

Highest paid broke homeless person in Eureka

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“I used to be the highest paid broke homeless person in Eureka,” that’s how Michael Crafton, a Lead Gas Mapping Technician and Peer Volunteer, recalls his life before he got sober. Michael spent all of his money on drinking, so he couldn’t afford a place to live, despite his good job at PG&E. He was living in hotels and campgrounds, drinking every day from the time he left work until the bars closed, and all day on the weekends.

Michael started using methamphetamines at 18, became an alcoholic at 23 and realized he had a prescription drug addiction at 35. That’s when his wife left him and he traded his journeyman job in Fresno for a gas mapping tech position in Eureka.

“I was broken inside. Nothing inside of me made me happy, I never felt I was good enough,” says Michael. One night, he left the bar drunk, and a PG&E crew was replacing a transformer across the street. He began yelling at them, telling them they were doing it wrong, and the foreman called the police. Michael then called PG&E customer service to complain about the line crew. And that’s when his supervisor and shop steward got involved and he knew he needed to get help.

He contacted one of the Peers from the Peer Volunteer Program (PVP)—confidential support for employees and their family from co-workers who have been there themselves. Brent Kirchner, electric crew foreman and Peer Volunteer, shared his story and Michael says, “He knew what I was going through and I felt like I knew him, even though I didn’t.” And that’s why Michael decided to become a Peer himself, “I can be there for someone, like Brent was for me.”

PG&E is stamping out the stigma of mental health issues and addiction. Michael suggests, “If we didn’t condemn or judge, maybe people would choose something other than alcohol or drugs. If we all cared about addicts, if we all took just one person under our wings, can you imagine the impact that would have on society?”