

## Pass It On®...

### On the Other Side of Despair.

*The Other Side Village is a literal bridge from grinding hopelessness brought on by homelessness, drug abuse and criminal behavior to self-confidence, a productive life and joy.*

Joseph Grenny walks briskly from a renovated brownstone to a church repurposed into a school just outside Salt Lake City, Utah. He points out the surrounding apartment buildings. "This is where our students live," he says.

On the grounds is a landscaping crew. In the school is a full commercial kitchen, as well as a test kitchen to create commercial products. In the parking lot is a donut truck being meticulously cleaned by a small crew. Down the street is a thrift store, and in that parking lot you'll see a fleet of moving trucks. Most striking is that everyone is hard at work, and everyone greets you with a quick smile, a handshake.

Why is everyone so happy? These are, after all, people who just a short time ago were living on the street, had drug addictions and failed relationships, couldn't hold a job, had recently been released from prison and were labeled by some as government dependents. Every handout program, every community assistance plan had failed them. And yet here they are, thriving. Why?

Grenny explains. "At The Other Side Village, we don't dwell on the physiological effects of drugs on the brain or attempt to psychoanalyze why life dealt us the hand it did. Those things matter, but what matters more is whether or not our students are tired of the life they have and are willing to put in the very difficult work necessary to learn to live a different way."

The main room in the Village is large, with no furniture around the edges, just a circle of chairs. It is here that accountability is taught, vulnerabilities are uncovered and trust begins. The adult students are organized into groups with a mix of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Each group is self-regulating. Issues are brought up to the group, and members outline the behavioral corrections needed. These can be tearful gatherings.

"If correction comes from an administrator who writes you up and files it away, it's meaningless," Grenny explains. "When your community corrects you, it matters."

Phyllis, a second-year student, explains the process. "We pull them up and talk about the problem. We let them know how their behavior affects us. Then we all give advice on how to better yourself, what needs to be changed, and we pass a resolution."

Change can be hard. It's made easier when you know somebody cares about you, when somebody values the work you do, recognizes your talents and abilities. Productivity becomes the purpose in life, whether it is preparing a meal for a hundred people, loading a moving truck, remodeling a kitchen or building friendships based on trust and love instead of a selfish transaction, the way so many people in the system grew up.

As an individual progresses through the classwork and becomes proficient at a work skill, there comes a point where their life transitions from "I need to fix me" to "I want to help others." This is the magical moment Grenny enjoys most.

"They see their own self-worth," he says.

And that means they are ready for the next phase. On the edge of the city is a 39-acre community with space for 460 homes designed for graduates of The Other Side Village's "Prep School." An ecosystem of small homes with their backyards opening onto common space to be shared with neighbors, an outdoor pavilion for community meetings (circle of chairs included) and, of course, on-site businesses. These businesses are key, not only to creating a sense of purpose but also to sustaining the program itself.

The Other Side Village is on a fast track to complete self-reliance, where profits from social enterprises pay for the entire program. "Our vision is to replicate this model all over the country," Grenny says. "We can solve homelessness as we overcome the bigotry of low expectations — the belief that those who've been chronically homeless and suffer from severe mental illness need the rest of us to fix everything for them. The Other Side Village shows that even those most marginalized

have the potential to run world-class businesses, be beloved by their neighbors and maintain a beautiful community. And we can do it in a way that is not a drain on community resources but rather an asset to their city.”

At the edge of the Village, a ceremony takes place when a graduate is awarded a home in the community. They cross a bridge that spans a waterway, moving from one life to another, accompanied by the cheers of their new neighbors. They are handed the keys. This time, the tears flow from the joy of becoming something new.

**Change...**[PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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