

# In the St. George: Brian Tierney

**Brian Tierney knows the feeling of your life coming almost full circle; his has done that in the last seven years.**

He started living in his own apartment and working full time as a software developer, came to live in a back lot of a building and panhandling in front of the Los Angeles Times, and now resides in his own apartment at The Trust's St. George Hotel. Tierney points to the kindness of strangers as the reason his life is coming full circle again, from the folks who saw him panhandle everyday at the Times, to the outreach workers from LAMP Community who offered him help and the medical team at the St. George Hotel who diagnosed his disability. "People have been real good to me," Tierney quietly states, "they don't judge."

Tierney, 48 is a life long Angeleno who started life out much the same as many. He lived with both parents in the San Fernando Valley where he spent time with his siblings throwing rocks, making tree forts and chasing the tadpoles in the shallow pond behind his parent's home. School and early adulthood were ordinary experiences for Tierney with the exception of the beginnings of both an alcohol and a sleeping problem that would later mushroom into a full blown addiction and eventually homelessness. A nasty bout with insomnia befell Tierney in his early 30's. He wasn't able to shake it, falling asleep at work, facing hours and hours of sleepless nights. He started drinking alcohol to help him sleep and then using methamphetamines to help him stay awake. Soon the sleep problem was minor compared to his drug addiction. He arrived late and missed deadlines at work, eventually he just stopped showing up.

That was the first time he became homeless, living, as he puts it, "like an animal." "You have no where to shower or shave, you can't change your clothes because you don't have any clean ones, your teeth never get brushed and after so long of not being able to take care of even your simplest hygiene needs you learn not to care about them anymore, you have to, to get by." Eventually Tierney did get temporary work and lived with several other



people in a dingy apartment where most everyone was using drugs. Soon, he was using again too. This led to his second bout of homelessness and his 18 month residency on the streets of downtown Los Angeles. He spent most of his days panhandling downtown, particularly in front of the Los Angeles Times office.

**"The people at the LA Times were my friends and they would tell me 'Go over to this place or that one, they will help you.' I tried to do it on my own, but I just couldn't – I couldn't for some reason. One day the people at the Times called LAMP Community and told them about me and soon two people from there showed up and offered me shelter."**

Tierney took the offer. Through LAMP Community, he attended addiction groups and began to address his substance abuse issues, and he even volunteered as a receptionist for the agency. Even though his life had improved dramatically at LAMP Community, Tierney struggled with the cramped space, the constant noise and most of all the lure of addiction. He knew that he would never feel secure and would be very susceptible to using drugs again if he did not have a place to call his own, permanently. LAMP Community stepped in again, helping Brian get an interview with the St. George Hotel staff, where he found a home.

Initially adjusting to permanent housing was difficult for Tierney; "It's hard to accept, to trust, that these four walls are yours and you can stay here as long as you want." Slowly, Tierney began to adjust to his new life. He and his St. George case manager set goals and identified areas of his life he wanted to improve. He sought health and psychiatric care with the hotel's on-site medical team and eventually the team was able to ascertain that Tierney had a disability. With the records from the medical team and the assistance of his case manager, Tierney applied for and received, Supplemental Security Disability Income. It increased his income three fold and provided him with health insurance. "I would never have gone to the doctor or attended regular follow ups or applied for SSDI if I didn't live at the St. George; it's too hard to do on the streets or in shelter and too easy to just skip it."

Tierney has lived at the St. George for three years now and he likes the routine he has built there. "I get up early and I go to bed early," he laughs. "I have people who are my friends, I have a job I like and I can make plans again, not just wonder what will happen to me."

"I can see how far I've come from the days on the streets," he says softly, "I'm almost back to where I started from. I realize I have an obligation to care about myself now."