



The Leader In Addiction Treatment

ISSUE #3

JANUS OF SANTA CRUZ MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



January 2026



Here's what has happened in January and what's to come!

Welcome to our Janus of Santa Cruz's January 2026 edition of our newsletter! We are thrilled to share with you the latest developments in our mission to make a positive impact in our community.

Firstly, Happy New Year! This year Janus will be celebrating its 50-year anniversary! Stay tuned for more information about our 50th anniversary gala!

This month is national Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment month! In honor of SUD treatment month, we will be featuring an exclusive interview with our very own Justin Ravanelli. In this interview Ravanelli honors us with a recount of his personal journey to sobriety. We hope that his story is a source of inspiration for all of our readers.

Additionally, to celebrate SUD treatment month has launched its advisory council! This council will center on SUD treatment and recovery programs,

advocacy, community engagement, and workforce development. The advisory group is comprised of voices from recovery, academia, the health arena, community wrap around services, and business stakeholders who seek to transform lived experience and professional expertise into meaningful action- shaping treatment practices, informing public policy, and most importantly, reducing the stigma surrounding SUD, which is a chronic and treatable disease.

Finally, we want to thank you, our community, for allowing us to serve you for the past 50 years. It has been an honor and a privilege, and we are excited to continue our vision and continued services for the next 50 of more!

Please enjoy this month's newsletter and know that your feedback is always welcome !

-Development Team

CEO's Corner

Janus of Santa Cruz has an exciting year ahead, and we're looking for dedicated volunteers to join us. Become a Janus Guardian and help make a meaningful impact in our community. Scan the QR code to sign up and get involved today!





Honoring National SUD Treatment & Recovery Month Through One Person's Courage

January is National Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Month — a time when communities across the country pause to recognize the strength, resilience, and humanity of people living with SUD, and to honor the work of those who walk beside them. At Janus of Santa Cruz, this month is more than a symbolic observance. It is a reflection of the lives we see change every day, and of the courage it takes to reach for recovery in a world that still too often misunderstands what that word truly means.

Recovery is not a single path. It is not defined by perfection or by abstinence alone. It is the ongoing process of returning to oneself — of reclaiming what was lost, rebuilding what was broken, and discovering what is still possible. And sometimes, recovery begins with a moment of connection that reminds someone they are worth saving.

Recently, I had the privilege of sharing one of those moments. A member of our staff — someone whose journey spans more than twenty years of struggle, more than forty treatment episodes, and countless cycles of hope and heartbreak — reached out for help. He had spent his childhood navigating loneliness, trauma, and early exposure to substances. His adolescence was marked by arrests, violence, and the constant pull of addiction. His adulthood brought homelessness, health crises, and the devastating grip of heroin and meth. And yet, through all of it, he kept trying. He kept getting back up.

He kept choosing life, even when it felt impossible.

When he told me he needed help, he did so with honesty and courage. And on my birthday, I had the honor of flying with him to Los Angeles so he could enter withdrawal management and residential treatment. Sitting beside him on that plane, I was reminded that recovery is not linear. It is not about never falling — it is about reaching out a hand when you do. It is about refusing to let stigma silence people who deserve support. It is about showing up for one another, even when the world tells us to hide our struggles.

His story is still unfolding. He has faced loss, grief, and the difficult work of rebuilding trust — including trust in himself. But he is also rediscovering his voice through music, reconnecting with his purpose, and finding new opportunities that continue to open because he keeps choosing to move forward. And he continues to use his lived experience to help others, turning his pain into purpose in a way that embodies the very heart of recovery.

What moves me most is how he speaks about Janus — about how far we've come, how much more client-centered and compassionate our programs have become, and how deeply our staff fight for the people we serve. He has seen us from both sides: as someone who once needed us to save his life, and now as someone who helps us save the lives of others.



This is what National SUD Treatment and Recovery Month is truly about. It is about honoring the people who keep trying. It is about recognizing that relapse is not failure — it is part of the journey. It is about celebrating the former clients who return as counselors, techs, and leaders. It is about acknowledging that recovery is not just possible — it is transformative.

To him, and to every person who has ever walked through our doors feeling broken, scared, or unsure if they deserve another chance: you do. You always do. Here at Janus, we will help you walk through the next door forward.

And to our staff — the ones who sit with clients in their hardest moments, who advocate, who adjust, who fight to keep people engaged long enough for change to take root — thank you. You are the reason stories like his continue to move toward hope.

This work is not easy. But it is sacred. And I am grateful every day to be part of it each and every day.

*-Amber Williams,
CEO*

Reach Out Today

If you or someone you know is dealing with substance abuse, please call today at

831-462-1060

to explore substance use disorder (SUD) treatment options or scan the QR Code below





A Story of Hope and Inspiration: Justin Ravanelli

Recovery is often defined as returning to a normal state of mind or regaining something you've lost. But recovery isn't one-size-fits-all. Many people still hold stigmatized views about anything outside complete abstinence — whether it's harm reduction, MAT, or what we call here "Cali Sober." My journey doesn't fit neatly into anyone's box, and it's been far from simple.

I've been in and out of treatment centers since I was 15 — more than 40 times over the last 20 years. My story started even earlier. At 10 years old, I smoked my first cigarette. The head rush changed the way I felt, and from that moment on, I became fascinated with anything that could alter my state of mind. With an absent father and a mother who worked constantly, I was home alone most of the time, free to do whatever I wanted. I was easily influenced by friends, TV, and music.

By middle school, I was smoking marijuana and drinking. In high school, the drinking escalated into blackouts, fights, and crimes. At 15, I was sent to The Camp and got my first taste of recovery. I remember the counselors — tatted, cool, and real — and I thought, That's the kind of job I want someday. I had no idea how long and difficult the road ahead would be.

After my 21-day stay, I lasted two weeks before drinking again. I actually left treatment knowing more about drugs than when I went in, which only pushed me to experiment further. Throughout high school, I used ecstasy, cocaine, Xanax, and painkillers. My addiction grew so severe that I stole from my mother, friends, and stores. I was arrested for vandalism and put on house arrest for six months — and I learned how to fake UAs just to keep using.

At 17, I caught another case for assault while blackout drunk. I was facing eight years in CYA and became a ward of the state, but I was offered a six-month program at Tyler House instead. Like always, I did great in a controlled environment. And like always, the day I left, I got high again.

At 20, I was caught in a drug deal, stabbed, and robbed. The only thing I cared about afterward was getting pain pills — that's when I knew how deep my addiction ran. My 20s were filled with heroin, stealing, embezzling, and doing whatever I had to do to get a fix. I tried moving to different places, starting school, anything to escape myself, but nothing worked.

I ended up homeless on the streets of Chico, surrounded by drugs, dealers, and biker clubs. That's when I started using needles. I contracted Hep C and landed in the hospital, where they told me that if I had waited any longer, I would have died.



**Justin Ravanelli,
Janus of SC**

I returned to Santa Cruz and spent the next seven years bouncing between treatment centers and the streets — SCRR, Janus, repeat. I'd get clean, get a job, a girlfriend, a car... and lose it all within a week. I got involved with biker clubs again, using cocaine, which always led me back to heroin and meth. Methadone helped me quit heroin, but I kept using everything else. My life was chaos.

Four years ago, something shifted. I decided I was done — at least with the hard stuff. I got clean, stayed on Suboxone, and still drank occasionally, but my life improved dramatically. I had a job, a place to live, and I taught myself guitar. I started making music about my life and sharing it online to help others. I felt like nothing could make me pick up a hard substance again.

Life wasn't perfect, though. I got fired from Shell, fell into a depression for four months, and gained weight. That's when I decided to get healthy and find a job where I could help people. I got hired at The Camp and waited for my year to be up at Janus so I could apply there too. I worked as a tech for over a year and met two coworkers who pushed me, inspired me, and grew with me. We all became counselors together. I started online classes for my CADAC, excelled at work, and went to therapy to work on myself. But I was still drinking occasionally, and when life got overwhelming — personal issues, work stress — alcohol became my coping skill. Occasionally turned into every day. I was high-functioning, but I knew where this

road led. I had already watched one coworker pass away after refusing help and another lose everything for the same reason. I didn't want to be next.

I reached out to Amber, Sabrina, Spencer, and Jessica. Two days later, I was booked for treatment. Amber flew with me to LA, where I spent a week in withdrawal management and another in residential. I left AMA — not because I didn't want help, but because I knew detox was what I needed, and staying longer wouldn't fix the relationship I had broken.

When I came home, I told people where I had been because I want others to know there's nothing to be ashamed of. People die because they're afraid to ask for help. Stigma kills — especially when you're someone who's supposed to be helping others. We're all human. We make mistakes.

Sometimes I still feel judged for mine. Sometimes I feel like people question my decisions. But their opinions have nothing to do with me. I'm still working on myself.

Coming home wasn't easy. I lost a relationship, and things at work felt different. But I've been doing everything I can to find myself again. Music has been a huge part of that. I took the best parts of a bad situation and used them to grow. I even took a solo trip that helped me reconnect with myself and inspired new music — opportunities I never imagined.



**Justin Ravanelli,
Janus of SC**

I believe everything happens for a reason. You're always exactly where you need to be. Just don't make it worse.

One thing that has stood out to me in this chapter of my life is how much Janus of Santa Cruz has grown since the days when I was a client. Back then, the program helped me in ways I didn't fully appreciate at the time. Now, seeing it from the inside, I've watched the organization evolve into something even stronger, more compassionate, and more client-centered than ever.

The staff at Janus go above and beyond to make sure clients get what they need to stay in treatment — whether that's medical support, emotional support, housing resources, or simply someone to sit with them during a hard moment. They fight for their clients.

They advocate. They adjust. They do whatever it takes to keep someone engaged long enough for change to take root. And I've seen firsthand how much that matters.

One of the things I'm most proud of is watching former clients come back to work for the organization. There's something powerful about seeing people who once walked through those doors broken, scared, or hopeless now standing tall as counselors, techs, and support staff. It's a reminder that recovery isn't just possible — it's transformative. It creates leaders. It creates healers. It creates people who want to give back what was given to them.

Being part of that cycle — watching it happen, contributing to it, and growing alongside it — has been one of the most meaningful parts of my journey.

Thank you for reading!- Janus Team

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