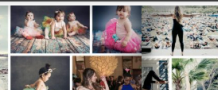




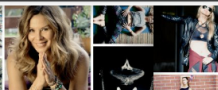
LA'S MOST INSPIRING STORIES



A TALE OF TWO FRIENDS



JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME



THE QUEST TO EMPOWER WOMEN



HOW LA FOODIES GET IN SHAPE

LOCAL STORIES JUNE 24, 2024

Check Out Leslie Gold's Story

VoyageLA

LOCAL STORIES



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Today we'd like to introduce you to Leslie Gold

Hi Leslie, so excited to have you with us today. What can you tell us about your story?

If you had told me 15 years ago that I'd soon be running marathons and would quit my job to start a nonprofit supporting addiction recovery, I may have laughed. I may have offered a polite thank you. I might even have said something sarcastic. I'm sure I would not have taken it seriously. Yes, I was a long-time runner and had done a few half marathons, but back then, I wasn't even aware of anyone in my family or social circle who had been impacted by addiction.

When I was ready to train for my first marathon (26.2 miles), I wanted to run for a higher purpose. I joined the LA Marathon charity team at Beit T'Shuvah, a faith-based addiction treatment program in West LA. As I ran side by side with current clients and program alumni and they shared their stories with me, I listened and learned about addiction. I offered training tips and helped them stay motivated when the going got tough. I was surprised by how many times people would thank me for listening and being supportive. It was the first time I realized that I could use my passion for running to help someone other than myself. I also learned that a lot more people are battling addiction than I had thought.

The next year, I was invited to coach the team and happily accepted. Eleven years later, I'm still coaching Beit T'Shuvah's Running4Recovery team. Since then, I have helped hundreds in their first year of recovery cross the finish line of the Los Angeles Marathon.

Over the years, newly sober team members would tell me that being on the team and going the distance gave them hope and a sense of belonging. The more I'd hear comments such as "I realized I'm stronger than I thought." "I learned that I can do whatever I put my mind to." and "I don't have to go through life alone anymore", the more I started thinking "Every treatment provider should offer a program like this." Eventually, I turned that thought into action.

Strides in Recovery began in the fall of 2017. I helped 11 men at a West LA sober living home train for 8 weeks for a 5K. Leveraging the success of this test, we reached out to more treatment providers, and we changed the program to a year-round offering. We grew so quickly that by 2020, I quit my job to focus full time on Strides in Recovery.

Today, we lead over 25 sessions every week for people in addiction treatment programs throughout Los Angeles County. Every month, we bring dozens of Strides in Recovery runners and walkers to local events ranging from 5Ks to the Los Angeles Marathon. In 2024, over 1300 newly sober people will participate in our program. Today we are the nation's largest sober walking and running program.

I'm sure it wasn't obstacle-free, but would you say the journey has been fairly smooth so far?

Ha ha. It has definitely not been a smooth road, but I'm okay with that. I don't think it's reasonable to expect to get everything right on the first try, or to know everything. I came into this with plenty of running and coaching experience, and a professional background in finance and operations. That's probably only half of what I needed to know. I had very little expertise with fundraising, community building, or marketing. I didn't even know what a hashtag was or how to use them. I had a lot to learn. I learned some of those lessons the hard way. And I'm still learning.

The most significant bump in the road, a few years in, was the realization that we needed to change our vision. When I started Strides in Recovery, the plan was to begin in Los Angeles County. Then we would expand to nearby counties, and eventually we'd spread to other states. We grew quickly in Los Angeles County but struggled to generate interest outside those borders. I wondered what we were doing wrong.

But then, I reflected on a talk I had attended years earlier given by the founder of Homeboy Industries, the world's largest gang rehabilitation and re-entry program. Someone in the audience asked Father Greg Boyle if he was planning to expand the program to other cities. Much to my surprise, he quickly responded "No". He explained that what works in Los Angeles may not work elsewhere because every community is different, and the way they approach community challenges is different. At the time I was puzzled. Now I get it.

After careful consideration, we shifted our focus from expansion to strengthening our community of Los Angeles County newly sober runners and walkers. We invited more treatment provider partners to join us. We brought our participants to more local running events. We created fun runs exclusively for our Strides in Recovery community; and we enhanced our outreach to alumni to keep them connected after they finished treatment. As we became better known, more local treatment providers joined us, and the number of volunteers increased. Looking back, I'm glad we didn't get traction outside of LA County. It led us to build the strong local Strides in Recovery community we have today.

I believe that starting a business or a nonprofit requires a willingness to test ideas, learn from mistakes, ask for help, and never give up. I feel fortunate that we have so many supportive people in our Strides in Recovery community – our staff, our volunteers, our treatment provider partners, our participants, local businesses, our donors and more. With their input and support, we are building a strong community that helps people stay sober. Together, we are supporting sobriety one stride at a time.

As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them

POPULAR



PORTRAITS OF THE VALLEY



ARTIST OF THE DAY: RISTO MIETTINEN (R MUZIK)



PORTRAITS OF HOLLYWOOD



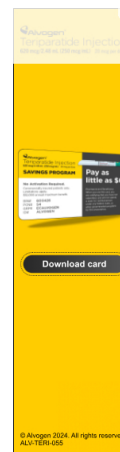
LA'S MOST INSPIRING STORIES



ARTIST OF THE DAY: JANELLE GRACE



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about what you do?

What else would you like people to know about Strides in Recovery?" of "How can others get involved?" [USE THIS QUESTION PLEASE]

Given that increased community support can literally save lives, I would be grateful if you could find a way to work in that info about volunteering and donating.

One in 3 American families is affected by addiction, and almost everyone knows someone who has been touched by this condition. Many want to help. If you would like to be part of the solution, there are several ways you can support the work we do.

- 1. Run/Walk with our teams: We are always looking for volunteers to walk or run side by side with our program participants on a weekly basis. If you can comfortably go 3 miles at any pace while making supportive conversation and being a good listener, you are qualified. For a list of volunteer opportunities, go to <https://www.stridesinrecovery.org/volunteer>
- 2. Volunteer behind the scenes: We have plenty of opportunities for people to get involved in other ways – event support, marketing, community outreach, fundraising, and more. To learn more, email us at info@stridesinrecovery.org and let us know about your skills and interests.
- 3. Donate: Support sobriety one stride at a time with the click of your mouse: <https://www.stridesinrecovery.org/donation>

Is there a quality that you most attribute to your success?

The path to success for me is just like training for a marathon, or any other endurance event.

- 1. Don't give up before the finish line.
- 2. Work hard most days. Take breaks to rest and recharge.
- 3. Be part of a supportive community.
- 4. Seek help when you need it.

Contact Info:

- Website: <https://stridesinrecovery.org>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/stridesinrecovery/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stridesinrecovery/>
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMeKkKw-qGTU0VS6ySj8vjg>

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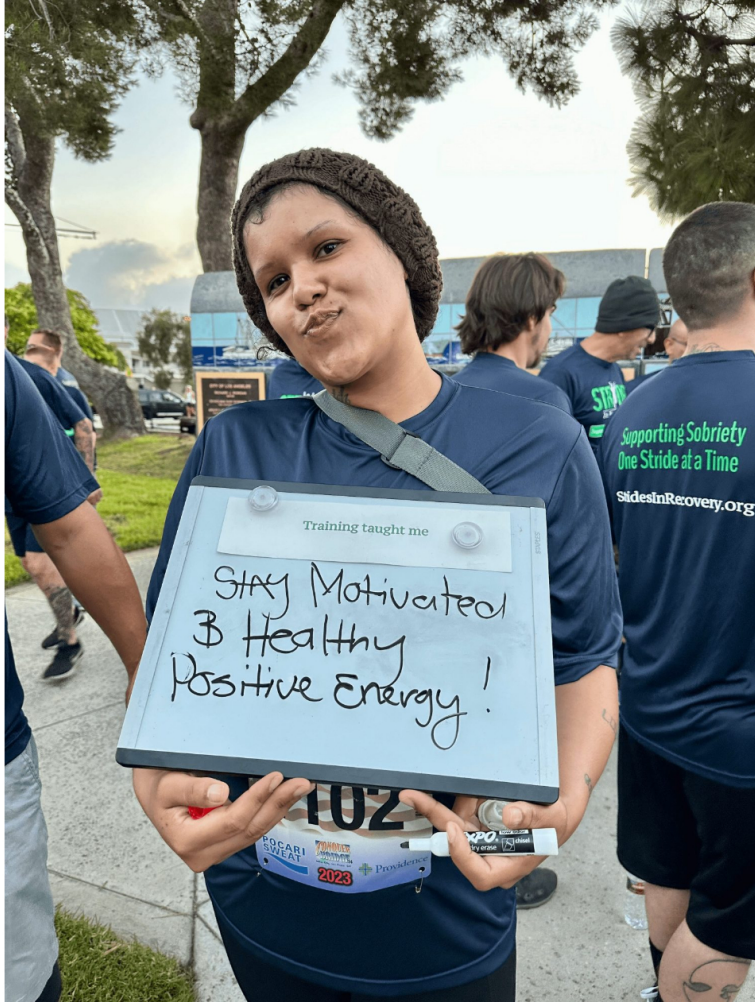
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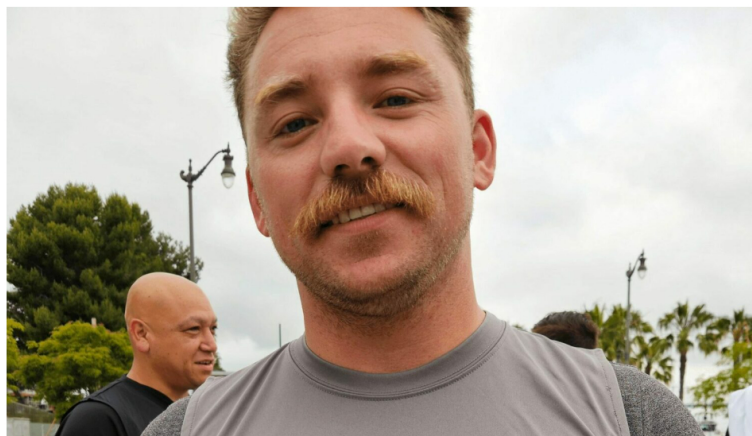
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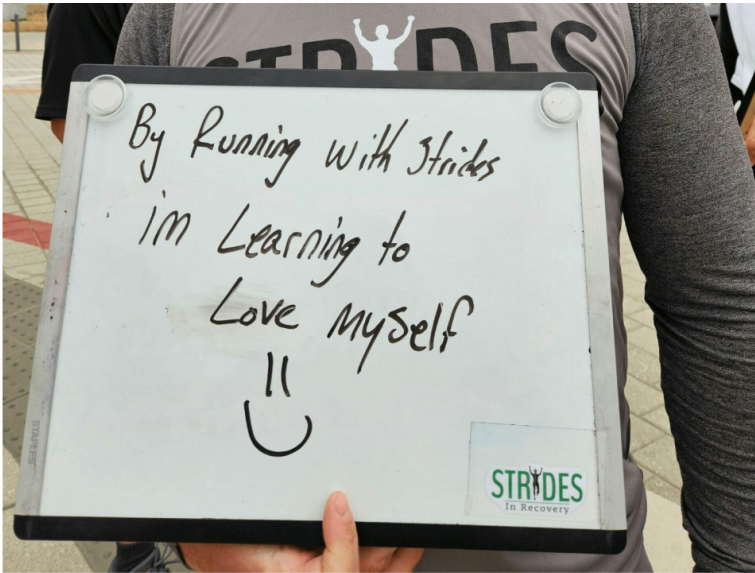


Image Credits

The "Personal Photo" was purchased from SCS Photoworks after I completed the 2024 Avalon Benefit 50 Mile Run.

All of the "Additional Photos" were taken either by myself or by Strides in Recovery staff or volunteers, none of whom are professional photographers.

Suggest a Story: VoyageLA is built on recommendations from the community; it's how we uncover hidden gems, so if you or someone you know deserves recognition please let us know [here](#).

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