

## How one man went from an ARC graduate to Salvation Army cadet

### David Aviles shares his journey in finding purpose through faith and sobriety.

Each morning, David Aviles wakes up to see a handwritten note that says, “Reach one.”

To Aviles, this serves as a daily reminder of his calling to serve others. “Reach one person today and invite them into that friendship with God,” he explained.

As he begins his journey toward officership at the [College for Officer Training](#) (CFOT) at Crestmont, he said he’s taking this motto with him.

“God didn’t call me out of darkness to just live here,” he said. “This is my duty.”

Before finding sobriety, Aviles said he never could have imagined being an accepted Salvation Army cadet.

For three years, Aviles said his life became filled with “darkness and depression” as he struggled with an addiction to drugs and alcohol.

During that time, he said he often “felt like there was nothing left to live for.” All of these feelings culminated one morning when he made the decision to end his life in early 2020.

“I didn’t even think about writing a letter or telling anybody,” he said.

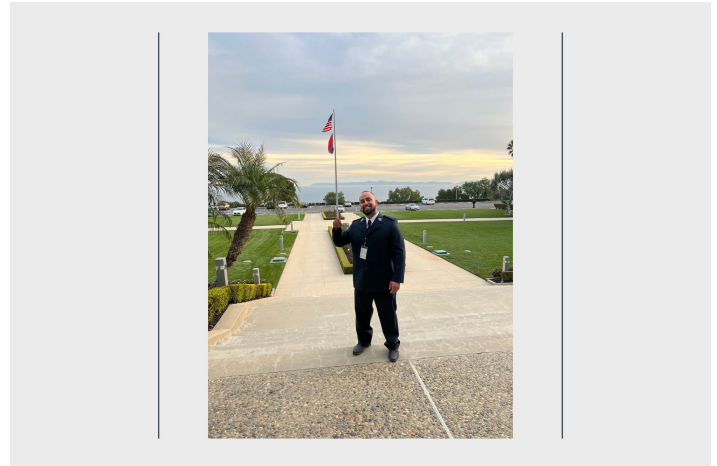
As he physically struggled to bring an end to his own life, he heard music coming from the other side of the wall, a worship song titled “Grace Wins” by Matthew West.

At that moment, he felt God’s presence back in his life. “I heard God telling me, ‘No, this is not how your story is going to end. You’re my child and I have something better for you.’”

Then, he said he came to the realization that he needed help.

On Jan. 8, 2020, Aviles entered [The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center](#) (ARC) in San Bernardino, California.

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“That’s the day I gave my life to the Lord,” he said. “Since then, I haven’t looked back.”

Throughout his youth, Aviles lived in Victorville, California, where his father served as a local pastor. Growing up, he said he knew about who Jesus was, but never felt he had a relationship with him.

While at the ARC, Aviles said he grew “hungry for this new way of life, hungry for Jesus, and [hungry for recovery](#).”

A month into his program, he began playing guitar for the ARC’s worship team, which he said took him back to playing music for his father’s congregation when he was a kid.



David Aviles (center) with Captains David and Kelly Cain.

When asked at his 60-day review if he ever considered doing more than leading worship, Aviles said he wrestled with understanding God’s calling for him and his place within The Salvation Army.

“I was so used to checking off boxes,” he said. “That’s what I thought religion was, when in all reality, God was just calling for my heart to be open and receptive.”

After graduating from the ARC, Aviles moved into the Hope House, a bridge housing program located above the [Riverside \(California\) Corps](#). While living at the Hope House, residents are required to work a recovery program and attend church services and meetings, all while maintaining a full-time job.

Although Aviles found a job a little over three miles from the Hope House, he no longer had a driver's license following a driving under the influence (DUI) charge he faced before getting sober.

"For eight months, he rode his bike back and forth to work as he chipped away at these DUI classes," said Riverside Corps Officer Captain David Cain, adding how residents are required to "do everything the right way, even when it's hard."

"I was willing to do anything that it took for me to get this life, this recovery," Aviles said.

As time went on, Aviles assumed greater leadership responsibilities, taking charge of worship services at the corps and guiding Rooted in Recovery meetings at the ARC.

"When he leads worship, he doesn't just get up there and play music and sing. He allows the Holy Spirit to work through him and he encourages the congregation...It's like second nature for him," said Riverside Corps Sergeant Major Ric Clayton, who also serves as Aviles' recovery sponsor.

Out of all the men Clayton has sponsored over the past five years, he said, "David is the one that stuck. He worked all his steps and he's the type of guy who receives love and in turn, gives that love right back."

In addition to these roles, Aviles also began working to support the corps' social services office, helping with the food pantry and shower program. Through these acts of service, Cain said he saw God "[cultivate a heart of compassion](#)" in Aviles.

"I would see him discipling people in the shower program, and then they would come through one of our social work programs," Cain added. "He would continually pastor people."

When Clayton left his role as resident manager for the Hope House after getting married, he said he believed Aviles would be the "perfect fit," and Cain agreed.

"I think it was a beautiful opportunity for David to live into something that was bigger than himself," Cain said. "It provided a platform for him to build leadership, to build confidence and live out his faith."

Then came the Future Officers' Fellowship (FOF) retreat, where Aviles finally accepted his calling for officership.

"Everybody knew that this was a calling for him, but it took him a little longer to process that," Clayton said. "He doesn't just jump into things...He takes God's direction and if he feels led by the Spirit, he will move in that direction."

During the retreat, Aviles said he [heard God in his heart](#), telling him, "this is what I want you to do."

The next day, he went and looked over the ocean and spoke with God. "I said, 'I know this is where you're calling me and this is what you're calling me to do and I'm going to accept the calling.'"

*David Aviles will enter the College for Officer Training at Crestmont with the Champions of The Mission Session (2023-2025) in September. He will train to become a Salvation Army officer, or pastor, over the following two years.*

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