

Hi Larry, this is Shiloh Appel from the Redfield Press. I interviewed you on the 24th of February and the article came out in yesterday's paper, March 9. I decided to save it for the March 9 paper so we could put it in the special section we do once a year on "Taking a stand against drug abuse."

Below is the article. If you send me your mailing address, I can also mail you the paper. Thank you so much for doing the phone interview! I have found that our Redfield High School does use your Reality Check Program. Thanks for all you do!

QUITTING DRUGS

Personal accounts from SD residents and a message from Larry Lawton

By Shiloh Appel

"I got into drugs first because I thought it was cool and that it takes you on a whole [different] experience — later to find out I did it to fit in and [then] it was like my only escape from reality, a way to isolate myself from everyone because I had a lot of rejection in my life and it was the only thing that made me feel good."
— Jay, of Huron, SD.

For parents, siblings and relatives of drug addicts, the question has long been, "how do we get them to stop?" But a new question has emerged, "What was the root cause of them turning to drugs in the first place?" Someone once said, "What fascinates me about addiction and obsessive behavior is that people would choose an altered state of consciousness that's toxic and ostensibly destroys most aspects of your normal life, because, for a brief moment, you feel okay."

In studies by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, and other drug-research programs, it has been found that children and youth often turn to drugs in response to broken family relationships, abuse or depression. Sometimes, it can also be out of curiosity, but deeper issues are usually involved. The drugs become the happiness that fills the void and swallows the pain for a little while.

According to former convict Larry Lawton, the person has to come to the point where they see what the drug is doing to them...that it is destroying them more than the things they are using it to escape from.

"Everybody has to hit a 'bottom,'" said Lawton — who is also the founder of the Reality Check Program, an honorary police officer and former career criminal — in an interview with the Redfield Press. "Let me explain a 'bottom.' One [lady] might go out and have a few drinks, be on the way home, almost hit an old lady, swerve and not hit her, get home and she would say 'I'm never going to have a drink again.' She hit a bottom. Another person goes out, starts drinking, gets arrested and spends the night in a county jail. He gets out, comes home and says, 'I'm never going to do that again.' He hit a bottom. Then you get me. I went to prison. I had a 15-month old daughter when I went to prison. I got out and she was 13. My son was six years old and I got out and he was 18. I was in maximum security prisons and I still didn't hit my bottom. I hit my bottom when I was

in the hole when a friend killed himself and I thought, you know, this is what is going on in my life. Maybe I am here for a reason.”

“Why is it bad?”

“Well, what opened up my eyes was was one day while I was taking a shower I asked, ‘Why is smoking weed so bad? I mean — nobody gets violent and it’s healthy for you,’” said former Marijuana user, Jay, of Huron, SD. “...Then I [heard] ‘It’s a door that’s opened into your mind and it’s a door that’s opened into your spirituality...that takes control of your life in five aspects — which is your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and financial.’ ...I’ve seen how it affected my friends and everybody around me and that’s when I said, ‘Well, then, there would be no point in doing drugs then, if it’s causing all this in my life and it’s eating me up from the inside out.’”

It was two years ago that Jay began living drug-free. “I just had God give me a message to stop and then [my wife and I were] going through some struggles but at the end I got out of where I was and we decided to start fresh at our new lives and just be drug-free from there forth and just follow God.”

Jüerren, also of Huron, said that he first tried Marijuana at the age of 13. “But then at 15 I would smoke every other day and at 16 I started smoking more often. At 18 I was committed and, well, got pretty bad. I didn’t care about anything or anyone — not even my health,” said Jüerren. “Having too much of anything gets you addicted — no matter what it is.”

Jüerren also credits his turn-around point to his faith in God. “I dropped smoking weed. It was weird, because I usually would feen [for it], but I didn’t. God took it away, and ever since I never went back. I was tired of that life style,” he said. “And I know how to help someone, but the thing is, they have to want to be helped. That’s the main key — that they seriously want to stop. Another thing is patience, because they end up doing it again. Don’t be mad at them. Instead, encourage them and keep helping. Show love and affection because love is what they need.”

Another local, Lanet, was introduced to drugs at a young age and went from Marijuana to alcohol, inhalants and pills. “I got desensitized from the kids at the parks and streets and then I got curious about the drug affects, so I gave them a shot,” said Lanet. “I did Marijuana, alcohol, inhalants and pills. What got me to quit was that I overdosed a few times and got very unhealthy and lost focus of everything — job, social life and family.”

Being proactive

According to Lawton, in order to help the current generation, all entities need to be involved — families, local businesses, courts and the police.

“You say you don’t like the cops, but if you have a problem, what do you do? Do you call 411 or 911? You call 911. Then you know you need the police, right?” said Lawton. “We are trying to break down the mentality that all police are abusive.

I believe that most police officers become police officers because they want to help the community. If you get a positive-minded police chief, then he makes all the difference in the world because he is the man that the officers under his command want to please, and in law enforcement, change doesn’t come from the bottom-up, like in some organizations. Change comes from the top-down.” Lawton is encouraging police all over the U.S. to be proactive in helping addicts to recover instead of turning to incarceration.

“The question is, what do you want to do with them? Do you want to make them a better person? Do you just incarcerate them and think that that is going to do it? It’s not. It has been proven over and over,” said Lawton. “When you deal with drug people you always try to find out something that will either relate to a bottom or have them open their eyes in that regard. It’s a collective effort; otherwise we are losing a whole generation. The only way to change it is to stay proactive.”

As Methamphetamine use has become a prominent problem in Redfield and surrounding areas, the community is taking steps to become even more proactive and residents are asking the question — ‘how can we help?’ As Lawton and these three former addicts have attested to, quitting truly is possible.

“You know, the average relapse on drugs is three times,” said Lawton. “How do we handle that? Do we say, ‘Oh, you got one more shot?’ If it was that easy...people rob banks to get money to get drugs! They are not worried about you saying, ‘Oh you are going to change and we are going to come get you.’ They are not looking at that. The disease has taken them over. So we need to find out what made them fall. What made that person slip? What made that person go back to it?

There are different approaches. Was it a pressure situation? Family issues? Money issues? Everybody is different. That is why education is so important. We can’t give up on them.”

Breaking down boundaries and promoting change

According to Jüerren, certain societal boundaries need to be broken down in order for people to form better ways of helping each other.

“The rapper Lecrae said, ‘The rich man escapes his struggles by taking a plane to an island and a poor man escapes by smoking weed— and I said to myself, ‘What does this have to say? Not just about drugs, but what does this say about society?’” said Jüerren. “I understand we all have decisions, but there can be a pressure to make wrong decisions.”

Honored as the only ex-con to ever become an honorary police officer in the history of the United States on the floor of the U.S. Congress, Lawton can attest to having seen the system from “both sides.” Through the

Reality Check Program, a video program created by Lawton and proven to be the most effective program in the U.S. right now, Lawton has seen many come to the realization that they can change.

“The biggest [reaction] we get is ‘wow, if he can do it after being in prison and getting out of prison at 46 years old — if he can do it, I can,’” said Lawton. “I’ve done every drug in the book. You name the drug, I’ve done it. They see how somebody who has that kind of past can totally change.”

Lawton shared a story about an 18-year-old who stopped him after one of the Reality Check Programs and opened up about his own realization that he could change.

“He said, ‘I was going to commit suicide today, right after this program, and you saved my life,’” said Lawton. “I sat down with him and started talking to him and I ended up learning that at five years old he watched his sister drown in a pool and he could have saved her. He used to get beaten by his father when he would jump the fence, so he didn’t jump the fence to save his sister. So he lived with this guilt and this burden that it was his fault.

After the program he had this vision that things happen for reasons and that people can change. He wrote me years later and said ‘Mr. Lawton, I am now 21 and I am in the military. I don’t know what would have happened if it wasn’t for you...’ We were all crying,” said Lawton. “I have all kinds of stories like that, because they see a man that is just like them, who made a lot of bad choices. I am not talking about goody-goody two shoes. I was a bad guy. I belonged in prison, but I also know that people do change.”

To contact Larry Lawton or order the Reality Check Program or the Reality Check Video Gift Card, visit www.RealityCheckProgram.com.

Shiloh Appel

Editor

Redfield Press

605-472-0822

editor.redpress@midconetwork.com