

Tech addicts seek solace in 12 steps and rehab

The downside of technology

By **MARTHA IRVINE**
Associated Press

BELLEVUE, Wash. — The young men sit in chairs in a circle in a small meeting room in suburban Seattle and introduce themselves before they speak. It is much like any other 12-step meeting — but with a twist.

"Hi, my name is," each begins. Then something like, "and I'm an internet and tech addict."

The eight who've gathered here are beset by a level of tech obsession that's different than it is for those of us who like to say we're addicted to our phones or an app or some new show on a streaming video service. For them, tech gets in the way of daily functioning and self-care. We're talking flunk-your-classes, can't-find-a-job, live-in-a-dark-hole kinds of problems, with depression, anxiety and sometimes suicidal thoughts part of the mix.

There's Christian, a 20-year-old college student from Wyoming who has a traumatic brain injury. His mom urged him to seek help because he was "meditating" his depression with video games and marijuana.

Seth, a 28-year-old from Minnesota, used video games and any number of things to try to numb his shame after a car he was driving crashed, seriously injuring his brother.

Wes, 21, an Eagle Scout and college student from Michigan, played video

games 80 hours a week, only stopping to eat every two to three days. He lost 25 pounds and failed his classes.

Across town there is another young man who attended this meeting, before his work schedule changed — and his work places him squarely at risk of temptation.

He does cloud maintenance for a suburban Seattle tech company. For a self-described tech addict, this is like working in the lion's den, laboring for the very industry that peddles the games, videos and other online content that long has been his vice.

"I'm like an alcoholic working at a bar," the 27-year-old laments.

A mental health debate

"The drugs of old are now repackaged. We have a new foe," Cosette Rae says of the barrage of tech. A former developer in the tech world, she heads a Seattle area rehab center called reSTART Life, one of the few residential programs in the nation specializing in tech addiction.

Use of that word — addiction — when it comes to devices, online content and the like, is still debated in the mental health world. But many practitioners agree that tech use is increasingly intertwined with the problems of those seeking help.

An American Academy of Pediatrics review of worldwide research found that excessive use of video games alone is a serious problem for as many as 9 percent of young people. This summer, the World Health Organization also



AP Photo/Martha Irvine

A 27-year-old self-described tech addict poses for a portrait in front of a video game store at a mall in Everett, Wash.

added "gaming disorder" to its list of afflictions. A similar diagnosis is being considered in the United States.

It can be a taboo subject in an industry that frequently faces criticism for using "persuasive design," intentionally harnessing psychological concepts to make tech all the more enticing. That's why the 27-year-old who works at the tech company spoke on condition that his identity not be revealed. He fears that speaking out could hurt his fledgling career.

"I stay in the tech industry because I truly believe that technology can help other people," the young man says. He wants to do good.

But as his co-workers huddle nearby, talking excitedly about their latest video game exploits, he puts on his headphones, hoping to block the frequent topic of conversation in this tech-centric part of the world.

Even the computer screen in front of him could lead him astray. But he digs in, typing determinedly on his keyboard to refocus on the task at hand.

Demons

The demons are not easy to wrestle for this young man, who was born in 1991, the very year the World Wide Web went public.

As a toddler, he sat on his dad's lap as they played simple video games on a Mac Classic II computer. Together in their Seattle area home, they browsed the internet on what was then a groundbreaking new service called Prodigy. The sound of the bouncy, then high-pitched tones of the dial-up connection are etched in his memory.

By early elementary school, he got his first Super Nintendo system and fell in love with "Yoshi's Story," a game where the main character searched for "lucky fruit."

As he grew, so did one of the world's major tech hubs. Led by Microsoft, it rose from the nondescript suburban landscape and farm fields here, just a short drive from the home he still shares with his mom, who split from her husband when their only child was 11.

The boy dreamt of being part of this tech boom and, in

eight grade, wrote a note to himself. "I want to be a computer engineer," it read.

Very bright and with a head full of facts and figures, he usually did well in school. He also took an interest in music and acting but recalls how playing games increasingly became a way to escape life — the pain he felt, for instance, when his parents divorced or when his first serious girlfriend broke his heart at age 14. That relationship still ranks as his longest.

"Hey, do you wanna go out?" friends would ask.

"No, man, I got plans. I can't do it this weekend. Sorry," was his typical response, if he answered at all.

"And then I'd just go play video games," he says of his adolescent "dark days," exacerbated by attention deficit disorder, depression and major social anxiety.

Even now, if he thinks he's said something stupid to someone, his words are replaced with a verbal tick — "Tsst, tsst" — as he replays the conversation in his head.

"There's always a catalyst and then it usually bubbles up these feelings of avoidance," he says. "I go online instead of dealing with my feelings."

He'd been seeing a therapist since his parents' divorce. But attending college out of state allowed more freedom and less structure, so he spent even more time online. His grades plummeted, forcing him to change majors, from engineering to business.

Eventually, he graduated

in 2016 and moved home. Each day, he'd go to a nearby restaurant or the library to use the Wi-Fi, claiming he was looking for a job but having no luck.

Instead, he was spending hours on Reddit, an online forum where people share news and comments, or viewing YouTube videos. Sometimes, he watched online porn.

Even now, his mom doesn't know that he lied. "I still need to apologize for that," he says, quietly.

Apologies will come later

The apologies will come later, in Step 9 of his 12-step program, which he found with the help of a therapist who specializes in tech addiction. He began attending meetings of the local group called Internet & Tech Addiction Anonymous in the fall of 2016 and landed his current job a couple of months later.

For a while now, he's been stuck on Step 4 — the personal inventory — a challenge to take a deep look at himself and the source of his problems. "It can be overwhelming," he says.

The young men at the recent 12-step meeting understand the struggle.

"I had to be convinced that this was a 'thing,'" says Walker, a 19-year-old from Washington whose parents insisted he get help after video gaming trashed his first semester of college. He and others from the meeting agreed to speak only if identified by first name, as required by the 12-step tenets.

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

Place classified ads online at www.dailystorian.com or call 503-325-3211

CROSSWORD

ACROSS	41 City-based	2 Author Uris	22 Symbol of freshness
1 Oodles	43 Pressed	3 Gymnast Korbout	23 Funny folks
5 Rocky outcrop	47 "The Simpsons" barkeep	4 River of Iraq	24 Corn core
9 River blocker	48 Pub target	5 Uber competitors	25 Gmail alternative
12 Sub shop	51 Crony	6 Genetic letters	26 Entrance ringer
13 Part of A.D.	52 "Rhyme Pays" rapper	7 Director Lee	27 Larger life
14 Ms. Gardner	53 "Young Frankenstein" role	8 Visit	29 Slugger's stat
15 Carriers for left-overs	54 NBC sketch show	9 Appointment	30 Wee bite
17 — Aviv	55 "Hey, sailor!"	10 Opposite of "sans"	35 Sheep call
18 Entraps	56 Inquisitive	11 Beer ingredient	37 Sure winner
19 Kick out		16 "Certainly!"	39 Agra's land
21 Exists		20 Lustrous black	40 Sphere
22 Nerd			41 Strike callers
24 Scoundrels			42 Reddish horse
27 — chi			43 — -bitty
28 Undecided			44 iPod model
31 Tic-tac-toe win			45 Work units
32 Smack			46 Crucial time
33 Kimono sash			49 Berliner's cry
34 Amorphous sci-fi villain			50 Old Olds-mobile
36 Ninny			
37 Omnit			
38 Like April weather			
40 "I see"			

Solution time: 22 mins.

H	A	L	O	S	O	S	L	U	M
E	L	O	N	C	H	I	P	E	T
L	E	F	T	H	O	O	K	I	F
D	E	T	O	U	R	E	A	R	T
P	E	P	S	L	A	B			
G	A	L	Y	I	P	E	L	A	T
A	G	E	E	O	R	B	S	N	A
S	A	F	E	S	Y	A	M	K	E
T	R	E	K	S	O	S			
T	A	H	I	T	I	H	O	N	E
A	L	O	E	L	E	F	T	O	V
R	A	M	S	T	R	U	B	E	L
P	I	E	T	S	A	L	S	N	A

Yesterday's answer 12-27

107 Public Notices

Occasionally other companies make telemarketing calls off classified ads. These companies are not affiliated with The Daily Astorian and customers are under no obligation to participate. If you would like to contact the attorney general or be put on the do not call list, here are the links to both of them
Complaint form link: <http://www.doj.state.or.us/finfraud/>

204 Automobiles

2012 Mini Cooper Countryman

53,000 miles, black, excellent shape, auto, AWD, sun roof, roof rack, bike rack.

\$13,500

503-756-6547
Leave message!

Go. Do.
coastweekend.com

Short, Sweet, and to the Point!
Classified ads are a quick and easy way to get extra cash in your pocket! Call 503-325-3211 to place your ad order today!

481 Freebies

Free Furniture!

A hutch, dresser with mirror, a nightstand, and an end table.

You pick up!

In Long Beach
(360)666-4751

504 Homes for Sale



PUBLISHER'S NOTICE

All real estate advertising in this newspaper is subject to the Fair Housing Act which makes it illegal to advertise "Any preference, limitation or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin, or an intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination." Familial status includes children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians; pregnant women and people securing custody of children under 18. This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate which is in violation of the law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertised in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis.

To complain of discrimination call HUD at 1(800)669-9777. The toll free telephone number for the hearing impaired is 1(800)927-9275.

504 Homes for Sale

House for Sale

2bed/1bath
Drive by!
18 Auburn, Astoria

\$200,000
3% courtesy to brokers.

503-440-0842

651 Help Wanted

General Laborers, Fork Lift Drivers, and Crab Butchers needed at **South Bend Products in Chinook.**

Apply in Person.

Full-Time Employment
Hiring full time MEDICAL ASSISTANT immediately. Submit CV to Dr. Ashley at Wimahl Family Clinic, fax 503 338-2996 or bring to 2120 Exchange St, Suite 209 Astoria. Experience required. Astoria, OR. 503-338-2993 wimahlfc@aol.com

Reach the entire North Oregon and Southwest Washington coasts with our classified package options!
Call 503-325-3211 for more information.

Looking for **FT (Mon - Fri) experienced Automotive Technician.** We offer paid vacation, full health benefits, and competitive wages. **Never work weekends!**

You can send resume to millie@boxkauto.com or call 360-642-4753.

Lower Columbia Bowl

Seeks a part-time pinchaser/janitor for Friday and Saturday evenings. Must be minimum 18 yrs old to work with machines and be able to lift 50 lbs.

Apply in person at:

Lower Columbia Bowl
826 Marine Dr.
Astoria, OR



Peace Learning Center has openings for Teachers and assistant Teachers!

If you love children and are passionate about supporting families, please stop by and talk to Kim.

Call 503-325-4041 or email: dirplc@yahoo.com.

www.DailyAstorian.com

651 Help Wanted

The City of Astoria

is now accepting applications for a full-time position of Records Specialist in the Astoria Police Department. Pay range is \$16.54-20.11 with excellent benefits.

To apply and obtain further information, please go to the City's application website at <https://astoria.applicantpool.com/jobs/>.

If you need assistance, please contact HR at 503-298-2434 or hr@astoria.or.us.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Dec 28, 2018.

CLATSOP COUNTY

Health Promotion Specialist
\$23.80 - \$28.93/hour
(13 hrs/week)

Seeking one part-time Health Promotion Specialist for grant funded position through June 30, 2019 to perform policy development, education focusing on tobacco prevention. Bachelor's plus 2 years' experience in community outreach. Skills in building partnerships, programs, policies, and leadership a must. Spanish language a plus.

Visit <https://www.co.clatsop.or.us/jobs/>.

Closes 5:00 PM, December 27, 2018. EOE/AA



Now Hiring!

Ocean Beach Hospital

CNA, Hospital – Half-time Days
Certified OR Tech, Surgery – Half-time
Cook, Dietary – Half-time
Education & Community Outreach
Associate – Full Time/Temporary
LPN, Ilwaco Clinic – Full-time
*sign-on bonus eligible
Physical Therapist – Full-time
RN, Acute Care – Full-time Nights
RN, ED/Relief Charge – Full-time Nights
Ultrasound Technologist – Full-time

More info: oceanbeachhospital.com

Contact HR: employment@oceanbeachhospital.com
360-642-6315



Follow us on Facebook!



We're your newspaper