

LIVING SECTION

"Chemical free" kids bring hope to teens

by Marih Allyn-Claire

Mike, Scott, John and Todd, ages 14 - 17, are inpatients at the Adolescent Care Unit of Physicians & Surgeons Hospital in Portland. The Adolescent Care Unit Program assists teenagers in uncovering their addictions and offers tools to build a "chemical free" life.

"It's a progression; it gets worse and worse," said Mike.

"I started smoking pot between the ages of 7 - 9 with my 14-year-old sister," he said. "It didn't do anything for me then. It just thrashed my throat. In 7th grade, I'd go out on weekends with my friends drinking and smoking. We'd space out on the lights. Nothing seemed wrong to me. I was getting As in school, but as time went on I started drinking during school. There was lots of pressure. My parents got divorced; I got kicked out for selling and buying drugs and coming to school drunk."

John explained, "We had a lot of family problems before I started smoking pot. My parents used to get into arguments. My Dad hit my Mom a few times. I didn't care about anything anymore.... Drugs ruled."

"I didn't go to school at all. During my freshman year I smoked pot daily. I started doing burglaries and auto theft. I was arrested and served 2 months in a group home in Gresham. I was later sentenced for 15 months in Corvallis for other charges. Runaways all the time."

Scott said, "My brother turned me on to pot and champagne. It was the greatest feeling I ever had. It gave me something to do.... I depended on my brother to get drugs for me. I gave him my allowance... but most of the time he didn't have time for me."

"During 8th grade I started a new school. We moved after my parents got divorced and my Mom started going out every night and drinking heavily. I'd be home alone."

"Pretty soon I didn't have the money so I started ripping people off."

Mike added, "We'd gone over the edge. We'd ripped off too many people."

Scott continued, "I stole a computer from school, and had my sister hock it. My step-parents knew I was getting into trouble. They could see right through my lies.... We robbed this house. Money, booze, equipment. We hit it five or six times. We never got busted."

Mike said he hit bottom when he started stealing from his father. "I'd steal \$20 at a time out of my dad's wallet while he was in the shower. I never imagined I would steal from him."

Scott: "I got a DWI ticket for negligent driving. My parents had to come and get me."

John said, "I thought I had killed my Mom. I was stealing from her. When she caught me, she started screaming at me. I pushed her down some stairs, and she broke her ankle. She just lay there—I thought she was dead."

"Now I have to go to court in two weeks, on assault and battery charges. I'm pretty scared."

Todd explained, "My family life started going down the drain."

"My brother and I would get into brawls. He threw me across the room and cut my head open."

"I got in trouble with my Dad. I'd sneak out after my parents went to bed, and smoke weed and drink with my friend when he got off work. My grades went down."

Todd continued, "I knew I needed help. I started being open with my parents. They brought me to the Care unit. I've been here 43 days. The big test is, can I stay sober out in the streets?"

My friends will probably say, "Oh, you pussy, you can't take a bong hit."

Now a patient at the Adolescent Care Unit Program, Mike said, "I feel really good. I've been sober and clean 13 days and I feel really good. I don't wake up loaded and all burned out."

"At first when I came I felt weird—out of place. I've been here nine days. I've started going to meetings."

They say, 'You're Number One. You have to take care of yourself first. They have the level system and if you screw up you go down.'

The program uses the "How" concept:
H—Honesty: Admitting you have a drug problem.

O—Open to accepting help.
W—Willing to give the program your best.
Mike explained, "I made a prom-

ise to myself that after I'm out I'm going to stay clean and sober. I'd like to help some of my other friends. An AA friend of mine told

me about a dance where 1200 people are going to be. All sober: that's going to be a real rush!"

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