

Ex-addict counsels youth on dangers of drugs

A city man is taking his own experiences of drug addiction and dealing and turning them around into messages of hope for youth and parents.

Tom Barthel talks to kids and their parents about the dangers of drugs and the way out of addiction through his Red Deer-based Street Smart Counselling.

Things were good for him in earlier years, earning top grades and excelling in general.

But life changed by the time he was 16, and he started hanging with the "wild" kids.

"At 18 years of age, the party monster from within was unleashed."

By the time he was 23 he was into drugs, dealing, and crime.

But the stress of running from the law and sinking deeper into the dealing and addictive lifestyle were taking their toll.

He woke up one morning in what he describes as a schizophrenic psychosis.

"It's basically a nightmare but you're awake. And it doesn't stop. My brain was scrambled in a big way, and I just wandered."

He eventually made a suicide attempt, which marked a stark turning

point. "I went through a process I call surrendering. And I made a commitment to myself to never fall short of my dreams again."

On a quest for help, he came across alternative strategies that he says saved his life.

It primarily boiled down to a total misunderstanding of addiction and mental health issues, and the role of parents — specifically the way parents communicate and behave with their child, he says.

That's when Barthel, now 31, launched his own counseling service, intent on teaching people practical, real life, street smart knowledge of what to do if



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they have a problem.

His philosophy is that there is "another way of looking at things."

Barthel believes that if someone is struggling with something it is not because there is no answer, it is

because that person does not know the answer, or misunderstood the solution the first time. "Miscommunication is at the heart of many problems," he explains on his web site.

"I get parents coming to me asking 'What can we do for our kid? We're scared.' They went home, took action, and their kid started to recover from drugs all by themselves just because of the change in the parents' behaviour."

Among his topics, he teaches parents how to 'facilitate a recover' in their child and also explains the importance of timing so they know when to take action and when not to take

action. Children sometimes face issues that if missed by parents, may lead the youngsters to a greater vulnerability to using drugs down the road.

He now teaches these strategies and offers a step-by-step plan to parents, education professionals and health care workers who have made the commitment to support others who are in need.

Barthel will be speaking at Lacombe's Kozy Korner on Nov. 5 from 7 to 9 p.m.

For more information or schedules of his local presentations, check out www.streetSMARTcounselling.com.

mweber@reddeer.greatwest.ca (403-309-5459)