

The Lacombe Globe

Lifestyles

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Dealer turned counsellor to help Lacombe students

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Tom Barthel had a lot going for him. With a storybook upbringing and straight As in school, his future looked bright. However, Barthel struggled with self-esteem issues.

And when the young Central Alberta resident's insecurities mixed with peers engaged in dark extracurriculars — his bright future circled the drain.

Barthel started as a drug addict and quickly transitioned to drug dealer. A successful one at that. This included time pushing cocaine at schools across the region, including here in Lacombe. Business boomed, and his total customer base topped 1,000 people. Drug use also surfaced mental health issues for Barthel — including schizophrenic psychosis.

Fast forward to present day, and a sober, straightened-up Barthel has taken aim at helping youth avoid the same unsavory path he travelled as a youngster.

Barthel launched Red Deer-based Street Smart Counselling, which provides outside the box strategies to address addiction and mental health struggles.

Now, Barthel is taking his story and message to a school where he once prospered as a cocaine dealer.

Barthel is teaming up with Ecole Secondaire Lacombe Composite High School (ESLCHS) parent council to launch a series of speaking sessions.

According to Barthel, a ESLCHS staff mem-



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and they were like, 'we want you to come to our parent council,' Barthel said.

"There is the ultimate persuasion tool for motivating kids on how to behave and it's just not what they teach in textbooks.

"I gave the staff an introduction to that and now they understand where we're coming from."

Barthel's flooring presentation was also given to parent council, and now Barthel is hoping to organize a speaking project that would share his message with ESLCHS students. This connection with the school's students would then result in implementing strategies meant to help them stay on the right path.

The project would then conclude with a presentation to the parents of ESLCHS students.

"That's the real kicker," Barthel added.

"That's the focus for everything. Nobody is changing anything in a teenager's life until we deal with the parents."

Barthel is presently seeking sponsorship for the project that would be compensated with advertising opportunities.