

# SUNDRE RoundUp

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February 2, 2010  
Volume 50, Number 5

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## Drug awareness and prevention must involve parents

*Dan Singleton, Sundre Round Up*

A former Central Alberta drug addict and drug dealer brought his story and his message of hope to a public meeting at the West County Centre last week, telling guests that parents can play a key role in keeping kids off drugs.

Tom Barthel is known across the province for his work with parents and kids through his Streetsmart Counselling program. His information lecture and meeting in Sundre on Jan. 26 was sponsored by Greenwood Neighbourhood Place.

(Due to privacy concerns from some of the people in the audience, Barthel requested that portions of last week's lecture not be made public).

After telling guests about his early years in Red Deer as a drug and alcohol abuser turned drug dealer, Barthel explained that the only way to keep kids safe from the scourge of drug and alcohol addiction is for parents to take proactive steps.

He talked specifically about myths that he says some parents have when it



*Dan Singleton/Round Up*

HELPING HANDS – Tom Barthel speaks to parents and other interested parties during a lecture in Sundre last week.

comes to drug use.

"Society, the establishment and the medical community all think that drugs work a certain way and they are just not right at all," he said. "I relieve those myths by saying that there aren't people pushing drugs on people out there; kids buy drugs because they want to.

"The fact that they want to is the problem. If we know the reason they want to, then we can stop it."

Parents can have a "huge influence" over their kids' ability to avoid drug abuse and addiction, he said.

"I talk about the real source of addictive behaviour and how little it has to do with the chemicals involved in drugs; it's something else that is going on that is leading to addiction. And that something else is what parents have a huge influence over."

Regarding his own past struggle with addiction, he says the following:

- Drug use changes dramatically from my first experiences to my last ones. The benefits get less and less, as the consequences grow.
- Living without drugs is not a guarantee you will get positive aspects from life. Positive aspects from life are a skill that can come naturally or learned.
- I spent very little time living life sober and not having fun, or enjoying myself. Some people I know are still living life sober and unhappy.
- Learning how to get off drugs was a choice. Staying off them was a choice. Learning how to succeed and be sober was a choice.
- I never let a friend, teacher, parent, or authority make that choice for me. "All the parents focus on the kids and on the drugs," he said. "The first thing I teach them is that none of that even matters; that's not the problem and that's not what leads to addictions. The problem doesn't start with the kids; the parents are the key to causing a difference in their kids." Barthel says helping parents help their kids avoid drug abuse and addiction includes:
  - Showing parents how to navigate the mental health and legal system so that efforts aren't wasted and it works for them.
  - Give parents a road map to the future of their experience so they can navigate themselves, and always know what to do next.
  - Show parents what kind of help works, what doesn't, and why- so that parents can reclaim their own lives.
  - Explain the importance of timing so that parents know when to take action, and when not to take action.
  - Bring experience from several different types of recoveries and belief systems.
  - Teach families how to structure their home to benefit a troubled loved one.
  - Convey all information in street-smart terminology.
  - Give referrals to competent practitioners and services in the mental health industry.

A number of people at last week's meeting signed up for a follow-up private session with Barthel planned for later this month.

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