

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION

BY:

Kristen Mehl

AGE:

17

GRADE:

12

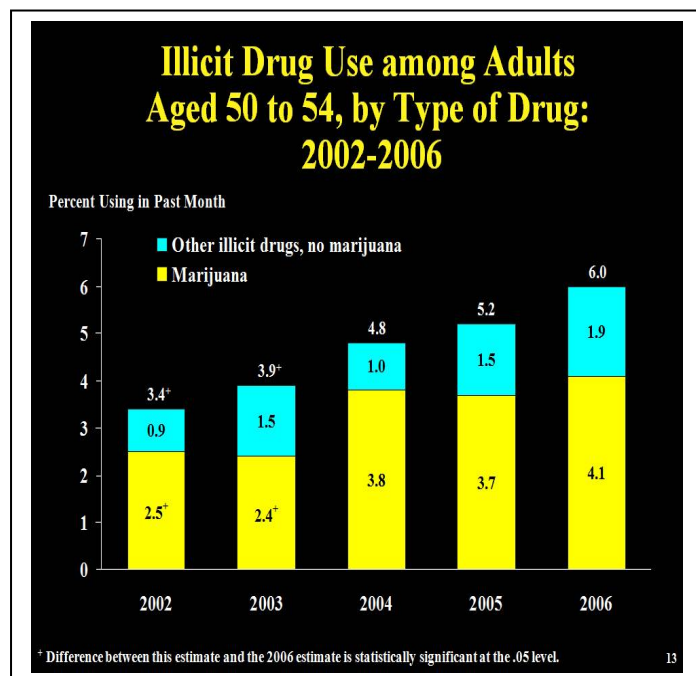
SCHOOL NAME:

St. Clair High School

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION

Drug and alcohol addiction is a rising problem among all ages, including our country's youth. The availability of some of these substances is appalling. Despite the extent of substance and alcohol abuse education, many youths still see no danger in participating in drug and alcohol use, though it is well known that some substances can kill, even on the first use. The war against drugs has been raging for years, and being immersed in high school life, I see no decline in use. In fact, I have noticed an increase in drug and alcohol use in the lower classmen.

In 2000, the number of people with substance addictions increased from 14.5 million to 16.6 million in 2001. In one study, approximately 1 in 5 people between the ages of 16 and 60 admitted to using at least one of the drugs mentioned. An



estimated 19.5 million people over the age of 12 used illegal drugs in the United States in 2001. In 1999, 19,102 deaths due to drug related causes were reported and in 2000, emergency department episodes involving drugs was at 601,776. Marijuana, still the most commonly used illegal drug, and used by 76% of current illegal drug users, increased in 1999 from 4.8% percent of the population to 5.4% in 2001. Cocaine, the second “most popular” illicit drug, increased from .5% to .7% in the same years.

There are countless centers for the prevention of and help for drug and alcohol abuse. Some of which are: Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse. The government's solution for increasing trends in substance and alcohol abuse is earlier education on the dangers of being involved in their use. Local authorities have also "cracked down" on drug users in their area. The number of prosecutions related to drug possession and distribution accounts for an estimated 30% of all criminal arrests. The punishment for drug trafficking or possession is rather harsh, can include heavy fines, prison or jail time, probation, and mandatory treatment programs.

Obviously, something must be done to decrease the number of persons using, distributing, and dying from drug or alcohol abuse. I propose an entirely new breed of program, specially designed for the prevention of these problems in youths under the age of 12 years. Every addict has a story because addiction is basically a coping device. To eliminate the need for the coping device, and the drugs or alcohol, the stressor causing the need for coping must be removed. Everyone suffers at some point in their life, some have no outlet for their pain other than hiding behind the mist drugs and alcohol cast over the user's mind. At the age of 12 is usually when drugs become an active tempting. There is no way to stop experimentation, but addiction is merely an effect of one's environment.

My personal experiences with people caught in addiction have involved abusive parents, the loss of the ability to provide for one's family, having to fend for oneself before one is ready, and the loss of a loved one. Constant suffering breeds the desire to

escape. Drugs and alcohol are an easy way to reach that escape, but the euphoria of such an escape from reality leads to a steep downward spiral. The need for escape soon becomes the cause of many more problems in the user's life. More is lost, less is gained and lives are sometimes lost in the process. Modern times have caused more problems with addiction, mental illness, and emotional defects than any other time period. We have to ask ourselves, what is the cause of this mass decline?

There is stress at work, stress at home, people as a whole have become far more

vicious, and love has been slowly replaced with

greed and deceit. Repressed emotions build to erupt in unpredictable and destructive climaxes.

Addiction can be physical or psychological, and

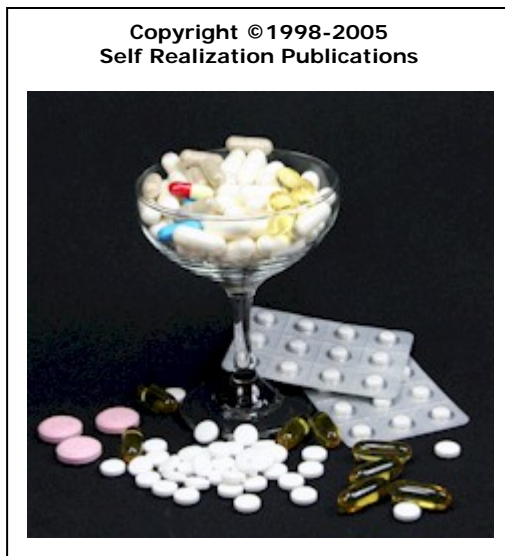
can happen rather unexpectedly, but happy

children do not experiment with drugs. Each

and every one of the individuals I have known

who have become addicted to some sort of

substance have a cause. I have yet to meet



someone who became an addict because it sounded fun.

The first step in my program would be to make the "12 steps" to recovery widely known. If children knew how much effort it took to quit, perhaps it would encourage a distrust of drugs and alcohol. Faith is also a valuable thing to have. It can never be taken away and doesn't necessarily have to match anyone else's. It can help those who have lost hope to carry on and help themselves. Originally developed by Alcoholic's

Anonymous, it can be applied to any addiction or bad habit. It can be called the universal mantra of quitting.

The second step in my program would be to place more attention on parental and spousal abuse, bullying in school, gang violence, racial violence, and religious

The five steps of imminent death are also applicable to addiction.

1. **Denial** that there is a problem
2. **Anger** at the world for causing the problem
3. **Bargaining** with self (I'll quit after this weekend)
4. **Depression**, believed inability to pull one's life together
5. **Acceptance** and finding help

violence. As well as more widespread incentive to ensure children feel loved. In order to eliminate addiction, I believe that our species as a whole must become more accepting and kind toward each other. If there is an absence of woe in a child's life, they are less likely to dabble in illegal or prescription substances.

To sum it up, I am advocating peace and love. To remove addictions from our nation's problems we must ensure that, as children, the next generation has no reason to try drugs, and thus, no danger of becoming addicted. Everything is interconnected and each individual issue affects every other, just as each individual person's actions affect those around him (or her). As a child, I myself suffered emotional abuse and neglect. It led to heavy marijuana and alcohol use, testing of more dangerous substances such as cocaine, ecstasy, and various amphetamines, as well as a reckless abandon in my teens. With the removal of my mother from my life, the cause of all my stress and depression, my addiction to marijuana (a psychological addiction) was also removed. Now that I am in a caring and safe atmosphere, I am learning to trust and slowly stepping down from

constant anxiety. I was able to let go of my anger and viciousness, but others do not view the world as I do.

As a youth, I participated in D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and won an anti-drug essay contest, leading to me reading my essay in front of the entire school body. I knew the dangers of drugs, I was against their use, but the rumors of how great it was to be high eventually lured me in. It has been quite a while since I have used and if I had known the day I first tried marijuana that it would be such a battle to regain my life, I would have said “NO!” It has been years since I have truly trusted anyone and it is not something that is easy to re-learn. I have not had an anxiety attack in nearly a month and I no longer attack people when I sense danger. Quitting is possibly the most beneficial choice I have ever made.

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