



**Support, every step of the way**

**The below was written by a youth living at Wesley Youth Housing and shared at a school assembly at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School.**

**The youth was also featured on CHCH for Raising the Roof Toque Tuesday and you can watch this by clicking <http://www.chch.com/toque-tuesday-3/>**

I used to feel like my life didn't have a purpose. There weren't many things that I looked forward to and I generally didn't have much awareness of how my actions were impacting my life or those around me. So growing up I was very much a "follower". I was constantly looking to others to make my decisions for me, regardless of whether or not those decisions were positive. Back then it was more about fitting in and being seen as one of the cool kids. I wanted to find myself but wasn't really looking in the right places. I was looking to the people who gained status by smoking pot and skipping class. I was in grade nine, 14 years old, and instead of idolizing someone who was really contributing to society, my role models were drug addicts. It changed my life forever. I started smoking pot because I wanted to fit in with my new friends and I continued smoking it throughout high school. I was always late or skipping class and trying to gain popularity by acting like some sort of thug. I thought that getting high and acting tough would get me admiration. As if that weren't enough, I then started dealing. I was selling weed both at school and outside of my home. It became my main priority and things like attending classes fell out of focus. I was way more concerned with where and when my next deal was gonna go down, or who I was gonna sell to. Smoking weed took away my ability to learn more about myself and to really start exploring my potential.

Fast forward a few years to my high school graduation. Yes, I graduated, but I'm still not sure how I managed it because it definitely wasn't a priority. Instead of planning ahead to my next step and furthering my education, I decided to celebrate by trying out new drugs. That was when I started using MDMA. At first it was fun but over time it got even harder to remember who I was. I started to lose pieces of myself, both mentally and physically. That probably should've been my cue to stop using drugs but I no longer knew who I was without them. Instead of trying to figure that out, I upped the ante once again. I started using things like acid and mushrooms. They made me feel spiritual and tricked me into thinking that they were helping discover more about myself. They gave me a new perspective and as a result, I felt more connected to my life. I continued to experiment with a variety of drugs over the next year and a half and over that time my life continued to spiral out of control.

Substance use was destroying not only how I saw myself, but how others saw me. Feelings that I had for friends and family began to change and deteriorate and most of my conversations with them ended in an argument. Eventually I was kicked out of my home and found myself struggling just to stay safe. I ended up staying in places that were infested with rats, covered in



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garbage, and full of drug addicts. I remember there being babies crying almost 24/7 and the smell of dirty diapers filling the air. My situation started becoming clearer. Was this how I really wanted to live? Were these the type of people that I wanted to become?

The answer was no. I decided that things had gotten too far out of control to sort out on my own and walked into a homeless shelter looking for answers. I knew that I needed support but with my previous relationships fractured and full of distrust, I wasn't sure where else to turn. I knew that I wanted to get sober and rediscover that person I'd lost before drugs took hold of me, but I couldn't do it alone.

It took a lot of strength and courage to finally admit that I had a problem and needed help. I stopped caring about what other people might think of me and started paying more attention to how I saw myself. It was my life and my future and I wanted it to be about more than partying and chasing my next high. Once I was at the shelter, I began making goals and really considering what I needed in order to survive. I started thinking about things like how I was going to provide for myself. How was I going to get enough food to eat? Where could I find a job and a safe place to live? It was during that time that I met my early intervention worker. Here was someone that I felt comfortable opening up to and accepting help from. For the first time in a very long time, I felt connected and supported and able to move ahead in the right direction. She helped me to see that despite what I'd done in the past, I was still worth something and because of that I started to feel hopeful. Only a few days into my stay at the shelter, my early intervention worker informed me that I was going to be transferred to another program; a transitional housing program for youth. She told me that she thought it would be a better fit for my situation and she was right.

At Wesley Youth Housing I met other youth who'd gone through similar struggles. They too were trying to build their lives back up and to set goals for a better future. I made new friends who understood what I was going through and a staff team that genuinely cared for and supported me. I have been sober for six months now. I have learned that while partying and getting high may seem like a good time in the moment, it can lead to a really lonely and scary place. I've been there and I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy. My advice to you is to try and sort through the tough times and to figure out your purpose in this world without resorting to drugs. Surround yourself with positive influences and let them lift you up when you're down instead of getting high. Strive to learn new things and to better yourself. Most of all, always know that you are enough. Be proud of that, celebrate that, and never forget it.