

The Lois and Milton Y. Zussman The Activity Center Connections

A newsletter for the Activity Center Clients by the Activity Center Clients

Editors:

David Barg
And
Debbie Safe

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Coming Out of the Dark By Debbie Safe

It has the power to enslave; it breeds despair, self hatred, shame and guilt. It can lead you to lie and steal from those you love; it destroys families, careers, and it can leave you destitute. Ultimately it can lead to death. It is addiction.

For thousands of years people have been using intoxicating substances in an attempt to "feel better", deal with emotional pain or achieve what addicts describe as "a sense of euphoria." Those with a mental illness are especially vulnerable as many will try to manage their psychiatric symptoms by using drugs or alcohol. Mental health clients will describe, for example, the absence of auditory hallucinations (hearing voices) when they are high.

Others have said that it alleviates their symptoms of anxiety and depression. Over time, "getting high" can result in a cycle of abuse and deprivation; and ultimately addiction.

In this issue we will deal with substance abuse and addiction. Several Kadima clients will share their personal stories from the onset of their drug/alcohol abuse to their involvement in the recovery process. Our closing article will deal with a family perspective-the impact that addiction has on family members. A very special thanks to all of the clients who agreed to share their story.

David B's Story

It's a funny thing about people who are, or have been, involved in substance abuse. They always have a story.

In all their tales of parties and being 'high', of bad choices and desperation, of guilt and broken relationships, of fear and anger, even of renewal and redemption, they cannot escape one simple fact...that their story had a beginning. They were not always what they became.

It seemed impossible that over the course of my growth into adulthood that

I would ever become anything other than what I was.

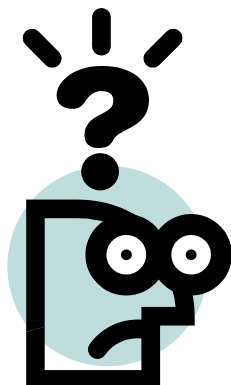
A few tidbits from my previous life.... Husband, Father, Homeowner, Career Holder. I was deeply involved with all manner of Tamarack Camps programming and ran its Family Camp. I served two full terms on its Board of Directors. I helped raise funds for the Federation on Super Sundays...sat on several Federation committees. A member of Beth Shalom, I even taught the 7th grade

one year for its Hebrew school.

Then I did indeed become other than what I was...the onset of my bipolar disease brought down the house, literally. Many doctors, numerous medication protocols, and years of attempts failed to control my symptoms. The mounting hospitalizations included treatments of ECT, colloquially known as Electroshock therapy. I mention this because I am hoping to convey my

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David B's Story (Cont.)



“My symptoms were banished from my awareness I had been delivered from my pain. I wanted more.”

desperation at that time. Yet, it was not the treatments, the loss of hope, or even the despair which finally got to me. I was lonely.

The illness had robbed me of many friendships. It scared away many colleagues. I was no longer part of a social group. The phone had stopped ringing, no lunch dates on the calendar. One fateful day I was waiting in line to be discharged from yet another hospital stay. The person in line ahead of me said very plainly, “I am having a party at my place tomorrow night. Want to come?” “Sure”, I replied. I was thrilled beyond belief. The fact was that I barely knew this person. I did not know where I was going or what I would do when I got there.

It was like a dream come true. The place was full of attractive women, each of whom made it a point to introduce themselves. Bright smiles all around. The men were well dressed and seemed eager to meet me. The first evening I did not even see any drugs. You may well imagine that I was pleased to be invited back. I was so naïve that the following night when the woman next to me asked me if I wanted to share some ‘crack’ with her. I had no idea what she was talking about.

Crack cocaine was completely unknown to me. In fact I declined telling her to go ahead and enjoy herself. I was so happy to have a place to be and friends to be around.

The old adage goes something like this, ‘If you hang around the barber shop long enough you’re going to get a haircut.’ And so it was for me. After a week of offers, I decided to see what everyone was so excited about.

I could not remember ever feeling so good. Every fiber of my being screamed with joy. The pleasure filled me in wave after wave of bliss. My symptoms were banished from my awareness. I had been delivered from my pain. I wanted more.

My path down the slope to the hell of addiction was pretty straight forward. Over the coming weeks, crack use consumed me totally. I spent every waking moment either smoking crack or attempting to buy more. The isolation which fueled my search for companionship in the first place now served to conceal my desperation.

The nightmare might have continued had it not been for my family’s intervention. Of all things, a traffic
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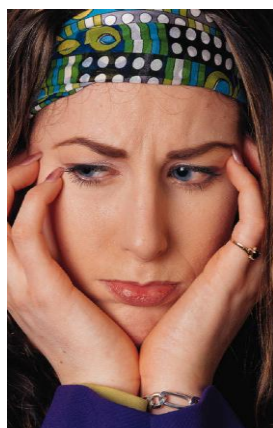
Amanda's Story

Debbie: “When did you start using? What were your life circumstances at that time?”

Amanda: “I started using when I was 15 years old. My parents were divorced. My dad didn’t take much interest in my life and I was very sad about that. I

really took it out on my mom. My parents had always been liberal with me so I had free reign of the streets. My mom started her own business when I was 15. She had a Grand Opening of her store and often had to work late. She had to

spend a lot of time trying to get the store going, so she was rarely home. I tried heroin for the first time at fifteen and I fell in love with this drug. I loved the high, the tingling, and the emotion and physical
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David B's Story (Cont.)

violation exposed my chemical slavery to the light of day.

Within a day or so, I was in a car with my brother headed for Toronto, Canada. He had executed a plan wherein I would detox on the couch at the home of a friend. He and his small band of companions kept a close eye on me while watching movies for 24 hours on a big screen TV. I cannot remember much of my time on that couch. I emerged days later, weakened, but free of the chemicals which had

ripped my humanity from me.

I was not sure if I could remain clean (drug free), but I knew I could no longer live the deprivation that is a drug user's lifestyle. I threw myself into a 12-step program. I established friendships and re-learned how to have fun without drugs. I placed myself into the care of a psychiatrist familiar with substance abuse. He established an aggressive plan of care to help diminish my symptoms.

The tragedy of people who are affected with a mental

illness is that they often end up with substance abuse problems. Whether in an attempt to ease their symptoms, seek friendship, or other reasons. The toll on them is devastating. For many budget cuts, lack of insurance, or inadequate coverage means jail time instead of treatment programs. I am proud to acknowledge Kadima's efforts to establish substance abuse groups, drug counseling, and family supports to help clients facing substance abuse issues. Let's bring substance abuse out of the dark.



Amanda's Story (cont.)

Debbie: "Describe your struggle with substance abuse. What impact had it had on your life?"

Amanda: "I started using heroin on a daily basis. I was missing school. Because of my age I was considered truant and my mom was notified. One day my mom insisted that I get in the car and she drove me to the hospital for a drug screen. She also requested a psychiatric evaluation. My mom was initially hysterical when she discovered I was using and sent me to live with my dad. So I went to live

with my estranged dad and he really didn't care what I did. So I resumed using. This lasted about a year, at which time I moved out on my own. By that time I had quit school and had gotten a full time job waitressing. I moved around a lot and continued to use with short periods of clean time. I experimented with other drugs.

When I turned twenty one I was arrested for possession of cocaine and put on probation. I skated by with a slap on the wrist. My boyfriend and I had been living together and

we moved in with his mom. My boyfriend got into trouble and ended up in jail for felonious assault. He was gone for 90 days. I was really struggling without him. My heroin use increased tenfold. The downward cycle began. Eventually I was hospitalized with Hepatitis C.

I have been to inpatient treatment seven times. and yet I continued to relapse. Eventually the community mental health system referred me to Kadima. I now live in a Kadima home."

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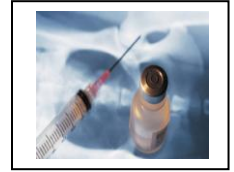
“I like the structure of AA. People are more honest in these groups. It is about one addict helping another.”

Amanda’s Story (Con’t.)

Debbie: “Are you involved in recovery and what motivated you to begin the recovery process?”

Amanda: “I consider myself to be in the recovery process. I am in the AA 12 Step Program and I find that works best for me. I like the structure of AA. People are more honest in these groups. It

is about one addict helping another. I have relapsed many times; this happens when I’m not really working the 12 step program. My goal right now is to make one year of clean time—one day at a time.”



Tameka’s Story

Debbie: “When did you start using? What were your life circumstances at the time?”

Tameka: “I was fifteen when I started using. I started smoking pot. I was experiencing a lot of stress at home especially with my stepfather who was verbally abusive. I was also under a lot of peer pressure to get high. I started getting high whenever I had extra money and it helped me to forget the stressors in my life. But when I was straight again the stressors were still there.”

spending all of my time with my friends getting high. At one point I stole money from my grandma so I could buy drugs. This took a toll on my relationship with her because she was really upset when she found out what I had done.”

Debbie: “Are you involved in recovery and what motivated you to begin the recovery process?”

Tameka: “I wasn’t sure if I could face life without using. But at some point I got into legal trouble. That is what motivated me to try and stop. I also realized that getting high had a negative impact on my mental illness. I go to NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings twice a week and that has helped me the most. Being with other people who have shared my experiences and having a sponsor has helped with keeping the urges away. I have a year and a month clean time.”



“I wasn’t sure if I could face life without using. But at some point I got into legal trouble. This is what motivated me to try and stop.”

Debbie: “Describe your struggle with substance abuse. What impact has it had on your life? What losses have you incurred as a result of it?”

Tameka: “I started smoking pot in school and my grades dropped. I had to work really hard to get them back up. I lost the closeness that I had with my grandma because I was

Nick's Story

Debbie: "When did you start using? What were your life circumstances at the time?"

Nick: "I was around fifteen when I started using. I was smoking pot and drinking. Whenever I had a fight with my parents I would go out and get high. I used getting high to solve my problems. I was also trying to escape the truth and hoping it would change the reality of things. At that point I was getting high every day."

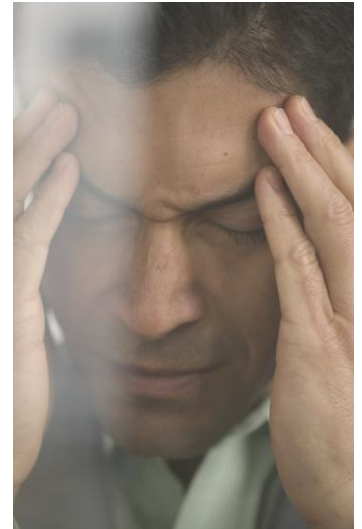
Debbie: "Describe your struggle with substance abuse. What impact has it had on your life? What losses have you incurred as a result of it?"

Nick: "I started to do badly in school and my grades went down. I was held back in the 8th grade and then again in the 11th grade. My personality changed and I became more negative. I started fighting

even more with my parents. It also affected my physical endurance (I used to play sports) and my stamina."

Debbie: "Are you involved in recovery? What motivated you to begin the recovery process?"

Nick: "I ended up going to Providence Hospital for inpatient treatment when I was around twenty. I was able to stay clean for a couple of years. I was going to AA meetings twice a week. By the time I was twenty five I had been diagnosed with a mental illness and was moving from one group home to another. I was hanging out on the street with gang members and drug dealers. I ended up back in the hospital and then I went for outpatient substance abuse treatment. Now I am going to a substance abuse group at Kadima and at Easter Seals. I just try to take it day by day."



David P's Story

I started using marijuana when I was fourteen years old, in high school. I was very awkward and had no self esteem. Pot made me feel better about myself. I was able to make new friends and didn't care what my old friends thought. My grades suffered as did my relationship with my parents; but at least I wasn't as depressed as I had been.

I remember the first time I tried cocaine when I was sixteen. I was at my cousin's house and some Columbians came in, set out a pile of almost pure cocaine and told me to help myself. I wasn't a regular user at first, but I sure enjoyed it and it made me popular because I had access to the best stuff.

I got into college at Western and continued to smoke pot every day. My use of cocaine was not regular yet. I used LSD on a few occasions and

found it to be a fun experience. When I wasn't high I was quiet and shy. Drugs made me more outgoing. I liked myself better when I used drugs.

I started to sell cocaine for extra money and free access to the stuff when I turned twenty. I also started to drink more alcohol. Coke was quickly becoming my drug of choice, but I was also smoking pot regularly and drinking quite a bit. In the summer of 1985 I was too wrapped up in the "cocaine" society and I became scared of the risk. I got into a summer program at Oxford University in England and since I didn't have access to my drugs regularly I started to drink a lot more.

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David P's Story (Cont)



“I was still using and drinking when my wife divorced me; the depression caused a suicide attempt in 1999.”

The next fall at school (my senior year) I was back to my old habits, but decided I wanted to go to law school. I graduated and was accepted to a law school in Detroit. My coke use became more infrequent. I still smoked pot and drank every day, but I got my work done, had a good relationship with my non using girlfriend, and had what I still regard as the best time in my young life.

When I graduated and passed the bar exam. I unfortunately broke up with my fiancé who had been my girlfriend during law school. I learned about crack cocaine and was immediately hooked. I used a technique I had learned at Oxford. I rolled up cigarettes using pot, tobacco, and crack. This combination provided me with an instant attitude adjustment whenever I needed it. I moved to an apartment close to the bar I used to drink at, and smoked my special cigarettes when ever I could.

When my bar closed down, I married my ex fiancé and had a couple of kids. I was still using and drinking when my wife decided to divorce me; the depression caused a suicide attempt in 1999. I had briefly started substance abuse counseling and AA meetings, but that was only to try to stop the divorce. It didn't help. I got a new job at a Detroit law firm and was successful but using a lot of drugs and alcohol after work. I had a little clean time, but lost that when my ex wife got remarried.

I soon lost my job and started working for myself. I was very successful, making good money, but was lost in a web of drugs, alcohol and women.

When the police intervened in my life I weighed only 150 pounds (I weighed 200 when my daughter was born 6 years earlier.) I served 28 days in jail and went into a court ordered rehab program. When I messed up on probation, the judge gave me one last chance or face prison and the end of my career as a lawyer.

I was then clean for 3 ½ years until my dad got ill (cancer) and I tried to kill myself again. If not for a concerned rabbi I would be dead. I was institutionalized for almost 2 years when I met a young woman at a group home in 2010. I moved up north to the Upper Peninsula with her as my fiancé in October 2010. I had 6 wonderful months with her and clean living. I had 2 ½ years clean when we broke up in February of 2011, and I moved back downstate.

I was lucky to get into a Kadima home, and was happy to do nothing but collect disability and watch TV, while going to an occasional group for therapy. I was using drugs and drinking about once a month when I was caught stealing at Kadima. Janette and Nancy confronted me

and I was informed that if I wanted to stay in Kadima I had to go to the hospital for substance abuse treatment, and move into a semi staffed home.

Today, I attend a substance abuse group at Kadima. I try to attend AA meetings regularly and I am involved in the Shul as well as The Friendship Circle. I have two months clean; I am working and hoping to get my law license reinstated.

I am trying to put my relationship with my kids back together, but my other family probably will never forgive the lying, cheating, and dishonesty of my past. My depression is under control, and I feel good. I am grateful to Kadima for all the help and support I receive. They could have kicked me out and nobody would have cared. They are truly a loving agency and I am proud and grateful to be a part of their system.

“My depression is under control and I feel good. I am grateful to Kadima for all the help and support I receive.”

Brandy's Story/A Family Perspective



“I saw the marks of abuse from my stepdad on my mom and my brother. One night in a drunken rage, my stepdad tried to kill my mom in front of us.”

As a child of an alcoholic there are a lot of things I dealt with that many children and families of alcoholics also experienced but never talked about. I'm writing this to inform others that they are not alone.

I'm 23 years old and I was raised by my mother and my stepfather from the time I was four years old. My stepfather came into my life after my mom and dad separated. My stepdad was an alcoholic and addicted to drugs. He is still, to this day, addicted to both drugs and alcohol.

My story begins with events that I can recall and with what I have read in police reports. My mom worked for Speedway and my stepdad was a successful businessman. His family owned a gas station and he owned a tire shop, which he still runs. This is when my life begins to change forever even though my mom never meant for it to change in that way. My mom got pregnant and had my second brother, her only child with my stepdad. After giving birth to my brother, my mom and stepdad's relationship started to change. My mom walked into my stepdad's office one day to find him getting high on cocaine at his desk.

My mom and stepdad eventually relocated to another house and that is where my story really begins. They decided to

move into a house right behind my stepdad's business. My mom did not think this through because there was a bar right next to the tire shop. My stepdad would go to work and go to the bar afterwards. Some nights my mom wouldn't see him at all and other nights he would come home just in time to create a fight with everyone in the home.

I can remember waking up in the middle of the night to screaming and things crashing. I saw the marks of abuse from my stepdad on my mom and my brother. Some nights he would come home and wake all of us up to just to make us witness the abuse. He used to grab my mom and destroy her clothes when he wanted sex. The man I had to call dad would disconnect parts on my mom's car so she couldn't escape the abuse.

When my mom was able to leave he would turn the abuse on my brother. The dad I was supposed to look up to has stabbed me with barbeque forks and thrown dishes at me in hopes the glass would break and do bodily damage. He would grab my brother by the shirt and throw him against walls, bunk beds, doors or anything he could. We have had cigarettes put out on us.

My real father tried to have us removed from the home and, at one time, my brother and I were removed by the state. But that didn't last long. The state put us back in my mom's hands and things got worse.

One night, in a drunken rage, my stepdad tried to kill my mom in front of us. Yet my mother continued to stay with him although she had a chance to leave with us for good.



By the time I was ten years old things got even more complex. My stepdad turned away from abusing my mom as often and started abusing my cousin and I more. He would go to work, come home and molest us. We were afraid to say anything to anybody. This went on until I was twelve when my mom walked in one night and saw him molesting me. Only then did she decide to leave and divorce him. But before she had a

“The dad I was supposed to look up to has stabbed me with barbeque forks and thrown dishes at me in hopes that the glass would break and do bodily damage.”

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Brandy's Story/A Family Perspective (Cont.)

chance to pack everything up and leave, my aunt passed away. So my brother and I went to my real father's house. The night we buried my aunt, my stepdad called and said, "I don't care if those kids ever come back to their mom; I hope they die!" My dad overheard what my stepdad had said; that was the first time I saw my real dad cry.

Not every day or night was like this but most were. There were days or nights when outsiders looking in would say that we looked like a perfect family. But we never spoke about what happened at home. People would see the big parties at our home, the trips we went on, the dinners at restaurants and the hotel stays. It seemed that nobody could see through the "happy" family. If they did nobody did anything.



My youngest brother is nineteen now; he is a high school dropout, a pothead and started to follow in my stepfather's footsteps. My mom is on disability now and she drinks a lot because she blames herself for what happened to us. My older brother is a high school graduate and has plans to start college. I'm living on my own and working two jobs, both of them in group homes. My boyfriend is awesome and he tries very hard to understand my

sudden mood swings and emotions. We come to Kadima together for counseling.

You may be asking why I decided to put my story out there. It's because I want anyone growing up in an alcoholic family to know that you are not alone.

I grew up hating myself, crying, blaming my mom and being afraid to come home. When I hit sixteen I started drinking, was full of hate, and became very depressed and suicidal. But, in the end I took a positive road. I left home, went to school and started working. I believe that everything I have gone through has made me stronger. I haven't forgotten but I have forgiven everybody for my past.

"People would see the big parties at our home, the trips we went on, the dinners at restaurants and the hotel stays. It seemed that nobody could see through the 'happy' family."

Acknowledging Each Other

The Lois and Milton Y. Zussman Activity Center Connections

15999 W. 12 Mile Road
Lower Level
Southfield, MI 48076

PHONE:
(248) 559 – 8235 ext. 113

Judy: “Gratitude and thanks to Debbie for her work with Kadima clients and for encouraging clients to discuss some very personal pieces of their lives. Sincere appreciation to Kadima clients who have shared their stories.”

Sue: “Thanks to David for calling Bingo.”

Nancy: “Thanks to my therapist Lisa for doing such a great job.”

Jill: “Thanks to Shelley for volunteering and calling bingo. Thanks also to Angel, our home manager, for dealing with all of the crap she has to deal with.”

Joan: “I’d like to thank Glen for being my new friend.”

Neil: “Thanks to Ronit for doing the prayer for peace at Shabbat.”

Tonya: “Thanks to Nancy for being nice to me.”

John: “Thanks to Debbie for taking time out of her schedule to visit me when I was at the West Bloomfield nursing home.”

Tom: “I want to thank David for helping me to become more confident and assertive. Thanks also to Nick for being a good friend.”

Marsha: “Thanks to Debbie and David for bringing so much joy to the Activity Center.”

Patrice: “Thanks to Ada at my home for taking good care of me.”

Nick: “I would like to thank Debbie for the interview we had because it exposed me to the truth and made me realize that people can change for the better. Thanks also to Tom for the company, his honesty, and the courage with which he deals with his every day life.”

Alice: “Thanks to Debbie for being my friend.”

Joel: “Thanks to John Stojek for being an awesome guitar teacher. Carry on the good music John.”

Susie: “I’d like to thank all of my friends at Kadima for their support and kind words during my father’s illness and subsequent death. I’d also like to thank everyone for their participation at Thursdays art classes. I love to see all of the creative energy that fills the room each week.”

Debbie: “A very special thanks to the wonderful and committed Activity Center volunteers-Susie, Terri and Shelley. Your enriching contributions are so very much appreciated.”