

# Transforming an



## It Starts Somewhere

50 percent of seniors have abused a drug of some kind

58 percent of sophomores have abused alcohol

Teens that start drinking at age 15 are 5 times more likely to become addicted

Photos courtesy of Madison Harding & Emily Baucum  
Stats from TeenDrugRehab.com

## Peer pressure of "social norm" escalates to life threatening habits

Kaylyn Jones  
Reporter

Lifting a bottle to her lips with a handful of pills, alumni Kerri Kibler, did not have a care in the world. She had her fix and that is all that seemed to matter at the time. Little did Kibler know, her life would spiral out of control when she realized substances became her ruler.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported alcoholism defeats 88,000 of its victims every year. Opioid and heroin deaths combined trail behind with a 14 percent increase in cause of death as of 2014.

"I had my first drink around seventh grade and was a big social drinker. Once I got into high school, my party life kicked off," Kibler said. "I was introduced to drugs my freshman year and became a daily user by sophomore year of high school."

When Kibler entered high school, she started

life. But alcohol and drugs clouded that, and before I knew it, the substances started to control my life." off with oxycodone prescription pills and the occasional Xanax which progressed to her becoming an intravenous heroin and cocaine user.

"I thought it was normal, I thought this is what you're supposed to do when you're young. I really thought I was invincible," Kibler said. "When I imagined an alcoholic or a drug addict, my first thought was, 'I'm not one of those people, and I could never be,' because of the stigma and stereotype formed around it."

Drinking and using drugs seemed to be the societal norm for teenagers, especially those entering high school. High school was known as a place where drugs were tossed around and teenagers ran wild, believing that nothing could bring them down. Addiction traps a person in a nutshell and holds them captive. The effects of the substances blind the user from seeing reality and continues to pull its victim along in a fantasy world until it has complete control.

"Those people have no morals, values or aspirations in life." I was very wrong for thinking that, and now being more educated on addiction I know very well I am an addict through and through," Kibler said. "And like every misunderstood addict, I have morals, values and huge ambitions for my

life. But alcohol and drugs clouded that, and before I knew it, the substances started to control my life."

Kibler is not alone in having began her descent into alcohol and drugs in high school. According to a 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 8.7 million Americans between ages 12-20 report current alcohol consumption. This represents nearly 23 percent of this age group for whom alcohol consumption is illegal.

"If a teenager is caught drinking, they are arrested and then it's up to what the juvenile detention center decides on whether they send it to court or they put them on probation with just the d-home [detention center] and not send it to court," Deputy Ryan Koch said. "The real truth behind it is the juvenile court system isn't going to do anything. If a teenager was to bring it on school campus, there's more things we can get into to make the grip tighter."

A major problem involving the d-home is the refusal to accept an intoxicated adolescent, no matter if the person is influenced under drugs or alcohol. If one is arrested at that point in time, the officer is required to sit with the teenager until they are sober enough to be carried to the d-home. A range of consequences awaits consisting of a call to parents, a creation of a case and a petition or complaint [equals a warrant for an adult]. A letter to the parents with a court date to face the charges are sent whether or not the teenager is going to

only talk to a probation officer to handle the situation outside of court or to be tried in court.

"You can absolutely receive a DUI [driving under the influence] at any age. The last I heard the going rate for a DUI attorney to even start is about \$10,000. Not to mention the loss of your license and the fees to get it back, you have to pay court costs along with traffic citations that are put into effect, so by the time it's all added up, you're looking at a minimum of \$20,000 just to get started," Koch said.

Now knowing the substances were changing how she perceived and interpreted things, Kibler realized she had a problem when she began to do things completely out of character to continue supporting her habit. Kibler learned that addiction is a growing disease, but said she "did not know how to ask for help or if there was even help" for the dilemma she found herself in.

"For a while, I had some sense of control, but before I knew it, I was mentally and physically dependent," Kibler said. "There was a person in my life at the time that asked me a question that really resonated with me. 'What are you waiting on to stop?' I thought long and hard about the answer, and it would have ultimately been prison

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## Addict

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I lived in a sober house for seven months so I could transition into the real world and learn how to truly live, not just go through the motions like I had been for so long."

Kibler described her rehab experience as "the absolute decision" of her life. Attending Alcoholics Anonymous and narcotics anonymous, Kibler is working her way through the 12 steps referring to them as "not a quick fix" but an "ongoing format for a new way of life." Kibler participated in individual therapies and group therapies where she was educated through "what the disease of addiction is and all

its components."

"Rehab is not a cure. It is the start of the road to your life in recovery and giving you the skills and tools to do so," Kibler said. "So, live the life you can be proud of so you can look back with a light heart and have no regrets."

She now describes her once addiction as "a blessing in disguise" that has allowed her to work on herself and become the best person she can be.

"It's not the ideal way, and I pray that others don't have to go down the same route. For me, this is who I am and I am able to spread a message of hope because I have been down that dark, hopeless road," Kibler said. "Today, my life is absolutely beautiful and full of light."

Most teenagers in the area begin drinking or experimenting with drugs because it is viewed as an escape from a problem they feel they are facing. Koch says this creates a continuous cycle and when the teenager is officially living on their own without money from their parents, theft and robbery could come into play to support addiction. A life spent in and out of jail can now be a reality.

"I have definitely seen an increase this year in teenage drinking than years passed. At 16, you go to the d-home. At 18, you go to the 'big-boy-jail' and people don't understand that difference. There is no phone call to your parents when you're arrested. Stray from teenage drinking. It's your choice. Either jail or a body bag," Koch said.