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Ready for the World

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“At age 12, I started sneaking alcohol at family dinners and smoked my first marijuana joint at 13. As my alcoholism progressed I would get street people to buy my beer and pot from my high school friends. Eventually I started using cocaine, and that was just the beginning...”, said Wright Smith now 21.

The future of America is in the hands of the young. Yet they are being violently affected by the disease of addiction. It destroys lives at an alarming rate, in fact, 150 young people give their lives to drug and alcohol addiction every week, the equivalent to a charter flight full of high school students crashing four times a month, a startling statistic indeed.

There are a few courageous dedicated people and institutions specifically designed and operated to make a profound difference in the lives of some young adults. One of them is V3 Tucson who is in the forefront of this battle. In a recent interview with Gale Standen, founder of V3 and her staff, we learned the following:

What is the motivation for working with the young adult population, aren't they the most difficult?

Not necessarily, alcoholism/drug addiction is the great leveler. It crosses all boundaries (age, sex, race)—young adults (17-26) have more at stake—family, academics, employment and legal issues. Many arrive without an awareness of the dangers and eventually wake up to the reality of what they've created.

V3 almost always sees the negative as an opportunity for newness. We learn to say thank you for almost everything that occurs and we open the doors for this experience. In sobriety, everything we do, say and create is of our making. We are driven to the difficult task of addressing the most tragic events of our lives and explore these issues through prayer, meditation, 12 steps and intense therapy. Many more avenues of healing are available to let go of pain, fear, and self pity. Our young population have been to hell, no different than any other addict/alcoholic, young or old.

The deep abyss of hell is dark, unrelenting, unyielding and terrifying; with no evidence there can be any relief, or safe place to escape. Parents have no idea this hell exists for their loved ones until they are caught up in the turmoil and tragedy.

The age group between 17 and 26 is perfect; they are able to wake up to the gravity of their situation. They are empowered to create a future they love, and begin to see the value of the principles and precepts their families have tried to instill in them. They discover their personal vision and implement their education to align with lost dreams.

Knowing the free ride is over; there is great incentive to embrace new disciplines. The idea of suffering consequences is new, the idea of behavior modification is new, the idea of actually being responsible for unacceptable reactions is new, and the idea their future is ahead of them is new. Working with V3, families learn loving detachment and how to give up the drama, sabotaging and control, allowing their children to earn their right of passage into adulthood.

Talk about the pressures they face, the way they come in and the transformations that occur over the course of their time at V3.

Some simply face the possibility of losing their family connection. Many parents have had enough—and decide this is the last opportunity they are offering their son or daughter.

Some kids have been institutionalized (psychiatric wards, treatment centers, jails, prison, etc.) before arriving at V3.



A world of opportunities await recent V3 Tucson graduates Wright Smith (left) and Zach Neminsky (right) with Zack Korn. The ceremony took place March 30, 2008.

We are well versed in working with the courts, probation officers, wilderness programs and other shorter-term treatment facilities. Many agree that a 30, 60 or 90 day treatment model does not produce fruitful results with this age group. Long term (minimum 12 months) is required to yield a full transformation.

Honesty is the first principle of success, to be accountable for what used to appear as someone else's fault. Giving up blame is an ongoing challenge, we need to let go of the drama, connect with reality and let go of delusions.

The joy of recovery can be stifled when we see how we can generate more hell... even in sobriety. Growing up and becoming independent can be staggering. Parents who watch the maturity struggle and do not interfere are the ones who embrace their transformed children with joy. When parents 'stay the course' they reap the rewards.

Residents often arrive without hope. If they complete the V3 process, they graduate with great opportunities for the future. Many complete their high school education while residing with us and continue onto the U. of A. campus to pursue a college education.

The V3 Tucson graduate program allows graduates to stay close to the main campus while continuing to create a life of excellence. The minimum commitment in the graduate program is three months, allowing time to secure part-time employment, enroll in studies and acclimate to a sober lifestyle.

Alumni are always welcome to attend dinners and events and many continue to provide active service to those enrolled in V3. Though residents come from all over North America, most alumni relocate to Tucson post-graduation.

Parents often blame themselves for what happens to their children. How difficult is it for parents and families to let go and let someone else take over?

It varies. V3 encourages families to participate in the fellowship of Alanon, which provides support and insight. Families who enroll in a 12 step program are more willing to "let go" than those who are deeply enmeshed. Those who are members of 12-step programs are ready to let go and work with us. V3 connects with the families on a weekly basis, offering updates around loving detachment and communication. We do not replace the core family.

We become a surrogate family setting where residents recreate the dynamic of their family of origin.

We celebrate the values parents have instilled in their children before the "disease" took hold.

We offer a three level Family Workshop program over the course of the 12-month residency designed to create new beginnings for the residents and their family. Topics range from creating boundaries to developing healing communications. When parents do not let go and insist on thinking they actually are to blame for their child's behaviors, the suffering addict is burdened with another's beliefs as well their own. Arrogance runs deep when we make our suffering for others the cause of our poor responses. The young addict/alcoholic can read their families pretty well and they often rely on the families inability to respond effectively as an 'ace in the hole' and escape to them when they want to relapse.

The families who are not on the same page with V3 often experience the relapse of their child, as the child can manipulate their way out of the community and discharge themselves prematurely. The resident who does not graduate almost always relapses.

Those who do are successful as they walk proudly onto a university campus. They are able to seek meaningful employment, and most importantly continue to be of service to God and their fellows. Parents are able to walk alongside their son or daughter in a way that was once only a dream.

They can dance to the silence that is the joyous sound of their child's heartbeat...*the sound of recovery.*

When 18 year old Zach Neminsky graduated V3 in March he told us, "my dream came true when I stepped onto the soccer field for the first time in two years. I was overwhelmed with feelings of excitement, happiness, and gratitude to anxiety and fear. I didn't know what to expect, sure I'd make a fool of myself.

But as soon as the first ball was played I was completely focused on the game and free of the emotions and the self-doubt that had gotten me nowhere for so long. I was convinced my dream of playing soccer, which I've had ever since I can remember, had been smashed as a consequence of my drug addiction and alcoholism.

I couldn't believe the opportunity to play again was in front of me. I would never have been able to receive this gift without the community of V3 who pushed me closer and closer to my dream.

As a result of graduating, I'm creating a life with a strong foundation built on leadership, excellence, and service. My family is here for me today and we are renewing our relationship, which was almost non-existent a year ago. I live a life based on integrity, commitment, and intention. I'm a man with a year of sobriety and will be eternally grateful for the program of V3 Tucson for giving me a new way of life. Yes, I am ready for the world."

Wright Smith's family stood proud as they watched him graduate. "It took a big commitment by my family to give me enough tough love to convince me it was V3 Tucson or the streets. I honestly did not want to be a homeless teen drug addict statistic. I chose V3 in a moment of clarity. It was the first right thing I have done in a long long time."

To learn more about V3 Tucson visit www.V3tucson.com or call 520-299-4778 and toll free 877-838-8276.

For Adolescent Treatment:

Banner Behavioral Health-Scottsdale 480-941-7671
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