



Prescription Drug Community Action Kit

SURVIVOR STORY

Skye

NOW COUNSELS OTHER TEENS IN RECOVERY

Shortly after having a tooth pulled, Skye's dentist prescribed her hydrocodone, an opioid painkiller. She was 13. She experienced a mild happy sensation and began using pills on and off.

"OxyContin was being prescribed pretty heavily at that time so it was easy for people to get access," Skye explains. "Friends had grandparents or parents who had pain issues and so we had access to the drugs."

Always a good student and employee, Skye attended college as a political science major, earned good grades, worked on Yearbook, reported for work and always got the job done. In fact, the police officer at school always thought of Skye as a good kid, that was, until her first arrest. "Then it seemed like they didn't care about me, like they were angry," Skye explained. "When people see you as a bad person, it's hard not to see yourself as a bad person, as well." Skye was arrested six more times during the course of her addiction.

Skye feels her use of prescription drugs contributed to her willingness to try heroin with her boyfriend. He was already addicted. At first, Skye limited her heroin use only to weekends, gradually consuming more during the week. "The only day we agreed not use was on Tuesdays. But then we did. Once the addiction took hold we'd access the drugs in any way that we can."

Eventually, her addiction took over her life. Then she lost her job. "My addiction got so bad that I couldn't function day to day. It got to the point where I couldn't show up for work."

Skye entered into a residential recovery program. She discharged after about three weeks. She had a good experience, but then moved back in with her boyfriend who was continuing to use heroin. "It took about seven hours to relapse on heroin again," Skye said.

"Recovery didn't start until I was honest with my family. Telling them about my addiction was the scariest thing I ever did. After that they were able to get me into an intensive out-patient program. They were able to support me. They were able to work through

their own anger toward me. We came back together as a family." Skye was invited to start mentoring other addicts at Connections Counseling, in Madison, Wis. and started working as an advocate for overdose prevention.

When Skye started her advocacy work as a person in recovery, she held the perception that police viewed people who struggle with addiction as the "bad guys." But she quickly learned that many of the officers with whom she did her advocacy work held the same perception about those who are addicted. "Both sides brought our preconceived notions about the other; and, getting to know each other as people, we were both able to set those notions aside."

Today, Skye Tikkanen works as a therapist and Assistant Director at Connections Counseling, in Madison, working with teens and those suffering from opiate dependence. She believes that people change from tapping into their strengths and resiliencies and encourages family involvement in the treatment process.

"The more people have on their recovery team, the better they do," Skye says. "When law enforcement is supportive of recovery, when drug court is supporting recovery, when somebody has a counselor or therapist they really connect with, when their family is involved – every person added to their recovery team makes it more likely they get into recovery and stay in recovery."

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