



A Complex Problem

By Katie St. John

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS are the second most commonly abused type of drug, preceded only by marijuana. In my small hometown in Washington, prescription drug abuse is evident. However, it's a problem that some people don't even realize they're taking part in. Through the actions of the courageous Tilla family, the community is beginning to recognize the prescription drug abuse happening in my town and throughout the region.

Hayley Tilla began abusing prescription drugs when she was 15 years old. I've known Hayley most of my life; she is the same age as my older sister. Now, at the age of 25, Hayley is well known in our community. She has allowed her story to be told, hoping it will help others avoid what she went through.

In 2002, Hayley got high for her first time. She was influenced by her friends, who often got high on OxyContin. She felt the pills were "safe"—after all, they came from a doctor. Unfortunately, one time was all it took. Hayley was soon an addict. In true addict form, she began to lose interest in most things she used to enjoy—sports, school, and hanging out with friends and family. In order to support her growing drug habit, Hayley started stealing from her parents and siblings. After her high

school graduation, Hayley was no longer allowed to live at home.

Meanwhile, Jim and Sherry Tilla, Hayley's parents, studied everything they could find online (which wasn't much at the time) and soon recognized her increasingly strange behaviors as signs of prescription drug abuse. They discovered how widespread this abuse was becoming; this formerly nonexistent problem suddenly became very real to them. Jim and Sherry talked to various community leaders who knew Hayley and everyone agreed: our community should take a stand against prescription drug abuse.

For Hayley's sake and for the sake of other young people, Jim and Sherry started a grassroots coalition, "Prescriptions for Life" in the spring of 2006. (*For more information go to: <http://rx4lifechewelah.org/>*). The local community had a strong response. A group consisting of school administrators, a doctor, a pharmacy owner, the city police chief, and other interested citizens started meeting weekly to discuss prescription drug abuse and find effective ways to reduce the problem within the community. With the support of the organization, Jim started visiting the local schools, as well as church groups and civic organizations.

To this day, Jim talks to kids, parents, and grandparents to tell them the dangers of abusing prescription drugs.

Although "Prescriptions for Life" was making great strides in the community, Hayley continued to struggle with drug abuse. Nearly all hope for complete recovery was lost. She floated from place to place, couldn't hold down a job, wrecked her car, and spent time in jail. Her family brought her to a rehab center near Seattle, but her addiction persisted. She relapsed days later. When her boyfriend died in a car accident, Hayley mentally and physically hit rock bottom. It took a serious, life changing experience before she truly accepted her problem and convinced herself she needed to sober up.

After seeing what the Tilla family has gone through, I am well aware of the short term and long term effects of drug abuse. They handled the situation in a very effective manner. Not only did they give Hayley the support it took to get clean, they also educated the community. Hayley is extremely lucky to have such a strong support group and a passionate family who stopped at nothing to see their daughter clean and healthy. Not many addicts are so fortunate.

Addiction is a complex problem; there's no cure-all solution. Hayley's story should serve as a warning. It sheds light on the consequences and potential dangers that current and future substance abusers face searching for that high. Hayley is now drug free, and has been for over two years. She occasionally accompanies her dad to presentations, where she tells kids firsthand the horrors of prescription drug abuse. Today, Hayley's parents are glad to have their bubbly, loving daughter back, and she is happy to have her life back to normal. 🍷

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Katie St. John is a high school senior from Washington. Alert Magazine congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.