

Adolescent Substance Abuse

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When I was young I lived one life with no divisions or boundaries. I went to preschool on the reservation which was one of the most innocent times in my life. As I grew older and more mature my eyes opened to the lunacy of the world and my whole life did a 180. My happy life on the reservation was filled with cloudless days, and drug-free friends and relatives. There was no worry about stepping on broken beer bottles or running into a bad crowd. I like to think of my childhood as more filled if that makes sense. I had more loved ones that were still alive and drug-free. I could talk to anyone and we'd have a good time. Today, many relatives have passed on and I lost relationships with many friends because we were separated by our interests, they chose drugs and I chose to stay healthy. Every time I go back to the reservation, I feel a line separating the drug abusers and the sober; it becomes more eminent with each visit. As the years passed I lost more friends and relatives that died and were sent to rehab for drug addiction treatment. There was a time when I used to feel surprised, but now all I feel is severe loss and sorrow.

During those times I went to many funerals and sent goodbyes through facebook or myspace; I cried and prayed those nights hoping I wouldn't lose anyone else. I felt like a big ball of emotions, pick any type of feeling and I could almost guarantee I had already felt it. I felt very lonely, like everyone was leaving me to be by myself. My cousin overdosed and died. I sat in my house and cut my hair. I went to sleep with my baby sister holding her near. I was livid because I couldn't understand why they would give in to harmful substances and let their family members be affected by it. I was extremely

disappointed too because I felt like they were also giving into the stereotypes of Native Americans being alcohol and drug abusers. I didn't like the fact that it was true either, most Native Americans are substance abusers, but what about those who have always been sober? We were judged by our ethnicity because of our people's choices.

Native Americans are the 2nd highest ethnic group that consists of substance abusers; just below those who are of mixed ethnicity. Technically we are the highest ethnic group with substance abusers. Most abusers originate from bad parenting or the witnessing of parents using harmful substances. The uses of illicit drugs or alcohol by parents and their children are strongly associated. When a child is neglected and has no one watching him or her it's easy to follow in the parents footsteps especially when they think the act of doing so is permissive. It's easier to drift toward bad crowds when adolescents are living on a reservation. They're practically living with bad influences so it would be very hard to avoid illicit and illegal substances. We are also affected by drugs and alcohol enormously. As more and more teens get mixed up with drugs and alcohol the results grow more fatal. Nearly two Native Americans a day die from driving under the influence, and Native American surveys show adolescents have been under the influence in the past 30 days.

I believe strongly that alcoholic parents are the reason for our youth drug use. When a child sees their parent consume drugs or alcohol it sets the curiosity and adventure in the child's eyes. They think nothing of negative effects, all they see is their parent/guardian doing it and they want to follow them. If I didn't know any better I probably would've tested the substance the first time I saw my parent do it. It's only natural, but I still believe teens have a choice. That's why I want to help spread the

knowledge about drugs and alcohol, and how badly it can affect one's life. On the Hollywood reservation in Florida there's a Boys and Girls Club. A organization that educates the youth about the negative effects of alcohol and drugs. This is where I want to start with the journey of helping my generation and all the generations to come. I want to volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club and encourage more kids to attend the informative meetings there that talk about drugs, health, avoiding bad influences.

When I graduate from high school I want to continue to college to pursue a career in business. I want to come back and work for my tribe. When I return I am planning to build a boarding school with the guidance, love, and care a home would have. I would also like to add a rehabilitation center and education to continue to help the youth. This is a place where my tribe's youth can escape to when they are hurt and neglected. If a young girl feels she is worthless and not beautiful, I will take it upon myself to show her how she is beautiful she is, inside and out. If a young man were to feel like he has no home, no life or friends. I would be the first to help him out of that phase; I'd call him into my office everyday and tell him how special he is if that's what it takes. Anything to help keep them from illicit drugs, I will do. Here, I will educate them about the negative effects of illegal substances and alcohol. I want to show them how they are better than drugs, and keep them busy with school so they can go to college and come back and contribute to my tribe's development. I was blessed with a wonderful home, and I want to spread the care, guidance, and devotion to give back to the tribe.

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