

Parental help for troubled teens

By Bromley Chamberlain

If your teenaged child has been struggling with drugs and mental illness, Tom Barthel is here to help.

Barthel who was born in Red Deer, was once a drug dealer, a user and a schizophrenic. Today the spokesman for Street Smart Counselling talks to parents about how to help their own teenagers with these issues.

Parents suffer when their children embark upon a path that involves drugs, and Barthel wants to help parents and their children by telling his story. He turned his life around after he contemplated suicide.

"This is not going to be like a normal, pardon my expression, boring community event," he said. "I've actually been hired to come into Ponoka and stir things up a little."

Barthel will be speak at the Ponoka Legion on Nov. 30. Pre-register by calling 403-396-8465 or at www.streetsmartcounselling.com The event is sponsored by Ponoka FCSS.

"I help parents to save their kids from alcohol and mental illness. I'm an ex-drug addict. I'm an ex-drug dealer and I used to be very ill with schizophrenia," Barthel said. "Now, I have a very successful life mostly because of alternative strategies and because of the help from my parents."

Barthel believes his method works because it's not something that can be taught in a textbook.

"I didn't just follow the box, I found lots of alternative strategies and they helped me out a lot. That's what I teach in my seminar."

He believes when parents deal with their teenagers, the problems normally get worse. But when his parents got involved, things got better.

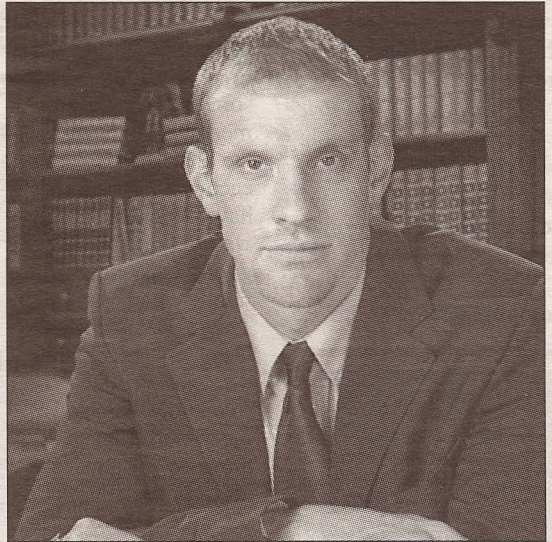
"I chose to do that (turn my life around) because of the role my parents played. Typically parents fall into the trap of taking care of their kids, the way their instincts lead them, and they their kids get troubled and things get worse."

Barthel started using drugs as a teenager, and now at the age of 32 he is helping parents learn how to help their children.

"They did some different things that were counterintuitive and it lead me to make a big choice after a suicide attempt at 23 years old," Barthel said. "That's when I started going out and asking for help, while I was mentally ill."

He opened his own counselling service and started talking to parents one on one. That progressed to seminars to help more parents.

"I took these parents in and taught them to make changes in themselves, in the way they behave around their kids, and in the way they communicate to their children. Their



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Counsellor Tom Barthel

kids started to get off drugs all by themselves without me meeting them."

Barthel says his seminar is vital to school staff and teachers.

"It's extremely relevant to school staff. Since I have been getting the results with families, I have been doing lots of schools, and teachers are important because kids spend half their day with them," Barthel said. "They are the ones that hold the key to a kid's success. Once again, it's what the teachers do, and how they behave that makes the difference."

He recommends that only parents attend his seminar as the presentation can be quite emotional.

"It's a dramatic seminar, but it's not there to be easy on parents. It becomes very real, very fast and I don't recommend bringing their kids unless they have the courage to bring them," Barthel said.

"It's not an event where you can drop your teen off for someone else to fix them. It's an event for parents."