

The day in which I decided to change my life was July 15-2008. This was the day I chose to commit to a 1 year intensive drug and alcohol treatment program at Our House Addiction Recovery Centre. I still remember the first day I came in. I was a scared, selfish, embarrassed young man who had destroyed his life and those around him. When I checked in at 8am, I was greeted by then Lead Counsellor Sheldon. I didn't unpack my belongings out of my vehicle as I was hoping somehow I could get out of this and run away. Sheldon asked where my clothes were, I told him in my truck and asked if I go get them and come back in. This was the beginning of the rest of my life, one day at a time.

Our House, to me was a place that broke me down from all the perceptions I had about myself and the world to the reality of my addiction and how I can't continue down this path. I was one of those kids whom, lived in denial about his addiction, didn't think I was that bad; I told myself that I never lived on the street; I never committed major crimes to support my addiction. In Our House I was taught just because I never did those things, does not make me any better or worse as a person.

My first day in the morning Group Counselling Sessions was one of those days that has forever been engrained in the back of my head. That was the first day I became sincerely honest with myself and another human being. When it was my turn to share about how I was feeling and what's going on with me, I remember saying that I was terrified, scared and not sure if I can be here for a year. Shelby was the counsellor that day and after I finished doing my "speech", Shelby turned to me, she was sitting to the right, two people down and looked me straight in the eyes and said, "stick around, give yourself a break, things will get better if you want them too."- that was the defining moment in my Recovery. I believed her, and decided to give this place a chance. That is not to say I still had trouble accepting that I was an addict, I still didn't think I was as bad as other people or I'm not the stereotypical addict that you see in the movies. But the longer I stayed clean, the "haze" became less and less in my head and the more I realized and accepted who and what I was; I am Addict and I do have a serious problem which will only get worse if I don't stop the cycle today!

Through my 12 months at Our House, I regained my self-esteem, self-worth and learnt how to forgive myself for the things I did when I was in active addiction. Our House challenged me every step of the way, whether it be, by the people whom I was bunked with, or how to effectively deal with conflicts without getting angry or violent. Trust me, when you have housed up to 70 Men in a house, I had to learn how to effectively communicate with different personalities in a healthy manner. It was either learn how to communicate effectively or nothing would changed. The choice was mine, the counsellors are there to help me, however, they didn't force me to do anything. That's what I loved about Our-House, I wasn't treated like a kid, I was treated with respect and integrity, and they allowed me to make my own choices.

Each course I took, was a different tool I added to my arsenal to help combat the disease of addiction. The courses that were offered to me at the time, and I'm sure they have not changed since then are.

- Understanding Addictions as a disease
- Coping with stress
- Communication
- Raising Self Esteem
- Assertiveness/Conflict resolution
- Relapse Prevention
- Co-dependency
- Healthy relationships
- Budgeting/Leisure

In addition to these courses, I took Life Management Skills and Understanding Ones Anger.

I can say today, as a result of taking these courses, I am a better person. I asked myself every day, first thing in the morning; "What am I willing to do for my recovery?" And every day at Our House, I became more honest, willing and open to change who I was to what I am. I learnt how to not beat myself up from the past, but learn from the mistakes I made and how not to repeat them. I learnt how to forgive, but never forget.

I don't know who I'm writing to today, or who's eyes this will lay on, but I can tell you this is a serious epidemic. You may not have a choice to be here in the beginning (whether it be court ordered or whatever). But if you do what you are asked, accept who you are as an individual and willing to change, you will come out of this a better person. You will not be cured when you step out of those doors, but you will be a healthier person if you took this program seriously, gave yourself a break, changed who you are for yourself and learnt how to live without drugs or alcohol.

Although I am far from perfect today(4 ½ years later), I still value my time I spent at Our House and never take it for granted. It was one year invested for the rest of my life.

Today, I have graduated from University, have a full time job and have a beautiful one year old Son. But most importantly, for all the exterior things I have got as a result of staying clean, I have regained my Self-Worth, Self-Dignity and Self-Respect. I have had hiccups a long the way, but I stayed clean through them as a result of valuing the tools I learnt and putting them to work when I needed them the most.