

I Got Help And Now I Help Others

Alex Tingler

Image by David Mark Pixabay

BEFORE YOU READ: Look at the subheadings and the chart. What will this article will be about?

Raised by Parents with Addictions

Growing up I never had a stable home. My parents were both addicts. My dad left when I was a child and my mom would randomly leave me with people while she was out using drugs. When I was six years old, my aunt finally took me in as one of her own, but she was an addict as well. Next thing I knew, I was that girl living in

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a house with drug paraphernalia scattered all over, and random strangers coming in and out at all hours of the night. I remember nights when my aunt would wake me up because she was having drug-induced paranoia that someone was

outside watching us. She would rub Vaseline all over the windows so no one could see in.

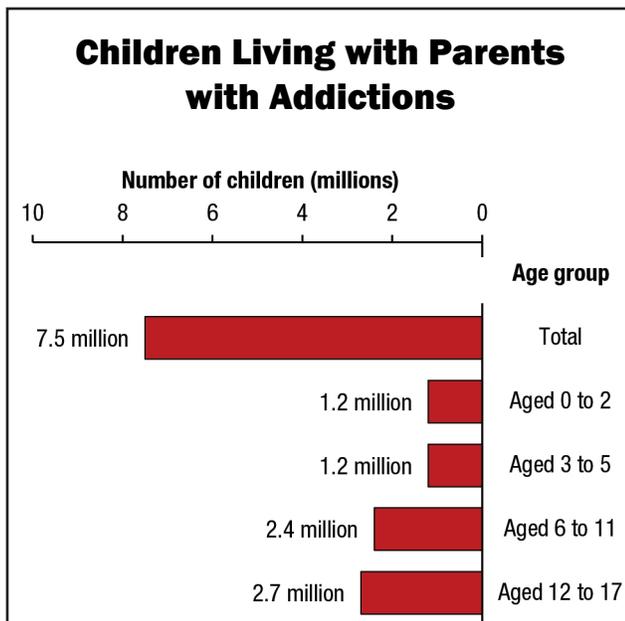
As a child, I had to fend for myself, so I was a lot more mature than your average 12 year old. I never celebrated holidays or birthdays. I didn't have toys like other children did, so I couldn't relate to what they did for "fun." I didn't fit in with any specific group of people my age. I watched drugs destroy my family and I remember being that little girl who swore never to do drugs. But all my life I just wanted to be loved. I wanted to

be accepted, so I started hanging out with the older cool kids and partying. My dad passed away from an overdose when I was 13 years old. During that time, my aunt would go on binges. She would disappear for days, sometimes weeks, at a time, which meant I needed to stay home to watch her kids.

I missed so many days of school, I failed all my classes. I dropped out of the eighth grade, and my partying took off from there. It went from an occasional thing to an every-chance thing. I went from smoking weed, to smoking weed and drinking, to doing anything I could get my hands on. I found freedom in getting high and for the first time in my life, I was comfortable. I was no longer that scared little girl. Eventually, I fell in love with and became addicted to opiates. I absolutely hated the person that I had become. I was just like my mom and my aunt, the two people I resented the most.

In Treatment, Angry, and Scared

I've been arrested numerous times for possession and possession with intent to distribute. When I was 22 years old, I was sentenced to a year in prison. Once I completed my year, I was accepted into the Anne Arundel County Circuit Drug Court Program, and I was sent to treatment. When I arrived in treatment, I was angry and scared. I told my counselor I wasn't planning on staying. In response, she asked me to complete a written assignment before I acted on impulse. The question was, "What would my life be like if I left treatment?" Somehow, that question interrupted my anger and fear, and I could think for a minute.



Number of children living with at least one parent with a substance use disorder in the past year: annual average, 2009 to 2014. Source: <https://www.samhsa.gov/>

I remember telling myself that instead of viewing this as a punishment, maybe I could view it as an opportunity.

I sat still and took the suggestions that were given to me, and I successfully completed an 18-month program. I know now that my problem was more than my addiction. It was the trauma of being abandoned and feeling not good enough as a child. The program gave me the tools to cope. Instead of using drugs to self-medicate, I attended therapy and 12-step meetings, and I built relationships with people who have the same goals.

Clean and Sober

Have I fully recovered? Absolutely not. This is a battle I have to face on a daily basis. On bad days, I have to face it minute by minute. I have to recognize my progress and tell myself I am not the person I was before.

No matter how I feel, I still get up, dress up, show up, and never give up. Today, I have been given my life back. I have four years and six months clean and sober. I have rebuilt relation-

ships with my family. I have rebuilt trust. I am able to show up for the ones I love, and I continue to work towards cleaning up the wreckage of my past. I am currently enrolled in a high school diploma program to achieve my long-term goals.

A Point of Light in Darkness

Recently, I was given an assignment to write an email to my local elected official about a community issue. I remember thinking to myself, "This is a waste of my time."

I didn't think anyone cared about the opinion of a convicted felon.

Surprisingly, my elected official responded to my letter, and we

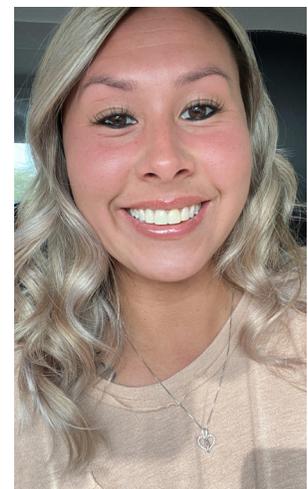
spoke on the phone. I

was open and honest about who I was and who I am, and I was even able to advise him on an issue he's been having in the community regarding a recovery house.

My past doesn't define who I am today. I am now working in the same treatment facility that helped transform me into a woman I never thought I could be. When I was a child, I never had a vision of my future, but today, I do. I have the opportunity to pursue my dream of helping others. I can be a point of light in a world of darkness and watch others transform as they find their purpose in life. I can make a difference.

AFTER YOU READ: In your own words, re-tell the sequence of events in Alex's life. What is the "point of light" in the darkness?

Alexandra Tingler is a 27-year-old recovering addict from Pasadena, Maryland. She works full time at a women and children's addiction treatment facility while also obtaining her diploma from the National External Diploma Program.



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