

## STUDENT WARNS: DON'T DO DRUGS

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Teenager tells seminar of his fall and rise

JUPITER - At first glance, Dustin [REDACTED] may appear to have the Jack Armstrong, All-American Boy life.

A freshman at Jupiter High School, he has made the varsity baseball team as a starting pitcher. He's supported by overtly caring parents. Art [REDACTED] has long taken him to baseball games and coached him when he was playing in the Jupiter-Tequesta Athletic Association. For years, his mother, Carol, dutifully carried lunch or gym clothes to school whenever Dustin left them at home.

But [REDACTED] won't be near the mound on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays. He won't be on the bench those days counting pitches or warming up along the foul lines. When his Warrior teammates take the field those three days, the 16-year-old will be in Lake Worth continuing his substance abuse treatment program.

For as Dustin now commits his life to bettering himself through baseball, he, as he says, "was out of society for the last 16 months."

The reason he was out of society was alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, LSD, pills, inhalants and anything else he could get his hands on. Crimes committed while he was high will require him to take periodic drug tests because he is on probation until he reaches 19.

"It all started in this school," he told about 25 parents Wednesday at Jupiter Middle School, during the first of three seminars on problems teenagers face: from basic social pressures to fit in to gangs, drugs and facing up to the consequences of making wrong choices.

The program is being put on by the middle school, Communities in Schools and the Jupiter police. The second part of the Family Awareness Seminar and Training (FAST) workshop, to be just for kids, is next Wednesday. The final seminar, to include both parents and their kids, is set for Feb. 19.

The First United Methodist Church of Jupiter-Tequesta plans to hold a follow-up seminar for parents on Feb. 27 at JMS.

Dustin and his parents were guest speakers for the talk with area parents.

"I got into drugs the start of my seventh grade year," Dustin said. "It wasn't every day. I just wanted to be accepted by the big, tough kids whose parents didn't care about them."

While Dustin was rebelling from parents who wanted the best for their son, he was aided in trouble making by his parents, who blamed themselves for their son's acts. "I was a can-do mom," said Carol [REDACTED]. "If my child was in trouble at school, I was embarrassed not at my child but myself."

"He misbehaved at school. We allowed him to continue misbehaving," Art [REDACTED] said. "Dustin was suspended 11 or 12 times. One of my most humiliating days was three weeks before the end of the seventh grade. Dustin stole a car with other kids."

Police asked the parents to call Dustin's friend, but they didn't want to because it was 1 a.m. The officer told them, "We're not looking for a dog," Art [REDACTED] said. The [REDACTED] called the parents of one of Dustin's friends, asking if they knew where their son could be. The other parents said their son had no idea.

"An hour later, police found Dustin with that couple's son in a stolen car on Maplewood Drive," Art [REDACTED] said. "We found at that point we had to do this ourselves."

Sent to military school, Dustin did well in the structured life, but found pills were easily available during three-hour study halls.

Tired of the military life, Dustin got himself kicked out. His parents then enrolled him in Cardinal Newman High School. "It was like dropping a lead weight into the ocean," Art [REDACTED] said.

"I liked it there," Dustin said. "Rich people with expensive drugs. I didn't have to buy it. Just go for the first hour so I wouldn't be listed as absent, walk out the door, then return at 3 to be picked up by my parents."

Fights between Dustin and his parents got worse and the drug use increased.

"I hated my family, hated myself," Dustin said. "Back then I wouldn't have cared if my parents were dead so I could have gone out and done things my way. I would have loved for them to be dead."

After disappearing for a weekend, Dustin was enrolled in Growing Together, a program that requires as much out of the family as the patient.

"The hardest things I've ever done have been to bury my father and put my son in Growing Together," Art ██████ said.

Relocated to the home of another family for the first five months of the program, Dustin continued to rebel. But unlike in the past, the consequences of his actions now produced different results. He'd punch the counselors and they wouldn't back down.

"I tried to get kicked out but they put up with my crap," Dustin said. "I bet if I still did those things, they'd continue to keep me there."

After several months in the program, he realized he'd have to change his outlook if he wanted to do anything with his life.

"Now I want more for myself than ever," he said. "I want to play baseball. I never touched a ball in 14 months. I think that showed how much I wanted it."

He is still involved in treatment but has returned home. "I'm not going to say it's perfect. It's not the Brady Bunch. We argue, but now it's different. It's not battles but disagreements."

Janet Pezelj of Growing Together said parents need to stay in control, setting rules and then sticking to them, checking up on their kids and knowing who their peers are.

"It's not our job to be our kids' friends," Pezelj said. "It's our job to raise healthy, happy people."

Art ██████ said the biggest part of their relationship now is that rules have been set in their house. Dustin knows he can break the rules, but there will be punishments, Art ██████ said.

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