

From the Web

Repository, The (Canton, OH) - January 13, 2000

• Author/Byline: JAMES F. WEBERRep editor at-large

Your prayers, which I requested more than a year ago for a problem teen-ager, worked. She was 15 then; she's 16 now. Considering what she was doing then and up until six months ago, that's a miracle.

A reader from Colorado asked about her, so I checked. She just finished her first six months in Kids Helping Kids Connection. In some ways, she's doing better.

The thing that may be helping her the most is journal writing. She has to make an entry each day. It's like an examination of conscience. She has to recall something she did in her past, before she got into KHK, why she did it and how she now sees that event or action. She seems to be making an honest effort to address those issues.

I read an essay she wrote about her own history of using marijuana, alcohol, pills, acid, special K (an animal tranquilizer) and pot laced with crystal meth and hash, starting three and one-half years ago. She already has been arrested six times, been a missing person four times and has run away from home for more than a week on seven occasions.

"... use of alcohol and drugs among teen-agers is out of control, and I have my own opinion as to why," she wrote. "I see a lot of people at school who seem insecure in some way or another. Whether it is their looks, hair, how they sound, height or weight, it is all the same.

"There seems to be one common goal in high school, and that is to fit in. Acceptance and self-esteem can drive anyone to great lengths to get it. The main reason I started to use (drugs) was because I wanted to fit in. And, sadly, it is very easy to fit in with a group of people who fill their lives with drugs and alcohol.

"This is a lifestyle that requires very little self-esteem and very little self-respect," she said.

She talks a lot about self-esteem, which she sees as probably her biggest issue, and fear, both of failing and being alone. She feels she was physically, verbally and emotionally abused by her mother. She never knew her father.

She's trying to live day to day following the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. She had been progressing in the KHK program and was allowed to have weekend visits home. But some questions of honesty, school performance and relationships arose, and she was busted back to a lower level.

She still has a long way to go. She has to work hard to catch up to where she should be in school. I think she's bright enough to be seriously challenged, and to go to college. But she's lazy and lacks self-motivation to excel. I know she has attention deficit disorder, but it doesn't affect her when it comes to things she wants to do. A few good report cards will help her self-esteem.

If I were negotiating her contract with KHK, I'd make sure it contained plenty of paybacks for the family that has stood by her. She'd be the best behaved, hardest working, most respectful, least demanding daughter and sister a teen-ager can be.

I'd put her on a very short leash, and it would be lengthened in very small increments for every month she religiously kept every condition in the pact. She should work just as hard at gaining acceptance at home as she did in her past on the streets.

• Record: 10030

• Copyright: Copyright 2000, The Repository, All Rights Reserved.