

Finding Purpose in Recovery

By Jordan Davidson

Jordan Davidson serves as SAM's Government Affairs Manager. When he was 17 years old, Jordan entered long-term addiction recovery after struggling with cannabis use disorder. Since he joined SAM in 2019, Jordan has specialized in youth outreach and substance abuse prevention.

Across the country the school year is starting again. It's a time filled with a familiar mix of excitement and jitters. As students come to terms with the end of summer, parents and teachers must come to grips with a sad fact facing today's youth. Marijuana use and addiction is on the rise as more states legalize the drug and the multi-billion-dollar industry produces higher potency THC-laced products in forms that are virtually undetectable.

Today, more parents are dealing with kids taking THC gummy bears without their knowledge. More teachers this year will deal with students vaping odorless THC in the school bathroom and heading to class high.

I know this can happen because it happened to me. In high school, my life fell apart because of marijuana use. I withdrew from my friends, family, relationships and school activities; I lived every minute thinking about marijuana. It took over everything.

On December 9th, 2018, two weeks before my eighteenth birthday, I decided to quit marijuana. It wasn't even a full day until I broke down crying to my mom, begging her for help. She knew what to do. I took medical leave from school, went to rehab, and completed 90 meetings in 90 days at Narcotics Anonymous. With the support of my friends, family, and community, I've stayed clean and sober ever since.

Finding these recovery resources isn't always easy for people struggling with addiction. Treatment can be expensive, meetings can be intimidating, opening up to loved ones is an exercise in vulnerability. That's why all kids need a foundation of support and information that they have access to from an early age. That starts at home and in school.

Parents and teachers, some of whom may have used marijuana when they were younger, need to realize that these drugs are no longer about a plant or natural product. Pot is no longer about taking bong hits in a dorm room. It's been industrialized and engineered into products that are on average 400% more potent than before. Medical science and hard data make it increasingly clear that the impact of THC on mental health is devastating. Recent studies have demonstrated that regular THC use leads to IQ loss, depression, suicidality, psychosis and schizophrenia, among other impacts.

There's a reason we are seeing the highest levels of youth use of marijuana in history, and it goes beyond states simply legalizing pot. Over the last decade the marijuana industry has marketed these addictive, psychoactive drugs as medicine and harmless fun, even 'recreation.' Perceptions of risk and harm from regular use among 12th graders have plummeted to less than a third.

Parents and teachers can have a positive influence by talking about the data regarding the dangers of THC drugs. We need to be clear about the mental and physical health impacts. We also need to communicate with young people in a supportive rather than investigative tone.

Being an active participant in your child or student's life can make a huge difference. School administrators need to do more to train teachers how to not only recognize the warning signs but maintain an open and honest dialogue with parents about their child.

Working in the drug policy and advocacy space has also been helpful for both me and those in my life. This October, I will be celebrating five years at Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM). In addition to my own experience, working with parents and advocates through SAM has bolstered my own recovery and serves as a constant motivation to spread the word on the danger of today's high-potency THC. It also allows me to educate the friends and family around me. I always hope this work can contribute to reshaping the narrative around marijuana and its very real health impacts.

I know there are many kids and families who were not as lucky as I am. I'm happy and healthy in recovery today. But we all must harness the opportunity the new school year brings to learn how we can ensure the next generation is protected from this latest threat to their future.