

Pediatrics

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**Building Hope, Recovery, and Life
Beyond Substance Use Disorder**

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Building hope, recovery, and life

BEYOND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

by Abbie Miller



“When I got to Nationwide Children’s, I felt so relieved. They were sweet, compassionate, kind and safe. After my first appointment, I was clean for the longest I had been in years.”

– Sarah Parker

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that even though my friends were also using drugs, they weren’t going home and continuing to use like I was.”

In the following years, she moved on to IV heroin use.

“After my first time using a needle, after the drugs wore off, I was embarrassed and disgusted. But I couldn’t cope with not being high,” she explains. “It wasn’t just the physical addiction. I didn’t like myself.”

Eventually, Parker says, she had an epiphany moment that made her get serious about sobriety. Going through detox alone in a jail cell made her realize that her life needed to change. But even that experience wasn’t the answer for the long term.

“I tried to get sober on my own, to quit cold turkey, but I couldn’t do it. I wanted it, but I couldn’t do it on my own,” Parker explains.

It wasn’t until her friend’s mom told her about a program at Nationwide Children’s for teens and young adults with substance use disorder that she got the help she needed.

“When I got to Nationwide Children’s, I felt so relieved,” Parker says. “They were sweet, compassionate, kind and

safe. After my first appointment, I was clean for the longest I had been in years.”

Recently, Parker celebrated her 30th birthday. She’s coming up on 11 years sober, and proud of the life she’s made for herself.

“I have good relationships and a good job,” she says. “I’m proud of how far I’ve come. I still have bad days, I still get triggered, but I’ve learned that it’s okay that I’m not fine all the time. We all struggle with different things. I don’t have to be perfect.”

By working with the physicians at Nationwide Children’s, she says she’s learned to be vulnerable, accept compassion and be kinder to herself.

If you are concerned about your or a loved one’s substance use, talk to your care team.

Five years ago, Pediatrics Nationwide dedicated its fall issue to a comprehensive look at the effects of the opioid crisis on children and families. At that time, Sarah Parker was working hard to stay sober, recovering from the very crisis holding the nation’s attention.

Parker grew up in Chillicothe, Ohio, halfway between Portsmouth, Ohio, the city prominently covered in “Dreamland,” the popular book about the opioid crisis, and Columbus, Ohio, home to Nationwide Children’s Hospital. Experimentation with pills starting at age 12 turned into heroin addiction and an arrest by age 19. But her story does not end there.

Parker is a success story — a beacon for youth and the doctors who care for them. Her story shows what is possible when an adolescent or young adult with substance use disorder gets the support and medical care they need.

THE FIRST STEPS TO SOBRIETY

“Gradually, then suddenly.”

This is a quote from Ernest Hemingway’s book “The Sun Also Rises” about how a man went bankrupt. For Sarah Parker, it’s the way she describes her journey to sobriety.

“As early as age 15 I didn’t feel good or proud about my drug usage,” Parker says. “I felt a lot of shame. I noticed



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