

Tuesday, September 7, 2004

## **Soon-to-be program graduate credits his success to treatment**

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Due to a confidentially agreement with Cobb County Superior Court, only the first name of the subject in this article is used.

MARIETTA - Andrew has some decisions to make.

Like a lot of 21-year-olds, he is trying to figure out what he wants to major in at Georgia Perimeter College.

He loves music and movies, but he said he has no musical talent and the movie industry is hard to break into.

Maybe he'll major in business and marketing and become a scout for a record label, scoping out up-and-coming emo/hardcore bands.

Or maybe, like his dad, he'll take a 9-to-5 job with a solid company where he can take the weekends off.

The possibilities are truly endless for Andrew, thanks in part to Cobb County's Drug Treatment Court, an 18-month drug treatment program for nonviolent, first-time felony drug offenders that he will graduate from in October.

More than a year-and-a-half ago, Andrew's goals only lasted days at a time as he continued on a self-destructive seven-year odyssey of pills, booze, theft and disappointment.

"I mean, it was like, I couldn't live and I couldn't die," said Andrew, who lives with a friend in Roswell and holds down a job at an area steakhouse. "There was no peaceful medium or anything. There was nothing I could do to make myself happy, no matter what I had or what I did, I really wanted to die but I didn't want to kill myself, you know. I didn't know how to live a sober life, it had been so long."

Andrew said his lowest point was when would park his car as far away as possible from his parents' house and walk home, hoping he wouldn't be seen by those from whom he had stolen.

After all, he had broken in his best friend's grandparent's house to steal pills, an act that he said has been forgiven but one at which he still shakes his head.

In and out of rehab five to six times - a place where he "learned the process" and "told them what they wanted to hear" - his days of drugs finally ended after he was arrested with a friend for possession of OxyContin, a strong narcotic pain reliever similar to morphine, when his buddy passed out at the wheel of a car and drove up on a curb.

"The wheels," he said, had finally come off of his former life, as he saw his freedom "closing in" on him with jail time becoming a distinct possibility.

Unlike failed ventures in rehab "that had no consequences," he said he noticed a change in himself after the first month in Cobb's Drug Treatment Court.

The first four months of Drug Treatment Court - or phase one of a five phase process - requires participants to attend intensive drug counseling and group meetings coupled with six-day-a-week random drug screens.

He also had to complete work toward a high school degree, something he never finished after being bounced from Pope High School and a local private school.

That was something he could not counterfeit, he said, like he had done so many times before.

"It was like once I got sober for a month, and I started going to AA and I started working the program and talking people and actually leaving people behind that I actually hadn't left behind before, I stepped outside myself for just that brief moment. For a month, I could actually look at the stuff that I'd done and get realization of that stuff that I done before, again and again and again."

During the drug treatment process, he said the parents of friends he used with have called and asked for his help.

"Look, we know that you've done this; how did you do this; how can we help our child," he said they say.

Fellow participants also rely on one another, he said.

"Once you see how serious this is and how happy you can be without that substance, it's everybody just pulling for each other," he said. "Before I couldn't figure out how to live my life, and now I'm trying to figure out what to do with my life."

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