




# San Bernardino County Needs Youth In-Patient Drug Treatment Facilities

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San Bernardino County is in desperate need of youth in-patient drug treatment facilities. Over a dozen can be found in Los Angeles and Orange, but none in San Bernardino County.

Children are the most vulnerable to addiction, and for those who find themselves in the later stages of substance abuse, it's critical they be provided with help. Speaking from experience, at the 12, I went through a youth in-patient drug treatment program in San Bernardino County and now have over 29-years of sobriety. My mother recognized the signs of drug addiction and found a program at Redlands Community Hospital. It was a place where I thrived with other youth overcoming our problems. I fondly look back at that life transforming process and wonder "what if no such place existed for me at that age, where would I be today? I can largely guess that I may very well have ended up like most of my drug using friends at that age who dropped out of school, joined gangs and ended up incarcerated.

Consider this, today there are over 6 million drug addicts in America, and a significant number of those are youth. Research shows that a drug addict who does not get help will likely end up in jail, an institution or dead. Having spoken to high school students across America, I can tell you that youth drug use is on the rise, and recent statistics tell us that one in five kids is a regular drug-user. Parents, that means that if your child has four friends, odds are one of those friends is likely using an illicit drug, and your child is in jeopardy.

Nobody wakes up one day and says, "I want to be a drug addict." Rather, it happens in steps, and most often at a very young age, starting with the experimentation phase, where your child is introduced to the drug. At that point, if they continue to experiment with drugs, they are doing so at the second phase we call "social use," among their peers. Because using drugs alters the brain, a social drug user can easily become hooked on the drug, which elevates them to the "abuse phase", where they often use on their own and critical warning signals become apparent, including truancy, behavioral problems at home and school, changes in appearance, and other indicators. Without intervention at the "abuse" phase, it's likely the child will end up in the final fourth stage we call "addiction." Without intervention at this phase, the child's life is in significant jeopardy.

The Redlands Community Hospital youth in patient program I went through at age 12 has been closed for nearly two-decades, with no replacement. What can San Bernardino County do? Admit we have a problem. We have a problem in our schools and on our streets. If we truly want to reduce gangs and crime, we must start with the children, and they are never too young for parental and community intervention. Children cannot simply go to school and come home with nothing to do – research shows that children who are involved in after school activities are much less likely to get in trouble. Find activities for your child, like sports, boy or girl scouts, church activities, etc. Monitor your child's friends, social media and behavior. Encourage schools to implement non punitive random student drug testing.

We have so many options to provide education on drug use, but so few tools at our disposal for dealing with the addiction phase of our youth. We are literally losing a generation to addiction – this year over 120,000 Americans will lose their life to a substance abuse related incident. That is twice the number of Americans killed during the entire Vietnam War – that's a doubling of the size of the Vietnam Wall, every single year.

I had the honor of being a guest of Kim Carter's Time for a Change Foundation Award Gala; an outstanding organization right here in our backyard that transforms the lives of so many who are in trouble. We have amazing leadership in San Bernardino County and we must strengthen this region by addressing our short-comings with youth inpatient drug treatment.

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