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Danville man says Christ and Isaiah House combined to set him straight

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Editor's note: This story is the second installment in a two-part series on Isaiah House Drug and Alcohol recovery Center. The first part on May 29 was about the center's need for donations.

WILLISBURG - On a recent weekday morning Choe Sergent of Danville entered the front door at the Isaiah House Drug and Alcohol Recovery Center. He immediately was surrounded by residents.

Dressed in a navy suit and talking in an encouraging manner to the recovering addicts who greeted him, it appeared he was one of the teachers or counselors on staff at the facility, and a very popular one at that.

Yes, Sergent does teach a class at Isaiah House. But not long ago he was one of the students who, as residents of the facility, are trying to turn their lives around after long periods of drug abuse. "I was exactly where these men are today," the upbeat, talkative, articulate 27-year-old said as he pointed down a hallway where residents were doing chores. "My hope is that one day they will be where I'm at today."

Sergent says the journey from seemingly hopeless addict to productive citizen can be a long, lonely one unless the drug-abuser seeks help and, once he receives, acts on it.



Choe Sergent

As he took a reporter on a tour of the sprawling former school house that was his home for several months, Sergent gave a few snapshots of his own journey from abuser to recovering addict who has acted on what he learned and experienced at Isaiah House.

"I grew up in a good family in Whitley County," he said. "My father was a minister, and my mother was a caring woman."

Sergent said he did well both academically and in sports in high school and, after graduation, went to Somerset Community College. He also met a woman, fell in love and got engaged. "I felt I was on top of the world," he said. It wasn't long, however, before Sergent found himself at the bottom of his world.

Physical and emotional pain

After experiencing prolonged pain in parts of his body, Sergent was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, an inflammatory disease that may affect any part of the gastrointestinal tract and cause a wide variety of symptoms, including abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting or weight loss.

"I started taking some high-powered medications, and they seemed to take care of the pain pretty well," he said. Then, Sergent was hit by a tragedy. The woman to whom he was engaged committed suicide.

"After her death, I was an emotional basket case," he said. "I started using more of the medications for my physical condition to deaden the pain. I thought that if the drugs I was using for Crohn's disease could take away my physical pain, they might be able to ease my emotional pain."

Although he's not a doctor, Sergent diagnosed a new condition he developed: "I got hooked on the drugs. I had become an addict."

His parents realized what was happening to their son and tried to persuade him to stop abusing his medications, Sergent said. When that didn't work, they took him to counselors and doctors. "I was admitted to one hospital and mental facility after another, and nothing worked," he said.

Then, in 2007, Sergent was accepted at Isaiah House. He said that program "definitely worked."

He spent 16 months in the program, beginning when Isaiah House was located in Hustonville and completing it after Isaiah House was relocated to Willisburg. He spent the last several months of the program as a trusty and then as staff person.

Sergent said the program's emphasis on convincing residents to make Christ the center of their lives instead of their own desires and to treat residents' minds, bodies and hearts was what turned him from being a drug-abuser to a recovering addict.

"Isaiah House has a comprehensive program that not only involves Christ- and Bible-based drug abuse treatment but also education and work programs," he said. "The whole idea is that when a man leaves the program, he not only has dealt with his addiction but he is prepared to lead a productive, Christian life in society."

Sergent's life now includes a wife and two children. He has been taking college-level courses and plans to enter Campbellsville University. He also is active in his church. And he makes weekly visits to Isaiah House to teach a class.

"Every time I come, it's like a homecoming," he said. "I just hope the men I'm teaching will be able to come back here one day like I am doing and share with the residents their own stories of how Isaiah House and Christ turned their lives around."

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