

On path to recovery: Norwell teen discusses his fight with addiction

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As a recovering alcoholic, Mark Routhier has had a long road to sobriety, one that's been checkered with starts and stops along the way. But now, at 19, he's looking toward the future with a new outlook on life and a new road to travel.

Although he's been in and out of rehabilitation programs, Routhier said a realization that he needed to change has kept him sober for more than a year. "I just thought about where I was," Routhier said during an interview this week. "And I knew it wasn't where I wanted to be anymore." Last September, Routhier made a decision to change his entire life, cutting off ties with friends who were still partying and enrolling in a cosmetology school in Boston, where he spends most of his time. As a young adult at school, Routhier said once he made the decision to change his life it was difficult to find supportive, and positively influential people he could share a connection with. In a move to connect with sober young adults, he started a youth group recently at a local church where he attends. "It's been tough to find sober friends," Routhier said. "Being 19, there aren't too many people my age who don't drink or smoke weed, especially going through college." Even when he's found sober friends to talk to, Routhier said it's still hard to find people he can relate to on a friendship level. In the last year, Routhier said his perspective has probably changed the most. "I think I have more control over my life," he said. "If there is something that I know is wrong I have the ability to just not to do it. I'm in a totally different mindset and I'm thinking things over more." "Now," he said, "it has become natural not to be involved [in drinking]. I think it's a big step because a lot of people never get to that point." Mark's mother Gia Routhier has been one of his biggest supporters. "I think Mark has tried everything," his mother said. Gia said her son has gone through a number of stays at rehabilitation centers, an intervention and he even traveled to a rehab in Utah to get clean. "I think things started to turn around after [a visit to] Dr. Kishore's walk-in clinic in Weymouth," she said. Punyamurtaula Kishore, the founder of Addiction Medicine Associates and practitioner of addiction medicine since 1974, has 18 clinics with 110 staffers (some bilingual) throughout the Bay State. Kishore's method combines traditional family practice with addiction treatment services. Patients enter with drug and alcohol abuse problems, go through a treatment program and continue using the clinic for regular visits. The practice blends preventive and curative care in what Kishore called "the best of the East and West." Kishore, 56, coined his addiction treatment approach "sobriety maintenance." During withdrawal treatment at most detox clinics patients are weaned off alcohol, heroin and other opiates with replacement drugs such as methadone and suboxone. Although patients receive "craving blockers" during their first couple of weeks of treatment, Kishore and staff forgo traditional drugs and meet only the natural needs of the body. Addicts are often stereotyped as "incorrigible people who deserve bad care," said Kishore, who opened his Brookline International Health Center in December. "But we here, we treat them in a wholesome way." On Jan. 29, Gia Routhier participated in the National Library of Addictions (NLA) and Preventive Medicine Associates' (PMA) second installment of the "Night of Knowledge" series in Weymouth at the Weymouth Public Library. There, she participated alongside professionals and councilors in the field of addictive medicine, discussing substance abuse treatment programs available to those seeking recovery from their addictions. Also at the event, other recovering addicts and their families spoke about their experiences with alcohol and drug abuse as well as their journey through treatment and rehabilitation, in an effort to live a clean and sober lifestyle. "One day, during [one of Mark's relapses], I got out an article I had cut out months prior and called [the Addiction Medicine Associates (AAM) in Weymouth] at 10 minutes to 5 p.m., just before the close," Gia Routhier said. "A woman named Sally answered the phone and as soon as I heard her voice I burst into tears. Even though it was late she said she could take Mark right away." "I think that really was the first step on his road back to life," she said. In addition to helping her son, Gia said AAM helped her cope as she met other families and mothers in similar situations. "What I took away from meeting those people was that no matter what the world says; 'this is the last chance or he only gets one more chance,' these kids will get every chance they deserve," she said. As Mark has progressed with his sober lifestyle, his mother said she's impressed with her son's commitment to staying clean and has she has witnessed vast improvements in his quality of life. Currently, Mark attends a cosmetology school in Boston, attends church on a weekly basis and even went to India last year on a week long missionary trip with his mother. "He actually held a hair cutting clinic over there," she said. "They have so much disease in India and he did what he could to help. He's the hero here." According to Mark, he joined the cosmetology school on a whim but found he liked it more and more as time went on. "I just joined because, I don't know, I figured there would be a lot of girls," he laughed. "It is a good environment there and I've been able to be focused there, getting stuff done to further my career."

During his darker days, Mark said he struggled to remain sober. About one year ago, he was arrested for unarmed robbery, assault and battery and intimidation of a witness. "I've made a lot of mistakes and learned from them," he said this week. More recently, Mark said he's remained focused and busy, one of the keys, he added, to staying sober. "It feels really good to have a better relationship with those around me, especially my mom," he said. Additionally, Mark said he's enjoying the added freedom and responsibility that goes along with being sober. "If someone is struggling with addiction I think you need to find something you're really into, stick with it and make it your focus," he said. "That worked for me." In addition to his schoolwork, Routhier said he's found happiness in a healthier lifestyle, eating better and working out daily. "I love to read for instance," he said. "But I barely have time to do that. I'm busy, non-stop, everyday and I think that's the key thing."