

### *Parent Testimonials - Abbie*

Growing up, our daughter was an affectionate, funny, original girl. She loved animals and had a real gift for language and storytelling. But in fifth grade everything changed. She broke off with her old friends and gravitated to girls who were dishonest, careless and often mean. She began to act that way herself.

By middle school our relationship with our daughter was strained at best. She became sullen and uncommunicative and complained about the way things were in school. She started therapy in 7th grade. Trouble continued into eighth grade, and we later found out she had begun drinking alcohol and smoking pot at 11 and 12 years old.

In eighth grade, our daughter indicated that she wanted a change – that she didn't like the way her life was going, and she asked to change schools. She was accepted to a good boarding school about 45 min. from our home. While we knew a change of venue wasn't the whole answer, we thought that if she really wanted things to be different, this could help.

Things seemed better for a while. Our daughter made new friends and got involved in the dance program at school, which she loved. But before the year was out, she started hanging out with her old friends at home, and that summer her drinking and drug use got worse (we were still unaware of the extent of her problem). She was sneaking out at night and lying to us as a matter of course. The only time she spoke to us was when she wanted something. At the time, we struggled to understand how much of this was normal teen behavior and how much was serious. She saw the school psychologist on a regular basis, and we had family therapy as well.

In boarding school our daughter got introduced to prescription drugs, including powerful pain killers that other kids stole from home. By the middle of her sophomore year, she was using cocaine (and stealing to get it) and being treated for anxiety and depression.

Our daughter asked to go into treatment in March of her sophomore year. She spent a month in a residential treatment program at a hospital. The program was really good for her, but it wasn't enough. We didn't know what to do when she got discharged from there, and the insurance clock was ticking. She was adamant about not going back to boarding school – she didn't believe she could stay sober if she did. There was no way we were going to have her go to the local high school, where her drug-using friends went. Summer was just a few months away, and we knew she couldn't be home for that. We researched all the longer-term residential treatment options: therapeutic schools, programs on ranches out West (she loves horses), wilderness programs that involved a lot of self-exploration, and more traditional rehabs.

With the help of a consultant, we found Ironwood. It was exactly what we were looking for: ongoing treatment for all of our daughter's issues, plus a lot of activities to reintroduce positive, healthy things into her life. There were a number of things we liked about the program initially: first, while our daughter didn't have all the symptoms listed

on the web site, she had a lot of them. We liked the the emphasis on therapy and the treatment goals. The use of dialectic behavioral therapy aligned with the work she'd already been doing. And we felt that the programs – riding, gardening, cooking, art, exercise, working with the dogs – would help her reconnect with life and find ways to channel her energies in positive directions. Most important of all, while Ironwood is strict, it is based on a culture of respect. Not all programs are like that.

Even after everything we'd been through, sending our daughter to Ironwood was a difficult thing to do. You entrust your child, someone you'd do anything for, into the care of strangers knowing she needs more than you can provide; hoping it's the right thing. But we had done a lot of research and truly believed it was the best option available. The beginning was hard. Since our daughter had already been in a treatment program for a month and was a willing participant in her own recovery, knowing she'd be starting out in Impact was hard. She definitely felt we'd betrayed her at first. But it's all part of the process. She did fine, and she herself now believes in the value of the experience – even Impact.

Our daughter was able to complete her sophomore year while at Ironwood through a combination of finishing assignments from her boarding school, distance learning through an organization that Ironwood has a relationship with and on-site tutoring. Ironwood provided all the support we needed to make sure that our daughter's problems and treatment did not derail her education.

My husband and I also had the support we needed as parents. We had weekly calls with our daughter's therapist and, once our daughter had moved from Frye up to the Farmhouse, another call with her and the therapist together plus a short call just with her. Marion was also available to us.

It's hard to describe the difference that our daughter's Ironwood experience has made in her life, and how deeply grateful we are to Marion, Rod and all the people who had a role in her treatment there. It didn't happen overnight. For many months the reports were that while she was "compliant," our daughter was basically flying under the radar, doing what she needed to do to get by. The staff's knowledge and insight into what was really going on with her was remarkable. They taught her about herself, how to love and respect herself and others, how to deal with tough situations.

Our daughter graduated from Ironwood after six months with a new sense of accountability and pride in herself, and she celebrated a full year's sobriety this spring. She attends a Recovery High School near our town. She is active in AA, has a sponsor, chairs meetings when asked and is working on her fourth step. She got mostly A's in school on her return. She rides four times a week and is getting ready to go to college.

The relationship we have with our daughter today is great – "normal," happy, honest and supportive, with mutual respect and open love. She's still a teen, going through the things teens go through, but she is infinitely better equipped to deal with those things than the vast majority of her peers. She herself points to Ironwood as the thing that saved her.

We have a lot of exposure to other struggling teens through our daughter's school. The ones who have at least been through 90-day treatment programs do best, and it's apparent by contrast how beneficial Ironwood's multi-dimensional approach is. From the beginning, the staff at her school has relied on our daughter as a peer leader with students who haven't had as solid a foundation as she has. We're all incredibly grateful for what the Ironwood program and people did for our daughter and our family.

Written by Abbie  
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