

Parent Testimonials - Barbara & David

We were blessed with two great children. This writing concerns our youngest son, Andrew. He is a bright, funny, witty, enthusiastic, popular, good-looking, self-assured kid with great friends and a supportive loving family. He had always done well in school, was active in sports and was just a pleasure to be around. He was always affectionate; in fact we had to tuck him in bed until he was about 14.

As Andrew went into high school, he did very well in his freshman and sophomore year. He had turned 16 and was still the same kid we knew, but we noticed changes. He started to smoke cigarettes. We hated the idea but just couldn't get him to quit. He had tried beer and occasionally would go to his friends' houses and play beer pong. They were all doing it. At least he wasn't driving so we figured he was safe.

At some point Andrew started migrating to a new group. Now, for the first time his friends did not have last names and we did not know their parents. He was spending more and more time with this group and less time with the kids that we knew. Through his new "friends" he was introduced to weed, and beyond that his drug experimentation escalated quickly - well beyond anything we could ever have imagined.

By the time he had turned 17, he refused to go to school; in fact he missed enough days that he was simply asked to leave before the end of his junior year. He was always out of the house and we never knew where he was or with whom. He openly admitted to smoking weed and drinking beer and vodka, but "it was no big deal" because "everyone else was doing it". There were nights that Andrew just didn't come home.

Our son was abusing drugs and/or alcohol on a regular basis. He was transformed from the kid we raised to someone we didn't even recognize. Andrew ran our home - he could not be disciplined. There was horrible verbal abuse and some physical abuse. He stole our money and stole our cars continually and he didn't even have a driver's license. He threatened us constantly, to the point that we slept with our bedroom door locked most of the time. It was awful and something had to be done!

We called anyone and everyone to get some type of help for our son. The school guidance counselor suggested that we call the police. The police suggested that we have him admitted to a facility that would help him. However, the treatment facility that was recommended to us was only interested in him, if he were homicidal or suicidal. We were totally lost. We felt that the way it was going for our son, he would either be in jail or dead. We were desperate!

We did hours and hours of research on the Internet and finally came across a small host of treatment options for our son. There were military schools, specialty boarding schools and wilderness camps. We wanted a place where he would receive the therapy that he needed and where he would be in a safe environment. We were initially going to send him to a wilderness camp in Colorado and though the people were very nice and helpful, we just didn't get the impression that he was going to receive the treatment and therapy

that he needed. With no other options we were just about ready to send him to Colorado. By happenstance, as we were searching for a transport service to get him there, we accessed the Safe and Sound Youth Transport website. On their website was a link to Ironwood.

Ironwood's website was very informative. They were focused on Therapy and Counseling. They also provided programs where our son would interact with horses and dogs. There were programs in gardening, art, outdoor projects, exercise and cooking. This was the kind of environment that we felt our son needed. Ironwood appeared to provide a place where Andrew would be safe and protected from the outside world. We spoke several times to the Ironwood administrators and the more we spoke to them the more we were convinced that Ironwood would be the best place for our son, and we even filled out an application and had Andrew accepted into their program. But we just couldn't get ourselves to make that final decision. Even though our life at home was a living hell, we put off sending our son, hoping that things would get better. Naturally they didn't, and when we couldn't take it any longer, we called the folks at Ironwood and they set the process in motion. Within a 24-hour period all of the arrangements were made with Ironwood to receive Andrew into their program and we contacted the Safe and Sound Youth Transport Service for their assistance in transporting our son to Maine.

The toughest part of this decision was when the men from the transport service came to our door at 4:30 am to take our son anyway. They were very professional, courteous and mindful of how emotional the situation was. We woke our son, introduced him to Tom and Rich and then left his bedroom to wait in another area of our home. In a matter of ten minutes or so, our son was dressed, put into a van (he did not go willingly) and driven away from his home for a 9-hour drive to Maine. When they left, my wife broke down in tears, and we held each other so tightly, questioning our decision and yet affirming that it was the best answer to helping our son. This was the beginning of an amazing journey for our son and our family.

There was no direct communication with our son for several weeks, but we were constantly kept informed of his situation via telephone calls, e-mails and his web site. Ironwood is not a quick fix and Andrew's stay was not without its share of setbacks. The treatment is a process. A couple of steps forward, a step or two back; but eventually he was taking more steps forward than backward. For the first 3 months of Andrew's treatment he worked hard at telling the therapist and us what we wanted to hear. He was less interested in getting better than in getting home. But at some point things changed and Andrew really understood that he has a problem and became committed to the program and the process. This is when we could see and hear him soar. He finally got it. We are so very proud of him!

He has embraced what Ironwood offers and what it's about. Andrew is now open and honest in all his therapy sessions. He has developed into a leader and a mentor. He loves working with the animals - he has a favorite alpaca and he loves the dogs. He has developed solid relationships with the staff and goes to them for advice or for help when he is struggling with a decision. He is learning to cook and now wants to go to culinary

school to become a chef. Andrew is working hard in his schoolwork and is maintaining very good grades. He has learned so much about himself. He is doing great.

We honestly believe that without Ironwood, we may have lost our son forever. Andrew turned 18 during his stay at Ironwood, and thought about checking himself out. With some coaxing he was convinced to stick the program out and to stay focused and he is now finishing up. He is happier now than he has ever been. He has a great self-image and high self-esteem. He has experienced so much at Ironwood and has been helped by a wonderful group of caring and dedicated people.

We thank Rod and Marion for caring enough to turn Ironwood into what it is and of course for everything they have done for our son. We cannot say enough about Donna. Through her diligence, her professional knowledge, and her caring manner, she has helped our son face his issues and develop effective coping skills. She is simply amazing. Thank you. We thank Jay, Aimee, Jeremy, Garrett, Jim, Kelly and Chris for being there for our son during those very difficult times that he was going through. In your own ways, you provided our son with useful advice and direction that was taken from your own unique life experiences. Thank you.

Ironwood has done so much for our family. We have learned the importance of maintaining supportive, cohesive relationships within our family. We understand the importance of being open with each other, without being judgmental. And we learned that help for our family is only a phone call away.

Through the dedication and efforts of all of the staff at Ironwood, we have our son back. Thank you for helping our son to gain control of his life and to look forward to a great future. Andrew has bonded through this program with several members of the staff and the residents. They have shared an experience that our son will keep with him for a very long time. Thanks to all of you!

Written by Barbara & David
April 12, 2007