

I appreciate the opportunity to share some of my experiences as a parent of a child with bipolar disorder. I know there are many opportunities for growth in our community, in our approach to people with mental illness.

Close to thirty years ago, my husband and I moved to Burlington where I could begin residency in Ob/Gyn at UVMHC. Our son was 3 months old. We chose Vermont because it seemed to be a good place to raise our family. Lots of outdoor activities, and a focus on health and wellness.

We did our best to engage our children in tennis, hiking and skiing as a family. Soccer, lacrosse, football as team sports. We were relieved when our oldest son, Sean, showed little interest in drugs and alcohol in the middle school years.

What we didn't know, was how Vermont is ranked amongst the highest states for teen use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine.

When a senior in high school he began using high level THC products, oils that were vaped. There was no tell-tale odor of marijuana. His mood disorder, later diagnosed as bi-polar depression, exploded. He went from being co-captain of the varsity alpine ski team, Senior leader, AP student to barely graduating. He was found by the police in a local park, covered in mud and confused. He later rolled his car into a ditch. He could become combative and aggressive. He became paranoid, restless and delusional. He felt police were out to get him. He even collected jars of his own urine. As concerned parents we had a drug test done, to our surprise the only finding was marijuana.

We struggled to find adequate help for his mood disorder. He received substance use disorder treatment but, not medication for his mood disorder.

However, without marijuana, he stabilized enough, to enroll in the Navy. He completed basic training and submariner school training.

Unfortunately, he resumed marijuana use after visiting an old friend. He transitioned within weeks to again aggressive behavior. He was disciplined for fighting. He was transported shortly before Mother's Day 2010, for a suicide attempt.

After his discharge we sought care for him out of state, there were no facilities for young adults in Vermont at the time. His diagnosis

Sean received care for just over a year in California. He moved to a facility in Pennsylvania in January to be closer to home. He relapsed soon after discharge. Unfortunately, he began using harder drugs. He took over a year to become sober from opiates. He did continue to believe he could smoke pot, or use dabs.

Fast track a few years later, Sean after some relative stability has another manic episode. He is found in the street one night by BPD. He is psychotic and delusional. I go to find him in the ER, I explain that he has a bed at Brattleboro lined up already. Yet, he was already discharged.

Unless you are homicidal or suicidal, you can be released. There is very little parents can do to intervene in their child's care, if they are adults and not showing SI or HI. Some weeks later I called the police when Sean broke into our home twice within 24 hours. My husband was out of town and I feared for the safety of our younger son. If there was a way to have Sean held with a mandatory mental health evaluation, I would have proceeded that route. I wouldn't have been compelled to call the police.

Eventually, Sean landed in jail. He failed mental health court. He went to several sober houses, only to be sent back to jail for using marijuana.

There is a video of Sean, months before he died asking for better mental health care at Saint Jay work camp.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBoPSQU3ZzA>

After release, he was untreated and manic. Despite having an offer of one year's treatment, in exchange for cooking for the facility, he instead asked for his tent and took a job at a local restaurant.

He died 38 days later. While high on Marijuana, he used a substance, thought to be cocaine which turned out to be 100% fentanyl. He died with fentanyl, marijuana and alcohol in his system.

Of his mental health, I am convinced that marijuana use, especially the high dose that he was using adversely affected his mental health. The difference truly was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type difference.

I couldn't believe how genuinely caring, pleasant and cooperative he could be if he was not under the influence.

His letters from his time in jail, reflect this normalcy of intellect.

I was unaware of dabbing at the time of Sean's use in high school and college. It wasn't until he told me about it after his "supplier's lab" blew up in Winooski. <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/2016/03/09/winooski-rotary-reopens-after-clandestine-lab-found/81522134/>

Governor Hickenlooper referenced a report on youth use after legalization, percent who used dabs increased by 7%, edible use increased by 8%

Data by self report can be confounding, for example, pregnant women report decrease in MJ use because DCF report is triggered. However, measuring the babies cord blood shows a 1/3 increase in THC since legalization.

I recommend more study before jumping on this bandwagon. We need to ensure we aren't hurting our kids by starting commercial sales.

Marijuana is a schedule 1 drug, it has been hard to study due to this restriction. We need more data before we can make a recommendation.