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RECOVERY CENTERS

# family recovery stories

## The Nixons: From Non-stop Chaos to Blessed Relief

The story began 21 years ago with the birth of Tyler, son of Kate and Gary Nixon. "He's had challenges navigating the world since day one," said Gary.

Tyler's problems began before birth when he was 16 days overdue. The hospital induced labor, but it took several attempts at vacuum. He experienced oxygen deprivation, coded on the delivery table and required extensive neo-natal care.

### "FISH OUT OF WATER"

Kate said, "Those early problems probably caused what is now Tyler, truly a fish out of water." Early on he was receiving all manner of testing and early interventions from a wide range of experts. The issues diagnosed in those first years continue to this day, according to the Nixons. He is very impulsive, easily frustrated, has limited verbal skills, does not connect socially with peers and developmentally is far behind.

The list of problems the Nixons have faced is long and never-ending, creating constant stress and chaos in their home, which includes three other children and two dogs. "Our daughter, the dogs and us as

This is the story of Tyler, a young adult with a complex history, including significant medical, behavioral and mental health issues as well as substance abuse. It is also about Clean Recovery Centers, and their unique approach to treating the whole person and welcoming the most difficult patients.

parents have been the most affected by Tyler's problems," Kate explained. "Our daughter is closest to him in age and always lived in the shadow of his maladjusted behavior. Even the dogs became very anxious because life here was so unpredictable."

### A TAMPA CONNECTION

As the non-stop drama with Tyler was playing out at the Nixon residence in New England, Clean Recovery Centers in Tampa, Florida was building a reputation as an innovative treatment center with a three-pronged approach to permanent sobriety - Get Clean, Live Clean, Stay Clean.

"An addict will quickly see that it is very different from traditional recovery programs. They will also see that it works," said Clean's President Nick Cuneo. "There are no cookie-cutter solutions here. Everyone is unique, and we create a recovery road for each person's specific needs."

Eventually Tyler and Clean would connect and bring that philosophy to life for this troubled young man, but there were still many difficult times ahead for the Nixons.

## LIVING FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS

As the years went by, Kate and Gary survived from one wearying crisis to the next with no rest from Tyler's daily struggles. Examples of his impulsive behavior and stealing abounded. Kate recalled how he often came home from daycare with his diaper bag filled with items that did not belong to him - jewelry, food items, toys and sparkly things. "This has been a pattern his whole life," Kate added. "He is impulsive and simply can't help it."

Up until the third and fourth grades, Tyler's problems were compounded by ongoing medical difficulties, including neurological problems, ear-nose-throat and sinus troubles, gastroenterology complications and significant kidney surgeries.

None of these behavioral troubles were new to the Nixons on a professional level. Both are Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) with a combined 55 years of experience working with adolescents, young adults and families. They know the traumas and stress on families today. Unfortunately, Tyler's need for constant supervision took it to new levels for Kate and Gary.

“It was clear we couldn't keep him safe anymore at home. He needed to be in a program.”

As he reached adolescence, Tyler's problems escalated. "As he got older, he no longer welcomed our efforts to manage and support him," Kate added.

## GIFTED ATHLETE

A talented and successful athlete from early on, Tyler played competitive soccer and then varsity football during his later high school years. After graduation, he was recruited by a State University where he excelled on the football field.

Tyler did well his first semester with coaches to guide him, but the months after football were tough. He was placed on probation from the team because of poor grades. That's when he crashed and burned and

ended up coming home. He had also been fired from his restaurant job for stealing.

It was summer 2016 and Tyler, at age 19, had no job and no place to go. The couple noticed increasingly erratic behavior - unstable moods, poor judgments and choices; they also began suspecting substance abuse. It culminated on the Friday of Labor Day when Kate came home and found Tyler unconscious on the couch where he had overdosed on heroin. This was a game-changer for the family because it was his second overdose. "It was clear we couldn't keep him safe anymore at home. He needed to be in a program."

The next day Tyler was on a plane to Florida where he was admitted into a treatment center. But the program was not a good fit for Tyler who was discharged for stealing. This actually turned into a blessing for the Nixons. "The owner knew Nick at Clean Recovery Centers very well and recommended it to us," said Kate. "We will be forever grateful to him for sending us that way."

That very night Clean sent staff members half a state away to pick up Tyler and bring him to the treatment center in Tampa. For the Nixons that December night turned into a wonderful Christmas gift - a reprieve from 21 years of non-stop chaos.

With Tyler ensconced at Clean and on a better path, Kate and Gary can reflect on their long journey with a son who has always been much loved with many gifts as well as troubles. "He has never been comfortable with himself and never fit in. He is a very loving young man with a big, big heart," they explained. "But at 21 he's like a 12-year-old, very impulsive and also very generous. He'd steal money and then give it all away."

## INSIGHT FOR PARENTS

Is it easier for social workers like the Nixons to deal with their children's problems than for non-professionals? "Not really," said Gary. "There is a crushing sadness in seeing your child not being able to adapt."

There were times when Kate and Gary second-guessed themselves as Tyler's parents. But they would quickly pull back and say, "Yes, we made some mistakes with him along the way, but we believe we did the best we could, provided the best care we could. We think it's important for parents not to take on guilt. These are not parenting issues; it's not your fault."

It also helps to laugh as Kate and Gary do when they jokingly ask themselves, "Did we read to him enough, take him to enough museums or have enough summer vacations?"

## "DOING THE BEST WE CAN"

The Nixons added that, "We work with adolescents and young adults all the time, but when it comes to our own family, we are just civilians, not therapists, just Mom and Dad doing the best we can. We found that our training and education has been helpful on some levels - but on a parental level, not so much."

Kate and Gary also urge parents of challenging children to take good care of themselves and their marriage. "Life can get stressful but try to agree on key points."

How did they know that Clean would work for Tyler? As the Nixons explained, "Early on, we had a long phone conversation with Nick Cuneo and were very impressed

with his perspective, his vision and his philosophy of working with addiction and recovery. We felt optimistic right from the start. Nick didn't make any promises, but he was very reassuring."

Nick told the Nixons said that Clean would do everything they could with Tyler and wanted the opportunity to work with him.

## BLESSED RELIEF

Today, for the first time ever, the Nixons are enjoying peaceful days and nights. "We don't lie awake anymore wondering what's next," Kate said. "Before Clean, when Tyler's name came up on our phone, we'd think, 'Uh-oh, what now, has he been arrested or kicked out of the program.' "

Clean Recovery Centers has put those fears to rest. Nick said that Tyler can stay in the Clean program and community for as long as he wants. The Nixons like the sound of that: "Everyone at Clean has really gotten to know Tyler. They understand all his issues and treat the whole person. That's what sets Clean apart."

## SUCCEEDING IN LIFE

Through many phone calls and visits to Clean, the Nixons have gotten to know the staff, people like Charles, Pauli, Kari and many others. "These people at Clean are so dedicated and so committed to the patients; they have truly been life savers for Tyler and also for us."

Life for Tyler at Clean means a sober living house, jobs, friends and ongoing interaction with staff members. But it's not all a walk in the park. "I've had to read him the riot act a few times," said Nick, "but that's all part of helping him succeed in life."

A look at Tyler's life at Clean provides glimpses as to why this treatment center is so successful. First, they aren't just focused on substance abuse but treat the whole person. "Everyone has gotten to know Tyler from the top people to the counselors on the ground," said Gary. "They reach out and support him all the time, and Nick is always there for Tyler."

## A UNIQUE FACILITY

In early conversations with Nick, the Nixons learned that Clean really understood the complexities of Tyler's situation and was not put off by his challenges. "Nick told us about Clean's clinical staff, about Clinical Director Charles Robinson and assured us they could address Tyler's mental health needs as well as the drug abuse. This was great to hear because there is no place in Connecticut where we could get this range of treatment," Kate and Gary said.

For every person who comes to Clean, these ingredients for recovery are continually stressed:

- Instilling hope
- Offering supporting services
- Providing a clear-cut pathway to sobriety
- Making teachers constantly available

Clean CEO Shayne Sundholm explained that "Our intensive outpatient program focuses on the client's strength; we build on what's right with the person, not what is wrong. And it's paying off - we are seeing dramatic results within 3 to 6 months."

**"They understand all his issues and treat the whole person. That's what sets Clean apart."**

Tyler Nixon is proving to be one of those "dramatic" results even if Nick Cuneo has to occasionally read him the riot act. But that's Clean - nurturing and firm. Clean does not give up or allow clients to believe their setbacks define them. Tyler and his family experienced first-hand Clean's commitment to helping its clients live a clean life.

## COMPLETING THE STEPS

Like any new patient at Clean, Tyler had to prove himself by completing the three phases of their unique program. Learning and adhering to a 12-Step Program and to the Four Agreements was a key part of the phases, allowing Tyler to begin integrating back into life and work. After successfully completing all 3 phases, he graduated, got two jobs in two different restaurants and bought himself a bicycle to ride to work.

"All was going well," Gary recalled, "but on his 21st birthday he thought every 21-year-old goes out and drinks, and that's what he did."

But Clean would have none of it. They pulled him back into the program and told him to quit the restaurant that served liquor. He had to start over and work the steps again. "He did the steps and has started working again," Gary said. "Clean has really hung in there with him; he's not an easy kid and can be a real knucklehead at times."

## get in touch.

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