

A Resource for School Counselors

Patricia Nailor

Recently Dr. C.D. (Curly) Johnson contacted several colleagues, including me, about a matter that he believes may be of interest to school counselors. An attorney, Robert M. Holliday, had contacted him about "An Open Letter to Young People" authored by Reed Prior. Following the initial conversation and several emails from Curly, I received the following email message. I have read the letter and believe it should be shared with our students. If you or one of your colleagues would like to use the letter, it is available on the RISCA website, www.rischoolcounselor.org under "Links" on the left hand toolbar.

I am a lawyer in Des Moines, Iowa. I have never been a criminal lawyer however 6 years ago I found myself trying to help old friends. Reed Prior (age 57) is the son of my high school football coach. In 1996 Reed was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. This sentence stemmed from Reed being arrested three times for the sale of illegal narcotics. Since that time, Reed has been incarcerated in a Federal Penitentiary in Greenville, Illinois. I am enough older than Reed that I did not know him as a youth, however I've known his parents for more than 50 years. His Dad, Don Prior, is the retired much respected football coach at Roosevelt High School in Des Moines. His Mother, Dr. Barbara Prior, is the retired Director of Secondary Education for the Des Moines School District. Unfortunately Don Prior now suffers from Alzheimer's. The reason I reached out to Reed and his family is that I soon learned what all of this has done to not only Reed, but to his family as well.

If you will read Reed's letter you will soon find that the evils of drug addiction will cause the best of people to do the worst of things. Frankly, until I became involved in this I was totally unaware of the horrible damage drugs can do. I can assure anyone who might read Reed's letter that everything contained in it is true, word for word. Not to make excuses for Reed, however he started experimenting with drugs as a college sophomore. That little experiment turned into a 27 year drug addiction. Having now investigated the background of Reed's addiction, I found that he was not a drug king-pin type, rather he sold only to acquire enough money to support the addiction he suffered from. Never did he sell to kids, or on the street. Nor, did he sell to make a financial profit, only to get enough money to support this terrible addiction. Again, I make no excuses for his behavior. However, what I've learned from all of this is the overwhelming addictive nature of these substances. Believe me, it has, indeed, been an eye-opener for me.

You should know that Reed Prior is, obviously, no longer addicted to drugs. Long ago, and while in prison, he went through the 12 step program. Having earned an undergraduate as well as a Masters degree (both in education) Reed decided long ago to make the best of his time left, in other words so see if he couldn't do something good for others. While in prison, Reed practically took over the education department of the penitentiary. He has assisted over 100 inmates obtain their GED so as to better prepare them for when they are eventually released from prison. He has taught subjects such as history, English, math, and courses in the U.S. Constitution. Currently, he runs the prison library. Reed Prior was never a violent man. He has never owned a weapon of any kind.

Not too long ago Reed prepared his "Open Letter to Young People" and has asked if I could assist him with getting it published so it could be read by as many young people as possible. With this charge we are attempting to reach as many high school and collegiate newspapers as we can. If Reed's efforts in this regard will save one kid from the path he found himself on then our efforts will have been worth it. We not are limiting these efforts to strictly school newspapers, rather any media source that might be read by anyone who may be exposed to these substances.

I have known Dr. Johnson for many years. Knowing his field I contacted him and asked for assistance with attempts to have Reed's letter published, thus his email to you followed by this one from me. It would be greatly appreciated if you could help and see that Reed Prior's message is read by today's students. All I would ask is that if it is printed to notify me as I would like to tract where it is printed, or going to be printed.

If anyone has any questions concerning any of this feel free to email me: office bholliday@sullivan-ward.com; home bholliday@mchsi.com.

Thank you for your time and interest,

Bob Holliday