

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > [Drug Education](#) > [Substance Abuse and Its Impact – Angel’s Story](#)

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ITS IMPACT – ANGEL’S STORY

2024 DRS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD WINNER

Substance abuse has played some part in my life for as long as I can remember. Both my biological parents, my paternal grandmother, and many of my maternal aunts and uncles struggled with addiction. At first glance, a person may view this as a tragic part of my story. However, while tragic, their addictions paved a miraculous path for my life.

Being the daughter of two people who struggled with addiction has proven to cause a lot of trauma, emotional and physical scars, financial hardship, instability, and other adversities. Despite the damage it caused I’ve been able to identify many silver linings.

In my mother’s instance she’s been a walking example of resilience that may have aided in building my own resiliency. She’s proof that you’re never too old to turn your life around and consistently work to redeem yourself.

With my biological father I reached a point of acceptance that allows me to see his absence as one of my biggest blessings. Due to his absence, I wasn’t exposed to the battles he fought, the life of crime or dangerous situations he was into. Due to his premature death, I can create my own story – a story that has aided in my ability to cope with his absence. The story being: he was absent from our life because he couldn’t be the father we needed, and he cared enough to stay away – a form of “tough love”.

As stated earlier on, many people may view this as a tragic story – and in many ways it is. However, it is also a story of resilience, hope, strength, and perseverance. I was privileged to gain a first-hand account of how addiction effects every aspect of a person’s life. As a result, the lessons I learned caused me to intentionally avoid addictive behaviors.

Though my story has been tinged with sprinkles of hope – this is not the case for many people in the United States. Which I believe contributes significantly to the prevalence of substance abuse in the country. When life gets tough, the lack of hope and healthy coping skills causes people to lose control of their life. This inevitably leads to alternative ways to cope – which often include turning to addictive drugs and alcohol.

If you add life's hardships, the glorification of drugs in film, music and social media and the accessibility of addictive drugs in the community – you'll get what we have, an extremely high prevalence of substance abuse and addiction in the United States.

I've been afforded the opportunity to see many of the mentioned factors take fold in my most recent role as a Student Support Counselor. Students easily admitted they, like both my parents, struggled to cope with family problems, financial problems, and even general schoolwork. They've also admitted to engaging in substance use because it was the normal and cool thing to do with peers. In addition, students admitted they look up to musicians who contribute to the "trendiness" of substance use. In a few cases, students also became addicted to medications they were prescribed by licensed professionals.

Of all the contributing factors I mentioned above, as a counselor I often focus on people's inability to cope with life's challenges and their lack of hope.

Thankfully, I've been able to witness the effects of several interventions aimed at curbing the prevalence of substance abuse. In my work at a Title I school, my team and I addressed student's substance use concerns by referring students to quality mental health and substance abuse treatment services; provided 1 on 1 and group counseling/psychoeducation; connected students with community partners who specialized in substance abuse prevention and treatment; and created programs and interventions to support Tier 3 students who were affected by substance abuse the most. Many of the programs we implemented proved to be effective in many ways. We had tough but necessary conversations with students and families about the dangers of substance use; and were actively, and intentionally, a part of treating and preventing substance use in our school. However, we continued to face barriers related to student's access to illicit substances – which proved to be one of our biggest challenges. Within about a 10-mile radius in any direction from our school there were at least 2-3 shops where students could easily gain access to illicit substances (even more if we include alcohol).

To add to the work that Drug Rehab Services (DRS), myself and others like us, the United States would benefit from regulating access points to illicit substances near schools and areas that are occupied by a large group of minors at once. For example, vape shops, places that sell cigarettes and alcohol cannot operate within a certain radius of any school at any time.

In addition, we will benefit significantly from focusing on youth from a very early age – ensuring they are engaged in the community, have access to necessary resources, have access to quality education, etc. I believe youth are less likely to struggle with substance abuse down the line when they come from supportive and engaging communities and families. As mentioned earlier, we must also continue providing access to quality mental health services to ensure individuals have access to tools they need to cope and maintain a healthy lifestyle. From observing my mom's road to sobriety and as a professional counselor, I've seen the powerful effects of individual, group, and family therapy.

While I haven't experienced any form of addiction personally – I have been “privileged” enough to witness the many different forms that addiction may take. This has afforded me the opportunity to understand addiction, empathize with those who may struggle with addiction, learn effective ways to treat addiction, and has empowered me to pursue a career that helps people who are most vulnerable – and that alone has proved to be rewarding. I've seen my mother “recover” from addiction; witnessed my biological father's life be overcome by it; and seen the direct effects it has on children as young as 11 years old. My life has been nothing short of a full circle moment. I made the choice to use what some may call a tragic life to fuel my advocacy for Substance Abuse Prevention and general mental health awareness. With this scholarship, I look forward to continuing my education to enhance my work of advocacy.

About the author:



Angel Clark is from New Orleans, LA but she currently resides in the Houston, Texas area and will be starting at the University of Houston this fall. She will be studying to earn her doctorate in Professional Leadership with a specialization in special populations. She decided to earn this degree due to her profound interest in advocating and providing resources for students with disabilities, at-risk and minority students. Her goal is to enhance the quality of education and overall life for these individuals; and to aid in shaping a society where they all feel they belong regardless of our abilities and backgrounds.