

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploration: Lived Experience Spotlight

### Katie's Experience with Substance Use

**Instructions:** Throughout these lessons, you'll hear real stories from people who have personal experience with substance use. These spotlights are told in their own words, giving you a genuine look into what substance use can be like and how it affects people's lives.

Read the spotlight story below and answer the questions that follow.

"I did not become addicted. For me, I always had a curious nature for as far back as I can recall. During my teens some of my peers began to experiment with various substances. I suppose I looked at it as if I didn't want to go through life thinking I was missing out on something.

I initially tried weed and felt like it just wasn't for me. This largely remained the same heading into my early 20s, at which point I found myself experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety as a result of various work and relationship struggles. Slowly, I began experimenting with weed use more regularly, finding that it could help quiet the ongoing noise inside my head. Eventually, this developed into smoking regularly aside from my working hours. This pattern then persisted for well over a year before I began to recognize that it was impacting other aspects of my life.

Initially, I felt as though it was a net positive for me, particularly mentally. I generally felt happier and less stressed. The issue became when I began looking at smoking as a bonus to any activity/event. Simple things I previously enjoyed while sober, like getting out for a walk with the dog, taking part in hobbies like performing music or playing sports, or socializing with friends, slowly started to seem 'boring' without me being high. Eventually, it began to feel as though I couldn't enjoy any experiences without being stoned. I began to slip into a pretty sedentary lifestyle as well, often resorting to lazing around for the evenings outside of my daily work duties. Because my work was not directly impacted, I failed to see how it could have been an issue. Eventually, I noticed some of my relationships began to deteriorate. My girlfriend at the time felt as though we were no longer communicating effectively, peers reported me being 'distant' and my parents informed me that they felt like I was drifting out of their life.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Ultimately, I did not aim to completely remove cannabis use from my life, but rather significantly reduce my dependency on it. First and foremost, I had to want that for myself. There were some attempts early on where I didn't take it seriously, only to slip back into the same lifestyle a few days later. In time, I was willing to open up to my inner circle, consisting of my partner, friends, and family, about the severity of my use and my worries around its impacts on my life. While initially it was a very difficult conversation to have, it was also as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders in some ways. My girlfriend opened my mind to the thought of exploring counselling, and from there I also availed of some substance use-centred counselling. It was definitely a team effort, with a lot of folks involved to work toward a common goal.

In the end, I was able to get to a place with cannabis use where I no longer feel a dependency on it. I have learned that I was more or less numbing a lot of experiences, rather than 'enhancing' them as I once thought. It was a very rewarding (albeit at times, heavy) experience to truly feel my emotions once again."

**Spotlight Questions:**

1. What reasons did Katie give for starting to use substances?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Where would you currently place Katie's cannabis use on the Substance Use Spectrum, and how did it change over time?

