

Student Name: _____

Exploration Part 2: Lived Experience Spotlight

Lowen's Journey: Understanding the Realities of Substance Use

Student 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 this spotlight on Lowen's journey and answer the questions that follow. You may choose to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Feel free to use the [Protective and Risk Factors](#) infographic, and check out the [Substance Snapshots](#) on the substances involved in this spotlight.

"My first experience with substances was when I was in 8th grade. My friend, who was on substances at the time, brought a vape into school. They asked me if I wanted to try, I declined, but they kept asking, and eventually I gave in. I tried it and I didn't like it.

After school, this friend came home with me to hang out and brought their vape. I tried it again and again until I started having fun with it. This was not the end of my substance use. From then on, I started experimenting with alcohol and weed and eventually couldn't stop.

When I think about what may have influenced my use, it was in part because I was frustrated with my family life. At the time, my family was always arguing and my brother was already smoking weed, so I thought it couldn't be that bad, as he seemed to be doing well for himself. Later, I found out he was not.

When I first started to use everything seemed fine, but then I started to use more. After a while, I didn't want to do anything. Nothing I did before was interesting

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anymore. All I did was stay in my room, sleep, and play games, isolating myself from friends and family.

When my mom found out about my drinking and substance use, she reached out to the mental health center where my brother was staying for help. They told my mom they had a sister location, 4 hours away, for substance use rehabilitation. I stayed there for 2 weeks in their withdrawal management program, which helped me stop using.

The person I feel the most comfortable asking questions or concerns to is my addiction counsellor. I was assigned to her after my stay in rehabilitation. If you don't have a counsellor, the next best place is to call 811. They always helped me when I needed it.

What I wish adults, or just people in general, would understand about substance use is that making someone feel ashamed about substance use doesn't help. It only makes things worse and makes it harder to reach out for help. A lot of people, like me, turned to substances because of other problems in their lives. Some people are looking for an escape.

Substance use fit into my life weirdly. It's different for everyone, I used it as an escape from reality. I wanted not to feel anything bad, but when I am sober, it feels like all the negative emotions I would have felt when I was under the influence are stacked on top of how I already feel. In the end, it only makes me feel way worse than I did before I used it. It's like having a friend who is fun to hang out with but is leading you down the wrong path to unhappiness.”

Spotlight Questions:

1. At what age did they start using? How do you think starting this impacted their trajectory around substance use?

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2. What factors might have put Lowen at greater risk of developing a substance use disorder?

3. What protective factors might have helped support Lowen?

4. How did developing a substance use disorder affect Lowen?

5. What are some potential long-term impacts of alcohol use disorder?