

daysofhope

Circling a cul-de-sac of Stupidity

By Jon Wells

Jenny is 12. She suffered extensive physical abuse at the hands of multiple boyfriends who drifted through the house when she was living with her mom. Perhaps her most severe wound is the fact that mom was always defending them instead of protecting her. Jenny landed in residential because she was cutting her arms and legs, and is working to overcome this destructive habit.

Odell is 16. He doesn't know who his father is. His mother gave him away early in life when she discovered that he was mentally challenged. Odell has been bouncing from caretaker to caretaker without a home for as long as he can remember. Odell is trying to stabilize his behavior so that he can eventually live safely in a group home.

Jim encountered addiction at the age of 12. He has been in and out of rehabilitation facilities more than a dozen times in his short life. Any addictive substance will do, but he perpetually finds himself defaulting back to heroin and has no idea how to really change. Jim is trying to get sober and stay sober.

Those names and stories are fictional. I made them up— then again I have met hundreds of Odells, and Jennys, and Jims. Their stories are like a broken record. New name, new face, same old vicious trauma and pain.

Each child arrives in residential care with a unique set of challenges that she is facing. Perhaps it is an addiction, or overwhelming grief and loss, or abandonment. Each one has specific goals that he needs to work on. The facility staff are there to help with these issues. Therapists, psychiatrist, teachers, and youth care specialists all know the history. They work to help the child address these problems. In spite of all this, I continually encounter a frustrating reality as I walk through residential programs.

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Shoestring Guns

By Aaron Jeffers

I wish I could tell you this was the first time. This month marks the third kid in one year I've met that has tried to hang himself off of an industrial shower rod with a shoestring. This child had a groove dug around his jugular.

I came into his cottage and asked the youth worker, "Is there anybody needing special spiritual attention?"

She looked at me and said, "_____ over there just tried to kill himself last night. He would have been successful if we hadn't got to him. It'd be really nice if you could talk to him."

I sat down where he was playing with Legos and gazed on the lacerations around his neck caused by the shoestring garrote.

I said, "Hey man, what's up?"

"Oh, not much. Well, I guess I did try to kill myself last night." He seemed freakishly jovial.

"What made you feel that way?"

All happy expressions melted from his face immediately. "I really don't want to talk about it at all. Can we just play Legos now? I'm sick of people trying to get me to talk. I just want to play right now!"

In my mind I was having a conversation with God that went like this: "What in the world do you want me to say to or ask this kid right now? I have no idea what I need to do. Please help me God, I feel like I'm in uncharted and troubled waters here. This kid could die if he doesn't get the right help." I just felt God putting on my heart to spend time with this young man.

We played Legos on the floor for an hour or so, and then he asked me if I could go get my guitar. I thought, "If this kid wants to play guitar, by golly, I'll drive down to the chapel and bring my guitar up to him." So we played guitar for the rest of the afternoon time I had with him.

After I got home, I expressed a request to our Days of Hope confidential prayer team about this kid, "Please pray for a suicidal kid in a residential facility."

As the team members responded that they were praying, one replied, "He is in pain, and can't stop the pain."

Immediately I felt the Holy Spirit take me back to a scene in a war movie. In the scene a tank is hit by an armor-piercing explosive. A soldier jumps out engulfed in flames. He's screaming and fumbling around furiously for his gun; then he shoots himself in the head.

It was like God saying, "That's exactly how this boy feels because of all the abuse and trauma he's been through. He's not just in pain, he's on fire. That's why he's reaching for a gun, the only gun he can find. . . a shoestring."

Will you join us in praying for this child and so many like him who are experiencing suicidal and self harming impulses? Pray also for the staff in our partner agencies whose job it is to keep these kids safe, they have their hands full with a difficult job.

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Residents are often not focused on their treatment goals. Instead, they are obsessed with the trivial stupidities of daily life in residential care.

"Lamar hates me. We're gonna fight. I hate that f*****."

"Susie is my girlfriend. We're going to get engaged."

"Susie was kissing Jacob. I'm done with that dirty s****."

"I hate that staff and I don't care what he says, I'm not gonna do it."

Perhaps they are intentionally avoiding the big challenges in their lives. But the never ending focus on the drama of day-to-day living distracts them from really working on the bigger problems they face.

They are literally driving circles in a cul-de-sac of stupidity. They are facing huge obstacles in life, and obsessing over these temporary, foolish trivialities that have nothing to do with the battle at hand.

Who is your residential boyfriend? What did that girl say in the note you got in math class? What are you going to do about the guy who was talkin' trash to you at lunch? What's the latest gossip about the new kid on the unit? None of these things have anything to do with the reason they arrived in care in the first place!

It is fairly common for youth to extend their own stay in residential facilities because of these distractions and the poor choices they make in response to them. Perhaps this is the most frustrating dynamic of all, that a child should land in residential care because of a presenting problem and then get stuck in a cycle of perpetual treatment because they get sidelined by these unrelated messes.

Their willingness to marinate in the meaningless minutia of the day-to-day reflects a deeper reality. These kids have bought into the lie that their lives can be reduced to simple distractions. They are acting out a core belief that there truly is nothing more to them than petty drama and short-lived infatuations. They see no higher calling, no deeper meaning, no bigger story that brings purpose to their lives.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

-Colossians 3

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Building Bridges II added as an Agency Partner



We are excited to announce that Days of Hope has added a fifth agency partner to the growing list of the residential programs where our chaplains serve in Central Missouri. Based in Waynesville, Building Bridges provides housing and programming for older youth who are leaving residential facilities but are not yet ready to return home or live independently. They provide their kids with tailored treatment in their Choices for Life programming.

The staff at Building Bridges focus on transitioning older youth out of residential settings and back into the community by focusing on educational goals, employment, independent living skills, and community involvement. They provide their kids with the specific help that these youth require, like teaching them to drive a car or how to prepare a shopping list.

Our chaplains began visiting the residential sites for Building Bridges in August, and already are developing relationships with residents as well as staff members. We are excited to be able to serve the spiritual needs of these youth and look forward to what God is going to do through this new connection!

For more information about Building Bridges and the services that they offer, check them out online at:

Buildingbridges4kids.com

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In more than a decade serving as a therapist and chaplain to these kids, I have watched some of them grow up institutionalized. These youth bounce from one facility to another; they never seem to get better. They don't really address the core issues that brought them into care. These kids squander their existence spending precious hours on meaningless distractions.

As much as I get frustrated at this pattern, I sometimes see it in my own life. I'm so easily sidetracked away from the Kingdom purposes in my life. I find myself failing to engage in the bigger story that Jesus intended, instead settling for smaller targets. I'm quick to focus on foolish issues that consume my time and drain my energy. I'm left with little of either to dedicate to the big challenges that I face.

The laundry, the dishes, monthly budgets, and untrimmed hedges all conspire to distract me from the higher callings in my life. They cause me to forget the kingdom purpose that calls to the deeper parts of who I am. I am ashamed to admit that my attention is too often consumed by bad drivers, leaky pipes, and shopping lists.

So what about you? Do you attend to the small details and insignificant conflicts of each day as if that is all there is to your life? Is there no greater story? Do you obsess over the minutia, fixating on trivialities and completely missing your higher calling? I am deeply convinced that each of us is invited into a much larger story than we realize. I believe that at each point in our journey, God has Kingdom purposes for us. We might aspire to live out this higher calling if we would just set our gaze above our shallow obsessions.

As I interact with youth in the facilities we serve, I try to encourage them to focus on the important things and let the trivial stuff go. God help us all to set our eyes on things above, not things below.

Financial Update:

Thank you to all of our financial partners, and those who recently responded to our support letter. *We could not do this without you!* We still need to close a gap of about \$1500 in our current monthly expenses. Would you pray about supporting this ministry so kids in crisis can meet the True Healer, Jesus Christ?

Every year, thousands of children and teens are sent to the residential facilities we serve to receive help with the overwhelming problems they are facing. At Days of Hope we continue to insist that God's core solution to all of the innumerable challenges is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

We are a not for profit, inter-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to address the spiritual needs of children and teens who are in residential psychiatric care at facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. We work alongside many dedicated professionals including educators, therapists, doctors and nurses, child care workers and so many more who strive to help these children who have been scarred by every form of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and harm.

Through the ministries that are offered at Days of Hope, Bibles are distributed, pastoral counsel, services, and groups are provided, and these children are given an opportunity to respond to the gospel message.

Thank you for helping us communicate the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way!

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