

THE LIFELINE

February 2021 - Hope, Help & Healing for Everyone Affected by Addiction.

MY SON BECAME A GHOST: ISABEL'S STORY

It happened at the end of a long shift.

With under a minute left to the game. A game that was deadlocked in a 3-3 tie.

My son JJ probably should have skated to the bench for a line change. Instead, he followed his forwards into the offensive zone. He looked gassed. I shouted from the stands. Other parents were shouting too. His coach was watching angrily. Teammates on their feet at the bench.

JJ's teammate went for a deke and the defenseman poked the puck loose. It slid into JJ's shooting pocket and he let loose a quick slapshot.

Goal! His team's first win in over a month! JJ was swarmed by his teammates, who patted him on the head and shoved him playfully.

His first goal of the season. That was the last time I saw my son celebrate with friends.

The next day, Quebec's first lockdown was announced. That was exactly one year ago today.

Disconnecting

JJ was a typical kid. He did okay in school, had a small group of friends who were all very close-knit. Enjoyed a good social life. Loved playing team sports. In the winter, he was a steady defenseman on our local hockey team. In the summer, he played football.

Occasionally, he played video games at home.

When the first lockdown was announced, we spent a couple days together as a family. Gradually work went online, and so did school. We bought JJ a tablet.

My husband and I were consumed with work. Too consumed to notice how the isolation had affected JJ.

The screen hooked him in. He was on it all day. And we couldn't get him away from it.

Family dinners were our sacred time. Phones went off, work was over. For years, we ate together and discussed plans, ideas, and current events.

One day, JJ brought his tablet to dinner. My husband asked him to leave it in his room, but JJ refused. That started an argument, which lasted until JJ stormed off.

JJ stopped attending dinner. He kept to himself all day. And he would scream if anyone entered his room.

At some point, he built a small alcove for himself inside his bedroom closet, and he spent his entire day in that enclosed space.

The World Wide Web

Our lives began to revolve around JJ's solitude. I would leave food outside his room. Most of it lay untouched.

Over the summer, I tried encouraging him to meet with friends in person, despite the pandemic. But he insisted that they were hanging out online.

One day, I decided to organize something for him myself like I used to do back when he was a little kid. I called his best friend, Scott.

Over the phone, I discovered just how isolated JJ had become. He had shut out everyone in his real life, maintaining some sort of supposed friendship with online strangers. He had missed football games, several small birthday parties, and other opportunities to hang with his buddies.



Once again, I tried talking to JJ but he reacted violently, so I backed off.

JJ returned to school in September and his grades took a serious hit. We were at a complete loss. We spoke to other parents who were going through similar problems with their children.

Samuel Berman's death

In early February, the son of my favourite guru Dr Laura Berman passed away. A drug dealer had lured him through Snapchat, a social media platform, and sold him the Fentanyl that killed him.

My heart began pounding when I read the news.

That night, I stayed awake. Waiting for JJ to fall asleep. Listening for movement from his room.

It was after 4:00 a.m. when I heard his closet door open. I listened to him climb into bed. Within several minutes I could hear his soft snores.

I sneaked in and nabbed the tablet. What I found disturbed me. I woke my husband and we went through everything. His emails, social media, games, website history.

Our son had a screen addiction. And it was only getting worse.

That morning, we stood up to JJ and confiscated his tablet and phone. He flew into a rage, and eventually stormed out.

Rebooting

We called Chabad Lifeline. A fellow parent had given us the number. "They see the isolation as a problem, not the screens," she had told me. "They help the entire family together, and it works."

She was right. Together, we have begun creating a structure and boundaries. Together, we have begun meeting. Together, we have begun healing.

If your child is spending all his or her time on screens, don't hide your head in the sand to avoid conflict. Chabad Lifeline is there to help you. They are a phone call away (514-738-7700). So give them a call and start your family's path to connectivity.

Please note: names and certain identifying information was changed to protect the anonymity of those involved in this story.

info@ChabadLifeline.com. 514-738-7700. www.ChabadLifeline.com



TRAINING FOR THE UPCOMING TSUNAMI

According to experts, a "tsunami of mental health and addiction issues" is coming. In our experience, the wave has already begun and our staff has begun intense training in anticipation of the swell, with a focus on helping parents and children affected by the isolation. The wave has begun, and the when the full force of the tsunami arrives, we will be ready.



WE CAN GET \$10,000 FOR INSTAGRAM SHARES

An anonymous donor has pledged up to \$10,000 to Chabad Lifeline. A reel will be posted on our Instagram page next week. Each share brings Chabad Lifeline \$5! So give us a follow on Instagram and start sharing our posts!



LIFELINE STAFF EDUCATES COLLEGE STUDENTS

Over the past few months, our staff has spoken to hundreds of students from colleges across Montreal, providing psycho-education and detailing our services. The results: an increase in clients and more lives saved.

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