Program For Young Men At Betty Ford Center

The Young Adult Track (YAT) at the Betty Ford Center at Eisenhower is a specialized treatment program for young men, ages 18 to 25. According to Lead Counselor Patrick Smith, there are three reasons young men need a specialized program.

"First, these young men inevitably are not your gardenvariety alcoholic or addict, if there is such a thing," says Smith. "They often come to us cross-addicted to a potent mix of drugs." Smith and his fellow counselors agree that the drugs of choice of their young charges are, in rank order, seriously-addictive opiates like Vicodin® and OxyContin®, cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and psychoactive benzodiazepines (Valium®, Xanax®, Klonopin®, usually prescribed for anxiety, insomnia or seizures).

Young men also need specialized treatment because, Smith notes, "the family is the patient."Many young male patients' parents are integrally involved in supporting them financially, in getting them into treatment and in monitoring their progress on the journey to sobriety.

YAT also provides focus on the severe developmental issues many young men experience."Most of these young people have been using since they were 10 or 11 years old," Smith adds. "To put it mildly, they have not had a normal childhood, or upbringing."

Young Adult Track Program

For the first four to six weeks, the young men participate in the Inpatient Program, as do virtually all Betty Ford Center patients, living on campus in an all-male dorm.Working closely with a patient's counselor, the treatment team evaluates progress and determines when a patient can move off campus to a designated home to live with fellow YAT residents. The house is staffed around the clock, and all activities are closely monitored.When residents leave the house for meetings and other activities, they always do so with a YAT buddy.

"By the time someone has been here for three to six months, they're acutely aware of where they were, where they are, and where they're going."
—Patrick Smith, Counselor

There are five levels of treatment for the patients, and the young men must petition for "promotion" to higher levels," explains Johanna O'Flaherty, Vice President of Treatment Services at the Betty Ford Center. "They want the freedom that comes with trust, but they have to earn that trust, and that freedom."

Because so many of the young men have been what counselor Patrick Smith describes as "MIA — missing in action" for so many years, many life-coping skills that may appear elementary to others,must be taught. "Things like doing laundry, cooking food, keeping a bedroom neat, managing a checkbook — for most of us that may all seem pretty conventional," says Smith. "But for many of these young men, it's a whole new world."

Another part of the "whole new world" is building communication skills. "They've had no meaningful or intimate relationships — not with family members, not with anybody else either," explains Smith. "They have to work consciously on learning personal communication skills and forming new relationships and associations." Those communication skills also come into play as the young men develop long-term educational and career plans.

Fitness is also important. "We recognize that when so many of these young men arrive here, they're in rough shape, physically, as well as mentally," Counselor Craig MacLaughlin explains. "Thanks to the Betty Ford Center's state-of-the-art fitness facilities, men in the Young Adult Track have access to a wide variety of equipment that helps with cardiovascular training and strength-building. There's also swimming, hiking (on nearby Mount San Jacinto) and mountain-biking.

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