



# Do You See What I See

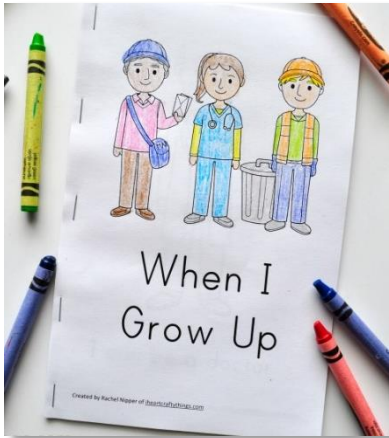
## Reflecting the glow of recovery from Starlight at Tamassee

By Jon Holland, CEO of Tamassee DAR School



When you look at an addict, what do you see? Is it easy to think of someone struggling with addiction and imagine the physical signs of use – bloodshot eyes, body odor, slurred speech, thinned out frame, and missing teeth? Sure, someone with years of use or in the midst of a binge may match such a mental image, but many do not. Many who deal with addictive behavior go to work each day, come home to families, and engage socially. They don't fit the stereotype.

So why the stereotype? Maybe – at least sometimes – it lets us dismiss them? We can judge someone as an addict, talk about how they drain the system, lay out of work, and fail their kids. Then we feel justified to write them off. When we see the stereotype, we fail to see the person – the heart of someone caught in a life and death struggle.



No child goes to kindergarten, stands up on “what do you want to be when you grow up” day, and says, “I want to be an addict when I grow up.” Kids say they want to be athletes, pop stars, fire fighters, police officers, or teachers, but not addicts. So what happens between kindergarten and adulthood? Trauma happens. Kids have adverse experiences in family life – emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect, homelessness, a family member with mental illness, domestic violence, divorce, incarceration, or even the death of a parent – or in community life – poverty, bad housing, discrimination, violence, natural disaster, and lack of opportunity.

When trauma happens, a child is stunted emotionally. The brain literally gets stuck developmentally, and it goes into survival mode. As a child grows into a teenager, he or she needs some way to cope, something to reduce the stress. Along comes alcohol or drugs (or any other addictive behavior), and for the first time in a long time, they feel good when they use it. They actually feel normal. So the brain craves more and more and more, and an addiction is born.

So what do you see when you look at an addict? A stereotype or a wounded child? A user to be discounted or a desperate kid trying to cope with unresolved pain. Over the years of supporting those fighting to be free of addiction, I’ve learned to see the scared child in each of us – the little one who needs to be protected and loved back to life. The path of healing is found on the road of compassion and understanding.



In Starlight at Tamasee, we see moms in recovery as the treasured girls they were before trauma, and we work to help them grow from that little girl into the women God designed them to be. To learn more about Starlight, visit [www.starlight.tdarschool.org](http://www.starlight.tdarschool.org), or contact us at 864-944-1390 or [starlight@tdarschool.org](mailto:starlight@tdarschool.org). If your church or civic group is interested in a presentation on recovery, contact Jon Holland at [jholland@tdarschool.org](mailto:jholland@tdarschool.org).