

[Back](#) [Home](#)Share: [E-mail](#) [Print](#) [Comment](#) [Digg](#) [del.icio.us](#)

## Sowing the 'Seeds of Sobriety'

By [Dan McDonald/Daily News staff](#)

**MetroWest Daily News**

Posted Jul 17, 2008 @ 01:09 AM

FRAMINGHAM — After a life of crime and addiction Mikey Oliver and Tristan Ambrose are sober.

Given the comments of their peers, their story of recovery, sadly, appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

Last night, they graduated the South Middlesex Opportunity Council young adult residential program called "Seeds of Sobriety."

The ceremony was an informal affair. More than a dozen of their peers - most of whom are still in the program, some of whom had graduated - sat in a circle inside a sweltering room in a downtown home and bade them farewell.

The glue that connects them is a shared daily grind against addiction.

Themes of growth and development emerged from the sometimes humorous anecdotes exchanged in thick New England accents. More than one person recalled Oliver as a pathological liar when he first arrived in the program 10 months ago, while several admitted to clashing with Ambrose during his stay.

"When you enter recovery you enter reality. There is no fantasy. A lot of people relapsed a lot of people fell off, a lot of people left. You guys didn't leave," said Rodney Long, the program's clinical director.

In his 18 months with the program - 12 as a resident, six as a house manager, Matt Webster estimated between 40 and 60 people ranging in age from 18 to 24 walk through the door. Webster, 25, of Milford, can recall about a dozen graduating.

"The success rate is low," said Webster, who now lives in SMOC sober housing. "And the sad thing is every kid that went through here needed to get sober."

Kenny Carrion, a 24-year-old ex-heroin addict from East Boston, reflected on one major factor that fuels the high failure rate.

"Drug addicts and alcoholics don't like structure," said Carrion. "It's like the program says you grow or you go."

Shane O'Donnell, a 23-year-old from Fall River said he first smoked weed when he was 8 and has struggled with heroin addiction. He said 85 percent of those in recovery programs do not complete their stint and fall back into addiction.

"I've never stayed dedicated to anything. Never completed anything. This ain't small. This is real big, kid," he said of the graduation.

The son of a fisherman, Oliver said his lust for harmful substances drove him to raid couch cushions for loose change for whiskey nips. It would eventually lead him to a life of armed robbery to fuel his cocaine addiction.

Oliver, 21, has done time for breaking and entering and larceny.

"If there wasn't coke on this planet I'd drink myself to death," said Oliver, a West Roxbury native.

Now Oliver lives in SMOC sober housing, works as a peer mentor and outreach counselor for Wayside Youth and Family Support Network. While in recovery he received his GED. He bought a 2001 Lincoln LS earlier this week and plans to attend Massachusetts Bay Community College in January.

Ambrose, who hinted about doing hard prison time, told the group: "It's been a long year."

He did not stick around after the ceremony to expound on his past.

Oliver said he was initially going "to fake it until I made it, so I could get out there and start ripping and running again."

Pointing to his graduation certificate, Oliver said he has a task to perform.

"I'm bringing it back to the police officer who arrested me in Hull," said Oliver. "He arrested me like five times."

*(Dan McDonald can be reached at 508-626-4416 or [dmcdonal@cnc.com](mailto:dmcdonal@cnc.com).)*

Copyright © 2008 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons license](#), except where noted.