



**THIS COULD HELP**—The “buddtender” at one of Morenci’s three medical marijuana dispensaries suggests a cannabis product. Knowledgeable buddtenders can match a patient’s needs to the right product.

DAVID GREEN/Observer photo

# Patients tell why they’re using cannabis products

## *It’s not about getting high*

By DAVID GREEN

Renée, an employee at Stateline Wellness Center in Morenci, was skeptical about medical marijuana when someone suggested that it could help her deal with migraine headaches.

“It was never my thing,” she said, however, she was ready for a change.

“A pharmaceutical would work for a few years, but then my body would get used to it.”

Besides that, she didn’t like what they did to her. She would inject a prescribed medication and then be out of action for two or three hours. It was a nasty feeling, she said.

She grew tired of taking two or three pills every day, so about six months ago she relented and gave cannabis a try.

The relief was amazing. No more nausea. No more bright light annoyance. When the symptoms begin, she medicates with cannabis and continues with her

daily life.

Jacob, a patient, mentioned the two car accidents that he’s been in.

“I get sciatica all the way down into my legs,” he said. “It feels like an electric shock and give me charlie horses. As soon as I smoke some concentrate, it’s gone.”

Jacob wants to stay clear of opiates and prefers a natural substance to ease his pain.

Matt talked about the CBD topical rub that helps his arthritis. It works better than the prescription drug that his mother uses.

Ed is a cancer victim, plus, a traffic accident left him with back problems.

“It helps,” he said about cannabis products. “It’s better than the opiates that I was on.”

He was also taking four pills a day for anxiety, but now he’s down to two.

“In a couple of months I expect to be off them completely,” he said.

Devin’s anti-anxiety medication made him feel like a zombie.

“I really didn’t like the way it made me feel,” he said. “A friend suggested that I try medical marijuana and it treated everything I

was having a problem with.”

For Jake, it’s Tourette Syndrome that he’s battling.

“It’s a constant struggle,” he said. “Sometimes your brain forgets to make you breathe.”

Cannabis has made his affliction bearable.

“It’s pretty awesome,” he said.

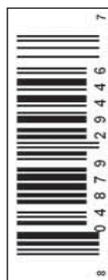
Casey Coffelt, the manager at Stateline Wellness, isn’t surprised by people’s willingness to share their stories.

“A lot of people want to tell their story and let people know it’s not just kids trying to get high,” he said.

Casey loves the feeling of helping people with medical issues.

“The hardest thing about this job for me is that I’m normally not a very emotional guy,” he said, “but I hear the stories people tell and they start to cry and then I start to cry.”

It’s very rewarding to watch the progress patients make from the first time they come in to the third or fourth, said Stateline Wellness employee Holly.



# Cannabis tales

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She has her own story.

Holly was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) at the young age of 17 and her life changed significantly as the disease progressed. She took medication prescribed by her neurologist, but daily life was still a battle in many ways.

She got a medical marijuana card and her life changed again.

"I haven't had a flare-up in at least two years," she said. "It's really balanced my life with normal sleeping and normal eating."

What about her neurologist? He's on board with her cannabis use because he's witnessed her progression away from the debilitating effects of MS.

Jake Fox, manager of Michigan CannaKings in Morenci, recalls when the State of Michigan decided that Ohio patients could not buy cannabis products in Michigan.

"There were people crying in the parking lot," he said. "Some had driven from four hours away to buy medicine. That was a rough a week."

A lot of people were just plain angry at the dispensary staff, blaming them for getting turned away. The ruling lasted only a week and once again a good percentage of the customers in Morenci's three dispensaries are from across the line.

The State of Ohio is issuing medical marijuana cards, but Michigan is much further ahead in the overall administration of the new industry.

Fox knows of at least 15 cancer patients buying medicine from CannaKings, including a recent visit from a 78-year-old woman.

"It's definitely an older crowd that we're seeing," he said.

Lucinda Swinney, a co-owner of In2itive Wellness, agrees.

"When we first opened, the average age of patients was in their late 20s," she said.

She figures it's closer to 40 now as a lot more people in their 70s and 80s are coming in for relief of various ailments.

"My mother is the head of security [monitoring camera images from her home] and she's surprised at how many older women are coming in," Swinney said.

The story that sticks out in the mind of her assistant manager, Bladen Mellon, is about a man who had been taking prescribed opioids for a large portion of his life following a traffic accident. The unpleasant side effects were building up and causing more problems.

"He said the answer he kept getting from doctors was to take more pills," Mellon said. "Now he's managed to wean himself of all opioids. He's able to eat normally and his weight has gone up from 118 pounds to 160."

"He came in one day and said, 'Bladen, you changed my life,'" he said. "It made him a completely different person."

Mellon spoke about the perception that many people have regarding medical marijuana: It's just a way for people to get high legally. Many law enforcement agencies have considered cannabis a gateway drug.

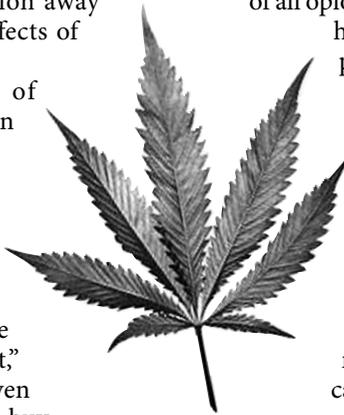
"I'm not saying that there aren't any problems with it—people make stupid choices—but open your eyes and look at the advantages," he said.

As more and more people become addicted to opioids—many simply by following their doctor's orders—there's a growing interest in taking a more natural approach to health care, Mellon said.

"It comes down to their well-being and happiness," he said, like the older woman who recently came in for help with shaking hands. "People shouldn't be embarrassed to turn to cannabis. It's eye-opening to hear people's stories about how it's making a difference in their lives."

He's surprised at how many people come in to buy cannabis products for their dogs. A smoking dog? No, many patients—as well as dogs—never smoke marijuana, but instead use oils, tinctures, edible products and rubs.

"So many people want their dogs to live a happy, healthy life," Mellon said. "Why not do the same thing yourself?"



## Additional stories from patients

### Richard

Richard suffered traumatic brain injury while serving with the U.S. military. For more than a decade he's suffered from debilitating grand mal seizures.

"I wasn't sure what I thought about using marijuana," he said, but he was experiencing about 40 seizures a month. "I wasn't sure anything was going to work, but I decided to try it as a last-ditch effort."

He knows now that he made a good decision.

"It's been remarkable," Richard said. "I'm down to one or two seizures a week. It's a huge step. None of the medications I was on worked as well. Not even close."

Addressing the attitude that some people have—that it's just a way to get high—Richard said that he couldn't care less about that.

"I just want to get better," he said.

### Kacey

Kacey, the manager at In2itive Wellness in Morenci, remembers that he used to spend a lot of time lying on the floor rubbing his head.

"I struggled with it for two and a half years," he said, and that included a lot of trips to the emergency room.

Kacey suffers from trigeminal neuralgia (TN), a debilitating disease that brings chronic pain to the face. Both talking and eating can be a challenge.

Eventually he decided to wean himself off his prescribed medications and instead use a full-spectrum cannabis product that contained 84 cannabinoids—the active constituents of cannabis—all working together. He found a dosage that seemed right for him.

"I'm certainly not a doctor," he said, "but from my personal experience, the full-spectrum extract has changed my life."

He knows of another TN patient who is once again able to speak after using cannabis.

### Angie

There's post-traumatic stress disorder from a sexual assault and there's chronic pain from Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease—an inherited disorder that mostly causes nerve damage to the feet and hands.

At one time Angie was taking 17 pills a day to deal with pain, anxiety and depression, but that was before she discovered cannabis.

"A friend was a patient and convinced me to get a medical marijuana card," she said. "It has changed my life."

She's down to six medications relating to Charcot-Marie-Tooth, but she's completely eliminated prescriptions for anxiety, depression and some of the chronic pain.

"I'm more outgoing now and doing more things," she said, noting a change in the way she feels about herself. "My kids will tell you that I'm a different person."

## Medical conditions that qualify for a marijuana card

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has approved several health conditions that could enable a person to obtain a medical marijuana card:

Cancer, glaucoma, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, Lou Gehrig's disease (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS), Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's disease, nail-patella syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic or debilitating diseases or medical conditions that produce one or more of the following: cachexia (wasting disease); severe and chronic pain; severe nausea; seizures, including those characteristic of epilepsy;

and severe or persistent muscle spasms, including those characteristic of multiple sclerosis.

New conditions added are arthritis, autism, chronic pain, colitis, inflammatory bowel disease, obsessive compulsive disorder, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, spinal cord injury, Tourette syndrome and ulcerative colitis.

Eleven conditions were recently barred from being added to the list, including anxiety, asthma, brain injury, depression, diabetes, gastric ulcer, non-severe and non-chronic pain, organ transplant, panic attacks, schizophrenia and social anxiety disorder.