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Execs in rehab

Drug use Stressed out business executives have become the biggest clientele of high-end rehabilitation facilities, with some costing up to \$35,000 a week, writes Yolanda Redrup.

It has all the trappings of a five-star resort: daily massages, secluded beaches, discreet private rooms. Guests can opt to do yoga, acupuncture and physio, then follow up with breakfast cooked by an award-winning chef.

From the outside, The Sanctuary, in the verdant Byron Bay hinterland, looks like an exclusive resort, and in many ways it is, but with one big difference – its guests are cashed-up business executives with a drug problem. And they're willing to pay more than \$35,000 a week to recover and keep their jobs.

Clinical director Jane Williams says the centre typically has four to six clients a week, most of whom stay for a month. Since opening in 2003, The Sanctuary has treated more than 400 business executives who have often developed addictions in a high-stress work environment and a culture of drinking and drug taking.

"Our clients are predominantly from business backgrounds, so we get investment bankers, industry heads or people who have inherited wealth. We also get celebrities," Williams says.

"Often they start off as young people using or having a few drinks . . . In corporate situations they're asked to entertain clients and have a few drinks, then they have a few more in the evening and then when they're not at their best, they have some cocaine."

Addiction can be a nightmare to deal with, whether it is alcohol or drugs. The brain is chemically changed by drugs and it adapts so that more and more are needed to reach the same high. It is a vicious cycle difficult for users to break.

For employers, a worker with a drug problem typically has poor concentration, low productivity, increased absenteeism, lapses in judgment who takes needless risks and long lunches.

This rang true for *Max, whose addiction escalated when he started his own business

in the mining sector and who has attended The Sanctuary.

"My addiction wasn't a big issue in my working life when I was in my 20s," he says. "But when I took on more of an ownership role, it gave me some flexibility. I didn't need to be there every day so I didn't have to get up in the mornings."

Max was 16 when he started using alcohol and drugs.

"I went to my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at 21. Then I used ecstasy, marijuana, amphetamines and then I finished on cocaine," he says.

"For the last 10 to 15 years, I knew I needed to seek help. I tried to do it on my own, but it got to a point in January last year when everything started to unravel . . . no one has success until they feel ready and in many cases, that takes hitting rock bottom."

Going to rehab was about taking time for himself and thinking about what was



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important to him. "I was leading all of these different lives, which were a lie. What happened was my lives started entwining and running into each other, which pushed me into a downward spiral," he says.

"I am the owner of a successful business in an industry with a lot of potential, but I needed the time to spend on myself."

The Sanctuary's Williams says addictions usually develop as a coping mechanism.

"If someone is stressed or exhausted, they have a drink and it relaxes them. If they feel drowsy, they'll take some cocaine to wake themselves up.

"Then it becomes a habit and you develop a physical dependence on the substance."

In the United States, substance abuse is estimated to cost employers \$US81 billion

(\$104 billion) each year, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

The 2014 United Nations *World Drug Report* found Australia had the highest proportion of recreational drug users in the world. Australians were the biggest consumers of ecstasy, ranked second in opioids, third in ice and fourth in cocaine.

There are no reliable figures for the cost to businesses in Australia but a survey conducted in 2014 by Safesearch of 1200 health and safety workers found mental health and wellbeing was the No. 1 challenge facing businesses.

Another luxury rehab resort, The Cabin, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, has early intervention programs for businesses with employ-

ees thought to be at risk of addiction. The Cabin has relationships with a number of businesses, including airlines and multinationals.

"We work inside workplaces where there is a heavy screening for even the first signs of alcohol or substance abuse," co-founder and program director Alastair Mordey says.

"When you're at that level and you're a high net wealth individual who companies don't want to lose, or you're in a sensitive profession, those HR departments have to err on the side of caution."

The Cabin costs about \$15,000 a month and since opening in 2009, Australians have steadily become its biggest clientele.

"We have had more than 1000 clients through the door now and I'd say almost

40 per cent of them are Australians," he says. "Our clients include tradesmen, oil workers and farmers, who often have a bit of money but are still blue-collar guys. Then you've got the corporate executives, the spoilt kids and the housewives or husbands."

Of its Australian clients, 39 per cent have

come from mid-managerial roles, 17 per cent from senior management and 10 per cent from the medical profession.

There are numerous drug rehab centres across the country but The Sanctuary and The Cabin are aimed at the ultra high-end drug users' market. So, what do you get for a month's treatment costing up to \$140,000?

When a client arrives at The Sanctuary, they are given 24-hour medical care while they are in withdrawal. After this, there are five psychologists who specialise in areas such as trauma and cognitive behaviour, and psychiatrists to help treat patients. The therapists are matched to the client, based on their particular needs.

"To ask a drug addict to go to a psychiatrist to fix an addiction is a very tricky situation ... we need to be careful of clients wanting to 'fix' their addiction with a pill," says The Sanctuary director Michael Goldberg.

He knows this better than most. He started The Sanctuary after his own stint in rehab. He started abusing drugs in his youth, but held successful jobs and started his own business in the building industry.

"I was like every middle-class child who was smoking pot at school and was just living a very good life," he says.

"I worked throughout my life and got a schooling scholarship, but I was always an addict and it held me back."

Goldberg says he started using drugs because of a difficult relationship with his parents, who had been hardened by living through World War II.

"They would go into a rage because they could not control their emotions. But I never blamed them because how could I complain about my middle-class life when they'd been in concentration camps."

It was when he became addicted to heroin that he knew he needed help.

"Taking drugs is a reaction. It's like smoking - people get hungry, tired, sad, happy, and anxious and they think 'I'll just have a cigarette now'. It's the same with drugs," he says. "I got to a point where I was using heroin every day and that's when I knew I had to stop.

"It took me two years and 50 detoxes to stop. I sold my business and went to rehab in Byron Bay ... After six weeks, they said I could go ... but that's when I started doing my own program and spent the next year ... devoted to getting healthy."

Not unlike the hackneyed image of investment bankers snorting lines from crystal

tabletops in swanky hotels, cocaine and alcohol are the drugs of choice for The Sanctuary's clients.

In Australia, the 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found 8.1 per cent of Australians aged over 14 had taken cocaine at some point in their life, while 2.1 per cent had used it in the past 12 months.

In the late '80s and '90s, United States businesses often employed spies to uncover employee drug use.

The Cabin's Mordey says in safety-sensitive professions, early interventions are becoming the norm.

"We screen and assess employees on behalf of organisations to determine if a person has an alcohol or substance abuse problem and then set recommendations, which often involves them returning for full treatment, but sometimes doesn't," he says.

"On a commercial level, do you really want to hire and fire, and go through all the expense of losing years of development? No. You want to retain that talented individual for the very reasons you first hired them."

Special Forces members, politicians and rock stars have attended The Cabin.

British rock star Pete Doherty has received treatment at The Cabin and Australian TV personality Grant Denyer went there for exhaustion treatment.

The Cabin works on a modified 12-steps program where clients are guided through each of the steps by trained psychologists and meditation is conducted by Buddhist monks. Other activities include elephant riding and white water rafting.

Most clients stay for two to three months, after which they can go to the Sober House in Chiang Mai City to start easing back into life without using drugs or alcohol.

The Sanctuary and The Cabin may cost a pretty penny, but they also get better results than the average rehab centre.

About 40 per cent of The Cabin's clients stay sober and drug-free long term, while The Sanctuary boasts an 89 per cent recovery rate.

Williams believes this is due to the huge amounts of money clients are willing to pay to attend The Sanctuary.

"You have to look at the amount of money these people have invested in coming here and the positions they hold. For them, there is so much at stake if they don't succeed."

* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED.

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Workers told to speak up

A drug problem in the Port Hedland community prompted miner Fortescue Metals to set up a program called Speak Up in November last year. It allows workers to admit to a drug problem and not be fired.

Fortescue Metals chief executive Nev Power says the program can be used by employees once in a two-year period, and does not excuse them from disciplinary action if they test positive to a banned substance.

"The Speak Up program empowers our people to take responsibility for their health and safety by reporting substance abuse by themselves or others," he says.

"If an employee comes forward with a personal alcohol or drug problem, they are placed on leave for up to three months and offered a range of support services, including counselling and employee assistance programs."

Power says before an employee is able to return to work, they are tested for drugs and alcohol, and they have to return a negative result, in line with the company's zero tolerance policy.

"Employees are also encouraged to speak up if they are aware of other drug and alcohol-related issues among their workmates, which may have the potential to put others at risk," he says.

In December 2014, police searched Fortescue Metals employees and contractors arriving on flights to the Christmas Creek mine, as part of an industry-wide initiative to eliminate drug abuse in the sector.

The raid was part of a wider project called Operation Redwater, which started after discussions between mining companies and Western Australia police.

The 2014 United Nations World Drug Report found Australia had the highest proportion of recreational drug users in the world.

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Max*



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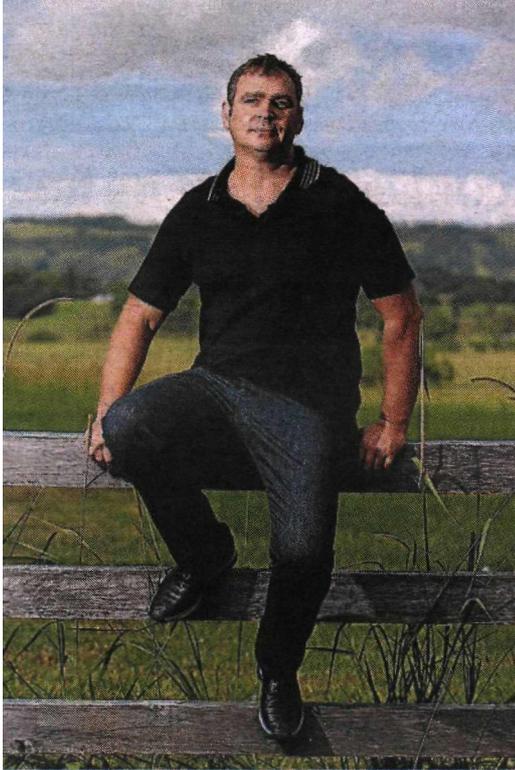
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Above left: The Sanctuary director Michael Goldberg started the centre after his own stint in rehab. Above right: Guests can do yoga.