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## **Family Plays**

# USERS

An ongoing tragedy  
by  
**JEROME McDONOUGH**



# USERS

**Young adult drama. By Jerome McDonough.** *Cast: 14 m. and w., with extras.* *Addict* by Jerome McDonough has been successful in helping many young people stay away from drugs. Producers of *Addict* have urged the author to write another awareness tool for a world that has sunk deeper and deeper into the despair of substance abuse. *Users* is that tool. A pill pusher, an inhalant abuser, a user of PCP, a marijuana user, a cigarette smoker, and abusers of many other drugs tell their stories and show the horrible outcome. It's a frightening play that will make young people think—and resist. *Users* is a one-act play that is in no sense intended for children or young audiences. *Set: stark, almost empty stage with costumes characteristic for each scene. All prop drugs, paraphernalia and most other props are to be mimed. Approximate running time: minutes. Code: U39.*

**From the author:** Whole scenes or sections may be cut, but every section which is performed must include its outcome. The outcomes are where it all “comes down” and we cannot tell half a story.

Further, the play must be performed as written, the only exceptions being the terminology updates and the cuts of entire sections, as outlined above. The words and even their order were chosen with great care and paraphrasing is strictly forbidden. Equally as forbidden is the inclusion of additions to the script. If additional material is presented on the same bill, it must be done separately from *Users* and credited to the author or authors of the piece(s).

The individual stories are written with the intention of not placing them at any one moment in time or tying them to a certain era. But many things do not remain the same. Therefore, permission is given to change any drug or slang terms in the play in order to reflect the current time of production. The local health and drug-awareness and police agencies are good places to run the script by with the purpose of checking for out-of-date terminology. Frankly, I would hesitate to produce *Users* without taking this precaution. Yesterday's words become today's jokes and none of us want *Users* to become a comedy.

**Users is in no sense a play for children. To reiterate, no kids.**

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Users

# USERS

*An Ongoing Tragedy*

**By JEROME McDONOUGH**



**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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“Produced by special arrangement with  
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## **DEDICATION**

To B.C., who encouraged this project;  
and to Officers Kent Gardner and Walt Yerger, who told it straight.  
And to Rachel Mattox who needed a new Heroin user scene *now*.

Thanks for kick-starting *Users*.

I hope the rest of the script will serve you as well.

### *And to the Original Casts:*

Brandon Smith, Benjamin Rodriguez, Kristin Logsdon,  
Miranda Meeks, Jeff Prescott, J.D. McNeil, April McCarty,  
Tim Gwynn, Alicia Morin, Mindy Cook, Jessica Cano,  
Patricia Stoffel, Jatou Ryder, Michelle Folkner, Julia Savala,  
Amy Richardson, Sondra Cook, Tara Luvaul,  
Crystal McDaniel, and Linsey Burrows.

### *Special Thanks*

To Dr. Gerald Holman, medical consultant on *USERS*.  
You're the best, Gerry.

## UPDATES

Hopefully, *Users* will continue to be a viable play for many years to come. (*Addict* is about to turn fifteen and is still breathing.)

The individual stories are written with the intention of not placing them at any one moment in time or tying them to a certain era.

But many things do not remain the same. Therefore, permission is given to change any drug or “street” term in the play so that it reflects the day of production. The local health and drug-awareness and police agencies are good places to “run the script by” with the purpose of checking for out-of-date terminology. Frankly, I would hesitate to produce *Users* without taking this precaution. Yesterday’s words become today’s jokes and none of us want *Users* to become a comedy.

I guess this is as good a place as any to bring up another point in regards to productions of *Users* or any play by Jerome McDonough. Whole scenes or sections may be cut, but every section which is performed *must* include its outcome. The outcomes are where it all “comes down” and we cannot tell half a story.

Further, the play must be performed as written, the only exceptions being the terminology updates and the “whole section” cuts outlined above. The words and even their order were chosen with great care and “paraphrasing” is strictly forbidden. Equally as forbidden is the inclusion of “additions” to the script. If additional material is presented on the same bill, it must be done separately from *Users* and credited to the author or authors of the piece(s).

Thanks for your cooperation.

—Jerome McDonough



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(full cast version)

COUNSELOR (Preferably, a mature student. May be an adult)

MICKEE (MICK)—Pill pusher (m or f)

ANGEL—Inhalant abuser (m or f)

'ZASH—Snuff user (m)

SHAD—PCP (angel dust) abuser (m)

LAINY—Marijuana abuser (m or f)

JIGGER—Alcohol abuser (f, maybe m)

CLINE—Multiple drug abuser (poly) (m or f)

SHARLAN (SHAR)—Cigarette smoker (m or f)

STANN—Rape drug abuser (rapist) (m)

DENA—Rape drug victim (f)

TERRA (TERRANCE)—LSD abuser (f)

QUINT—Heroin junkie (m or f)

MAR—Heroin abuser (m or f)

BOBBY (BOBB)—Crack abuser (m or f)

THE USER CHORUS portrays all other parts. May include above performers or not, depending upon the size of the casting pool.

*Place*—Right here

*Time*—Hopefully, not too late

## USERS—A Sequel

Sometime in the first half of the 1980's, I wrote a play entitled *Addict*. By the grace of God and myriad people's extra efforts to bring things up to date, that play is still being widely produced today.

By the late 1990's, however, many things had changed. (Not as many as have stayed the same, but we'll leave those areas to *Addict*.) The face of the substance abuse world has altered in many, many ways—ranging from the nature of the drugs which are being used to the profile of the user of a certain drug to a variety of differing methods of utilization of the drugs.

The percentage of teenagers using drugs is near its highest point ever and seems to be straining to break previous records every year.

Young adults stand in need of a new awareness tool in a world that has sunk deeper and deeper into the despair of substance abuse.

I hope that *Users* is that tool.

There has been a vocal demand for *Users* over the past several years but it could never quite escape from my mind and onto the page. Thanks to I. E. Clark and Bev Moerbe and Lou Ida Marsh and Rachel Mattox and Nicki Roberson and so many others who have been telling me, "The time is now!" I apologize for taking so long to respond. My hope is that it will have been worth the wait.

—Jerome McDonough

### PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

Counselors must be in attendance at every performance of *Users*. Their presence is announced from the stage. Students who may need to visit with someone following the show must have these human resources available to them.

Additionally, every student must be given a program which includes information regarding local, regional, and national substance abuse organizations. A listing of national sources is included in this script. Before these numbers and information are printed, however, the production company should make certain that each resource is still in operation by calling each number and verifying continued availability.

Local sources will be listed in the yellow pages of your local telephone directory—usually under the heading, "DRUG ABUSE AND ADDICTION—INFORMATION AND TREATMENT." People with these agencies may have other local numbers to suggest to you. Check out these

sources, as well, before including them in the program. The local and national numbers in the original program were all toll-free and there was no charge for the crisis line services. Whether you wish to include references to agencies which charge is up to each production company. If such companies are listed, however, they should be listed separately and the fact that they charge for services should be cited.

Invite substance abuse programs to send representatives to every performance of *Users*. The more resources which are available to audience members, the better.

**NATIONAL DRUG ABUSE, ALCOHOL, AND RELATED HOTLINES**

- Boy's Town National Hotline ..... 1-800-448-3000
- Covenant House 9-Line ..... 1-800-999-9999
- Alcohol & Drug Referral Hotline ..... 1-800-ALCOHOL  
(1-800-252-6465)
- Child Help U.S.A. (Abuse) ..... 1-800-422-4453
- National AIDS Hotline ..... 1-800-342-2437
- National AIDS Hotline (Spanish) ..... 1-800-344-7432
- National AIDS Hotline (TTY) ..... 1-800-243-7889

**AUDIENCE**

*Users* is in no sense a play for children. Adolescents should be the very youngest audience members. Parents and other adults who might need to know more about a world which is probably mysterious to them should attend the performance as should, ideally, education and health care professionals. To reiterate—no kids.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Properties*

As mentioned elsewhere—none. The play is starkly realistic in dialogue but needn't be a primer on how to utilize actual paraphernalia. Realism does not rule out the possibility of theatricality. Above all—trust your audience. They will intellectually “see” that which is mimed. And, more importantly, they will hear.

### *Costumes*

Make the wardrobe fit the crime. The “druggie” look of a person abusing a certain substance will change over the years. Reflect the changes. Students are probably the best source for such choices. More important than what is chosen is what must not be chosen. Costumes cannot tell a different story than the character. Mar, the rich girl, cannot be slovenly dressed. Quint, the heroin degenerate, should look dissheveled and dirty—physically dirty. These examples should guide the other choices.

### *Music*

I hesitate to admit that we did not use the music cues in the original productions. I brought some music I thought would set the mood and my kids said it sounded like the soundtrack from a porno movie. So I asked them to each provide his or her own song. That's the last any of us thought of it.

I cannot help but believe that, even though our performances were successful, the inclusion of music would have made them moreso—so please take the time and use your young actors/actresses' resources in a central role in musical choice. Emphasize that the song must fit the character and not just be a personal favorite. The wrong music is worse than none.

—Jerome McDonough

## *Users*

### *An Ongoing Tragedy*

By JEROME McDONOUGH

*[At rise, the stage is bare except for a few nondescript benches. MUSIC establishes the tone of the performance. (Each production company will find its own sound.) There may be levels created with platforms, ramps, whatever, but the appearance should be quite stark. MUSIC fades under as the COUNSELOR enters to Down Left or Down Right. The COUNSELOR may be a mature student portraying the adult, an actual counselor, or an adult playing the role]*

COUNSELOR. I'm going to start with a big lie. "This school has no drug problem." The problem may be minor—only one or two drugs are going around or there might be all kinds of substances being abused. Now—here's a big truth: "Drug users always have hope." Your program lists telephone numbers of organizations you can contact if you or someone you know needs their help. *[Brief pause]* We're going to show some stories today *[tonight, etc.]*—about how things were and how they are now. Most of the stories probably have nothing to do with you. But you never know when they might. You decide what to do. *[COUNSELOR exits and MUSIC comes up to "play on" the first scene]*

*[NOTE: No real or "prop" drugs or paraphernalia are used in the play. All are mimed. Money, cans, bottles, and other props are mimed as well]*

### **MICKEE**

MICKEE. I'm in a very high-pressure business.

USER A. *[Entering]* Mickee, you got any... *[His/her voice trails off]*

MICKEE. Doesn't the Mick always come through? *[USER A slips him/her some cash and MICKEE gives him/her a bottle of pills]*

USER A. Thanks.

MICKEE. Plenty more where those came from. *[USER exits as MICKEE continues]* It's a big responsibility providing "learning enhancements" for a school the size of this one. *[Another USER enters, looking anxiously toward MICKEE]*

USER B. Mickee, you...?

MICKEE. *[Looking around, then producing a "bottle"]* Just what you had in mind, right?

USER B. *[Checking bottle]* Yeah.

MICKEE. *[To exiting USER]* Tell your friends. *[To audience again]* A drugstore to go. *[He downs a few pills himself]* Pills to keep you awake, pills to get you to sleep, pills to give you an edge. I've even branched out lately. Steroids. The usual channels dried up, but those athletes still got no patience. So I help them skip a level or two. *[An athletic-looking USER enters]*

ATHLETIC USER. You got 'em, Mickee?

MICKEE. Right here. Gold medals in a tablet.

ATHLETIC USER. I want more than last time. I'm stuck on a plateau. You got enough to double 'em?

MICKEE. Does the Mick ever let you down?

ATHLETIC USER. Not so far.

MICKEE. *[Exchanging pills for cash, checking the money]* Whoa. You're ten bucks short.

ATHLETIC USER. I gave you twice what I did last time.

MICKEE. My sources went up on me. It's ten bucks more. *[Reaching for the pills]* But if you don't want...

ATHLETIC USER. *[Near panic]* No! I'll pay. Just try to keep this price, huh?

MICKEE. It's out of my hands.

ATHLETIC USER. *[Exiting]* OK.

MICKEE. Is that pathetic? Built tough like that and whining about a few dollars more for his muscle fix. Those athletes are worse than the pill heads. I don't know if I'll stay in that game or not. *[Takes more pills himself. Another USER enters. MICKEE speaks to audience as he/she arrives]*

MICKEE. Here's one of my favorites. *[To USER C]* What's your poison, guy? *[girl]*

USER C. *[Quietly]* I need some...

MICKEE. *[Pill/money exchange]* Here you go.

USER C. *[Quietly]* And some...

MICKEE. *[Pill/money again]* You sure that's enough?

USER C. You... You think it's not enough, Mickee?

MICKEE. You know what you need.

USER C. OK. Twice as much.

MICKEE [*Exchange*] As ordered.

USER C. [*Exiting quickly*] Thanks.

MICKEE. [*Tossing down more pills*] I call that kind “yo-yos.” They gotta have pills to get ‘em up for school or work or music or whatever it is they’re in to. Then they’re so high they can’t relax, so they have to take downers before they can get any rest. Then it starts over. And I get paid going up and going down. Is this a great business or what? [*More pills*] I see what you’re thinking. I’m no better than those pill-poppers I sell to. But I am. I’m smarter. I take just enough to get me level—high enough to keep my head in the business. You think those idiots didn’t teach me how much is too much? [*Pops a few more*] Well, they did. If you’ll excuse me, it’s time to hit the warehouse. [*Short MUSIC segue to the OUTCOME*]

### OUTCOME—MICKEE

COUNSELOR. Mickee got busted for dealing his pills a couple of time. He got probation and community service each time. And he’d sell pills at the places where he was doing the service.

He ran out of luck one day, though. He jacked the price up on his steroid customers once too often. After three of them had beaten him half to death, they told him a new dealer in town was offering his original price. He lost the sight in one of his eyes and had so many internal injuries that one of his kidneys had to be removed.

Mickee decided that the pill business wasn’t for him any more. Except, of course, as a user.

### ANGEL

ANGEL. My...my name...is Angel. It was, I think it was...yeah...sixth grade. Maybe fifth. Some kids...I can’t remember their names...were doing...this stuff.

KID 1. [*No props*] Come on, Angel. Take a sniff.

KID 2. Yeah. Whatcha waitin’ for?

ANGEL. I don’t know what I was...what I was...waitin’ for.

KID 2. [*Extending a “mimed” paper bag to her*] Here. Take a huff.

ANGEL. A huff. That’s what...they called it. [*She puts the bag over her face and inhales*] That was...the first time. I think it was...

KID 1. Great, huh?

ANGEL. Yeah... Great...huff.

KID 2. [*Exiting with KID 1*] This one’s run out.

KID 1. We may get back by.

ANGEL. They came back... No. ..They didn't... I don't know... But I got some more...from somebody...someplace...a lot of times, I think.

*[Another KID comes on, miming carrying a "cylindrical container," one which might hold an oil-based caustic fluid—paint, enamel, ????????. The KID starts to huff the can]*

ANGEL. One time...this...guy *[or girl]* had some stuff in...in a can, I think. *[KID 3 is huffing deeply]* I wanted to... *[Talking to the huffer]* Can I...have...a huff?

KID 3. *[Lowering the can very briefly]* Get your own.

ANGEL. He...wouldn't give me... Then something happened.

*[KID 3 starts to gasp, struggling for breath. He drops the can and clutches at his chest. He claws at himself, struggling more and more desperately to breathe. His agony lasts several more counts and then he sinks to the floor, turned away from audience—dead]*

ANGEL. Something happened...a bad thing. Somebody kept asking me...asking what happened...and I don't think...but it was real bad...Maybe even somebody died. That's why...I think why...I didn't huff anymore.

But I don't think so good...I can tell. A doctor... Or a nurse. One of them...said the huffing I did...I did before...made me this way.

I'm not dead... Somebody died... I don't remember who...

*[Short MUSIC segue to the next SCENE]*

### OUTCOME—ANGEL

COUNSELOR. Angel suffers from severe brain damage, brought on by the inhaling of caustic substances over a one-year period. She will be assigned to a group home when she turns twenty-one. The chances that she will ever function on her own again are remote. *[Short MUSIC segue to the next SCENE]*

### 'ZASH

'ZASH. I stick a little tobacco in my mouth and all of a sudden, 'Zash is seriously at risk. I'm at risk, all right—at risk of having a little freedom in



my life. My snuff is none of my parents' business or my teachers' business or any other old people's business.

Who can follow the signals, anyway? We got this long song and dance in Health Class about the "dangers" of smokeless tobacco. Then the teacher turned around to write something on the board and there was a very familiar-looking round shape on his back pocket.

Snuff. It's something that all my friends do, so I do it, too. And the first person who says, "If all your friends were going to...whatever" gets a fist from me. Why can't parents ever think of something new?

Hey, I've got this great idea. Get you a pinch going and come up with some new hassle lines your parents can use on you. And offer them a dip at the same time.

*[Short MUSIC segue to the OUTCOME]*

### OUTCOME—'ZASH

'ZASH. *[Moving to another area of the stage]* I went to the dentist last week and he found what he called a "pre-cancerous lesion" on my right gum. So I'm switching my dip to my left cheek—when I remember to.

Dad took me out to meet a guy today. His lower jaw is completely gone. A tobacco-related cancer destroyed it, they said. I guess I'll think about that. I might even do something about it. I might.

*[Short MUSIC segue to the next SCENE]*

### SHAD

*[SHAD STRANK, his hands bound behind him, is brought in Stage Right by OFFICER 2. He physically resists the Officer's hold on him. The OFFICER unbinds his hands and SHAD shrugs loose, then sits on a bench, Down Right. Even though he resents the police, his face and voice show little expression. He will reveal no sense of remorse. If practicable, SHAD should be in a strong light. OFFICERS 1 (Center side of SHAD) and 2 (Right side) begin the interrogation. OFFICER 2 writes down Shad's statement]*

OFFICER 1. Your lawyer says you're ready to make a statement, Shad.  
SHAD. If I get the methadone.

OFFICER 1. That's a heroin treatment. I thought angel dust was your monkey.

SHAD. Getting high is my monkey. Methadone's the only thing you

got. And I want it.

OFFICER 1. You'll get it.

SHAD. Write it down. Then I talk.

OFFICER 1. *[To the other officer]* Write the agreement. I'll sign it.

SHAD. *[Settling back down]* OK.

OFFICER 1. *[Formally, as if reading a standard format]* Statement of Strank, Shad. 17 September (year). From the top, Shad.

SHAD. Like you said, I was doing angel dust.

OFFICER 1. Where'd you get it?

SHAD. Look in the phone book.

OFFICER 1. We'll come back to that. How'd you wind up on PCP?

SHAD. I'd done everything else.

OFFICER 1. Like what?

SHAD. Like everything anybody ever popped, snorted, smoked, huffed, or shot up. Everything. None of them were enough.

OFFICER. Go on. About the Dust.

SHAD. It was the only thing that could still really hit me. And I'd see things while I was on it—then when I was coming down, I'd get real tight, and I couldn't loosen up until I hurt somebody. I couldn't loosen up all the way until they were dead.

OFFICER 2. How many people?

SHAD. I don't know. I kept a list for awhile, but I lost it. I'd do a bunch of dust on a joint and it'd hit me and I'd kill somebody. Then I'd head for the next town. I killed a couple of dealers along the way.

OFFICER 2. Where? What cities?

SHAD. I don't know. Off I-40. Arizona. New Mexico. Then I started killing cops.

OFFICER 1. Where?

SHAD. Everywhere. Undercover cops. I left a trail of you from here to Atlanta.

OFFICER 1. Tell me about it.

SHAD. You know about it. You've got it in a file here—the dead cop file.

OFFICER 1. Save me looking it up.

SHAD. I could smell you guys when I was on Dust. I'd see you watching me—like—there was this cop working as a waitress. I hung around until closing time and when she stepped through the back door I grabbed her. She's out in the desert. There's a tire iron by her.

OFFICER 2. What other cops?

SHAD. Gas station cops, all-night grocery store cops, Salvation Army

cops—I forget. When do I get that methadone?

OFFICER 1. After the statement.

SHAD. That *was* the statement.

OFFICER 1. We need dates and places.

SHAD. Give me a list of dead people. I'll sign it.

OFFICER 1. Where did you kill people, Shad?

SHAD. *[Echoing his sound]* Where do you keep the methadone, *[Sarcastically]* Officer?

OFFICER 1. You'll have more to say later.

SHAD. Hey, we've got a deal.

OFFICER 1. After the *complete* statement. Take him back upstairs.

SHAD. *[Resisting the Officer]* When I get out, I'm going to kill you. I'll spend all afternoon doing it.

OFFICER 1. Get him out of here.

SHAD. *[As OFFICER 2 takes him out]* Keep an eye out, pig. Every second of your life. *[OFFICER 2 removes SHAD with much difficulty. OFFICER 1 watches SHAD's exit, shakes his head, then exits as well]*

*[Short MUSIC segue to the OUTCOME]*

### OUTCOME—SHAD

COUNSELOR. Shad was sentenced to five to ten years at State Prison on a variety of minor charges. Even though he admitted numerous murders, there was never enough evidence to link him to any of them. The bodies of most of the people he claimed to have killed were never found. Shad had been in the penitentiary for ninety days when he was knifed to death by at least one other inmate. The autopsy report listed seventy-three stab wounds. There were no witnesses.

*[Short MUSIC segue to the next SCENE]*

### LAINY

LAINY. Grass. Dope. Weed. Wacky Tabacky. Motah. Reefer. Joint. Name after name after name of a way to step out of your head. And I never have to step out alone. *[Several DOPERS enter the scene to share with LAINY. They form a three-quarter circle, the open quarter toward the audience]*

DOPER 1. Lainey, pass it this way.