

Recovering individuals tell their stories

By DENNIS DYER Published: July 3, 2015 4:00AM

This is the third article in a series meant to inform the community about the opiate problem in Ashland County.

Prior articles have focused on community impact and how the problem has grown. This article will allow the voices of recovering individuals to be heard. Hopefully, this will help inspire others to seek help and begin the process of recovery.

None of the names are real.

Rita's words:

I had all the ACEs (severe childhood adverse experiences). I did not have good boundaries or tools to deal with trauma. I gravitated toward kids like me. We seemed the same and we partied together. First alcohol and then pot. When I heard about heroin from DARE, I thought it must be the best and I tried it. I was addicted by age 18.

I knew deep down that I wanted something better for myself and my children but I had no idea how to get there. The suggestion given to me seemed too foreign to comprehend. I sought treatment many times but the stays were so short that I would leave still in withdrawal.

I didn't know much about ACCADA. I would hear that the court made kids go there and we once dropped off a relative because he had a drinking problem.

People looked at me like I was a horrible human being and worse, some truly believed I did not love my children. I was often treated like there was no hope for me. I constantly feared I would lose my children and was afraid that I would lose them if I disclosed how bad my problem was.

I finally got in the kind of treatment that helped me. I needed the treatment medication for me to make it. Now I have been opiate-free for 10 years. I never could have made it without the forgiveness and patience from others. I held close those around me who believe mercy can be effective.

I gave everything. I had to learn how to live differently. My road to recovery has been horrific at times and beautiful at other times. I now have a college degree and a career that I love. This allows me to give back to the community. I have intelligent, healthy children who enjoy a stable environment that I lacked. From the outside looking in, no one would ever guess that I was a heroin addict.

Tom's words:

My childhood wasn't perfect. My parents divorced when I was young and it was very hard. It was when a loved one went away that I went into a deep depression and started rebelling. (Note: at least 3 ACEs). I really never felt like I fit in. At 12, I tried alcohol and liked it because it made me feel like I could talk to anyone and fit in. I dabbled with alcohol and marijuana for a couple years. At 14, I had my wisdom teeth pulled and was prescribed vicodin. Older kids I hung out with told me if I crushed and snorted the pills, I would feel good, so I did. The feeling was amazing! All my worries and insecurities went away. Not long after that, in the early 2000s, I was introduced to heroin. I was young and didn't know anything about it. My friends and I would get it when it was around, but that wasn't often. I learned firsthand that every year there is more and more heroin available. It is so easy and cheap to get.

At 16 years old, I shot up for the first time and fell in love. The warmth and calmness that came over my body was pure bliss. I felt like I finally found the answer to all my problems. Until one morning I woke up and felt like I had the flu. I did some heroin and was amazed because I wasn't sick anymore. I was so excited because I thought I had found a cure for the flu. I called my friend and told him what happened and his response was "Dude, you are getting dope sick." I had no idea what he was talking about. He explained to me that I was now addicted to heroin and need it in order to not be sick. At 16 years old, I was addicted to heroin. From that day on, my life was never the same. I would do anything to get that drug.

I hurt anybody I came in contact with, especially my mom. She tried everything to get me clean, but I wasn't ready to stop. The way I felt when I attempted to stop was like nothing I can describe with words. The only way I can attempt to help people understand is to have you imagine the worst flu they ever experienced and multiply that by 10. It isn't that people on heroin are bad or don't want to get clean, it's just the fear of being horribly sick.

I got treatment several times. I had some short clean times but was not ready to stop completely.

To support my habit, I stole and sold drugs, which led to spending a lot of time in jail and prison. My mom did the best thing she could have possibly done for me. She eventually had to quit trying to help. Only after completing my second prison sentence and marrying a woman who shows me unconditional love, did I want to change.

Now I'm going to ACCADA and Narcotics Anonymous. I'm also on suboxone and need that to stay sober. My life is great now; every day I can't wait to wake up and see what adventure is in store for me.

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