

Dyer: Sobriety must come first for recovering addicts

By DENNIS DYER Published: July 16, 2015 4:00AM

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

This article will allow the voice of another recovering individual to be heard. Hopefully, this will inspire others to find their way in recovery from opiate addiction.

The name is not real.

Helen's words:

I grew up in a household where drinking was common, I would see the adults smiling and laughing, generally having a great time. It's then that my romance with drugs and alcohol started.

Remember seeing old movies where the women would wear beautiful clothes and the men in suits sitting in their parlors drinking alcohol poured out of a crystal decanter into a crystal glasses, smoking cigarettes with the long black filter tips? Well, that's what I wanted to be like. Instead, I ended up sitting around for days in the same sweat pants and T-shirt with my ashtray filling up, doing my drugs and drinking out of a noncrystal glass. I romanticized the whole thing. It was the hardest love affair to leave.

I can't really remember if I drank or smoked pot first but I remember the summer before seventh grade I started smoking pot and I loved it because it did the same thing to me as beer and I hated the taste of beer. I guess being that young the only thing we could get was beer.

When I was around 15, my girlfriend got a bottle of Seagrams 7 and I drank till I blacked out. No matter what I drank after that, I was a blackout drinker.

Then I discovered pills. They could do the same thing to me and I wouldn't be sick the next morning. That didn't last long. Soon I was mixing pills, pot and alcohol before I knew it. With the crowd I hung out with, it was the thing to do. Of course, then I added the cocaine to pick me up from all the pills and alcohol I was using.

At 19, I knew I had an addiction to cocaine and was able to quit, but I continued to drink, smoke pot and take pills. The pills were mostly of anything that would relax me. I kind of leveled off in my mid-20s. I even quit smoking pot.

At 33, I was divorced, living on my own, drinking more than normal and was still taking pills. The only difference was I had health issues and the pills were prescribed. Now, I'm basically just talking pain pills, opiates.

At 37, I'm remarried and pregnant (I took and drank nothing while pregnant). I had a major health issue just past seven months pregnant and ended up having my son. That issue left me with all kinds of trouble and I ended up going on large quantities of pain meds and my addiction kicked into full gear.

After all those years of drinking and drugging, I don't know what happened and what changed in my brain but when I wanted to stop taking the opiates I couldn't.

I had been using drugs and alcohol for more than 30 years, since I was a young girl. I couldn't go on. I knew I wasn't going to live because each time I needed more of whatever I was using or drinking.

One morning in October 2013 through a series of phone calls, I was recommended to ACCADA (Ashland County Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse). I was set up with a drug and alcohol counselor. After a few meetings with Dennis (Dyer), he recommended attending meetings with a 12-step concept.

And so I started on my journey of recovery.

You see, I wasn't court-ordered into a rehab program. I went voluntarily and I've learned that you have to want sobriety or it's not going to happen. I never thought I could live a sober life. What would I do? But through counseling and the 12-step program, I learned how to live sober. It was and is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

You cannot sit back and expect it to happen, you have to work for it.

One of the hardest realizations for me and my loved ones was that my sobriety must come first -- before family, significant other and even my child, because without my sobriety I don't have those things.

I'm telling you from firsthand experience, sobriety can be done. If I can do it, so can you.

Dennis Dyer is the director of Ashland County Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. He can be reached at 419-289-7675. This article is part of a public awareness effort done in collaboration between ACCADA and the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County. ACCADA is a contract agency of the MHRB and a partner agency of United Way of Ashland County.