

An Army of Hope in the Epidemic

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It’s no secret in our country we are facing an opioid epidemic. We know people are overdosing and dying in the depths of their addiction. It’s easy, now, for society to focus on those who have struggle with addiction, at the same time, society isn’t always so sure about what to do with the rest of us. We are the ones whose lives have been impacted by someone we love with addiction. Sometimes we forget to talk about the survivors of the overdoses, the warriors who had Narcan and saved lives, those who maintain hope for Recovery, and the loved ones who grieve and celebrate lives in memory after a loss. It’s often we also don’t realize just how many people we know that make it in Recovery.

Somewhere there is a mom who is sleeping soundly for the first time in years, because their adult child has finally decided to go to inpatient treatment. This mom has been strong, she’s been weak, she’s been the biggest advocate her child could possibly have. She’s often walked this path alone, because so many aren’t sure what to say, or what to do, or they think they know how she should “fix it.” She walks this path, never gives up, and she is there when her child takes the first steps, this time, into that amazing and difficult Recovery Journey. She’s one of the many unsung

heroes that fight this opioid epidemic because she wants the person she loves to make it out alive, to be a part of her life, and to make a positive difference in this world. I challenge you to just be an option for this mom you know, to listen, to be silent with, to laugh with, and maybe most importantly to be there with her in support with the difficult decisions she makes to try and help her child. She is using the best decision-making skills she has, working out every outcome and argument in her head to come to that decision and is fighting this fight with every weapon she has. You may disagree, yet be with er in her decision. She needs her own platoon to walk with her in her into what’s next. Because we just don’t know what’s next.

Along the journey, she’s met other parents who haven’t had the opportunity to fight as long, because the opioid epidemic or other addictions won that round. Some of these parents aren’t sure if they should share how they lost their child because there are members of the community, who have heard they lost their child to overdose, and shun the parents because it “must have been their fault, they were bad parents.” In their grief, they aren’t sure how to handle the crippling shame and guilt. They never stop feeling the love for their child. On the other side are the parents who grieve through advocating for those who live to fight another

day. They take their pain and share it with the world in hopes that someone else might be saved. They share in hopes that others realize they are not alone on this journey. They choose the pain in honor of their child who struggled to find their way forward in life, halted on their path, by death.

Be there for these parents, by letting them share the magical stories from a childhood once known. Celebrate, with them, the characteristics that made their person unique and beautiful. Let them cry in silence when it’s all they can do. Advocate with them, so someone else may be inspired to make a different choice.

Somewhere in OUR community, Narcan is being used. An individual committed to a class to learn how to reverse an overdose. They made a choice to carry Narcan with them. They value the life they saved, knowing that under the addiction, there is a person who can impact the world with their kind heart, gentle soul, engaging intellect, and immense love for their family and friends. The possibilities are endless!

Some months later, that person who almost died because they used fentanyl laced heroin, they are here making changes. Heroin was the method they chose to numb physical and emotional pain, to feel good in a world that has high expectations, sometimes even of perfection. It made them feel even normal for a moment in

time. They are still here, thankful for another chance, and have journeyed through treatment. Now, life is about living, and practicing Recovery. They have moved through loss of friends along the way and learned how to tackle “simple tasks” like paying bills on time. They have learned to listen and to be a better son or daughter. Being a friend has come with different awareness and practice of action. This person has made amends, has fallen and picked themselves back up, because life never stops coming. They fall almost every day, like, really, most of us do. But they do keep getting back up. The choice to feel pain instead of the euphoria heroin will bring, remains a difficult choice. It’s a choice that is often overlooked as an incredible sign of strength and progress, because, “they should know better.” They choose pain and struggle forward, not because it feels good, but because there is the possibility of better. They choose Recovery. They choose the promise of a genuinely difficult, but more fulfilling future, where they can find and live their own potential greatness. They choose life.

In OUR community are the hundreds of people who live the professional roles supporting Recovery. We engage those in the struggle of addiction, the loved ones who stand behind them, and even those who have let go with love. We fight for reducing

stigma, to help individuals find THEIR pathway to Recovery, to connect with each other as a team of agencies and referral points. Most importantly we share the struggle with those in the depth of the fight and believe RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE. We share in joy of celebrating the successes, the grief of the fallen, and while hopefully, always with strong boundaries, we share an open heart.

Today, I ask you, to take a moment with me to acknowledge the army of amazing individuals that are a part of the journey of addiction, and the fight in the opioid epidemic, in different ways. We celebrate those who have stepped into Recovery, walk with those that continue to struggle, love from afar, and remember those that were lost in the fight. All make an impact on the world, hold love in their hearts, and are loved. I ask you to move through the challenges of stigma and fear to see the people behind the epidemic, the people who have faced addiction, head on, through the dark and the light.

On September 22, 2019, our community will joined together at Hanna Park in the “Light of Hope,” a candlelight vigil, to remember and celebrate those lost to overdose, addiction, and suicide. Together we maintain hope for all those who are still with us as they find steps in their journey of Recovery. We fight, together.