

# DEBRA HANBY

## DAYTON, OH

### **How is the opioid epidemic affecting you, your family, and your neighborhood? :**

On June 30, 2017 I flew to Cape Coral, FL to help our son set up his first apartment after leaving sober living with 6 months clean time. I found him dead in his apartment, after a 3-year battle with heroin addiction, the disease won. The autopsy showed cause of death as a Fentanyl overdose. He ended up in Florida after spending time in rehab in Utah. My insurance company told me we were lucky - we had an unlimited policy for addiction. After spending our \$6k deductible, insurance deemed treatment not medically necessary. We are still paying off the \$40k loan after his death to pay for the treatment insurance wouldn't. We went through legal issues with felony charges we had the police pursue hoping it would lead to recovery. We lost lots of items to pawn shops to fund his habit. That's how we discovered his addiction. With 2 other children in the house we kicked him out. It's been a nightmare with the worse possible ending. Through the journey we have learned about addiction. I advocate for recovery and speak openly whenever I can - Nova House, church gatherings, high school health classes, I've even met with the Mayor of Dayton to advocate for more resources - specifically sober living. I've fought Cash Land loans that fund addiction for many. What they do should be considered criminal. Our son also OD'd twice at our home and was saved with Narcan. I've never been ashamed or embarrassed by our son's disease. My son gave me my purpose. I'll be an advocate for addiction and recovery the rest of my life. How many more have to die? I've also met the most amazing people who are recovering addicts. There is hope. Recovery is possible. I've been attending Nar-Anon for 3 years. Nar-Anon saved my life. The stronger I got in Nar-Anon, the stronger my son got working his program. It gave him a chance and I'm grateful for his 6-months of clean time.

### **What do you see as causes of the epidemic in your community and in Ohio? :**

For our son it was back surgery after high school with chronic nerve pain that the doctor treated with Percocet. That took him down the path of heroin. Often times there is dual diagnosis. Our son David had his world changed with 9/11. We believe he suffered from PTSD. We sought therapy but child psychology is not profitable and the resources weren't there to properly treat him. Big Pharma new Dayton was going to have a heroin problem when Ohio started closing down pill mills. We have the 70/75 corridor. We have been a major city for distribution through the Mexican Cartels. Parents also are in denial.

### **What steps might we take as a state to combat the opioid epidemic? :**

1. Improved residential rehab with transition housing (sober living) for a minimum of 12 months. Outpatient rehab is not effective.
2. A legal system that allows rehab for possession charges rather than overcrowding our jails with addicts. This includes having the ability to expunge records IF the person successfully completes a

program, maintains clean time and employment over a 3-year period. State Rep Jim Butler has an understanding of what it takes.

3. Improved laws to prosecute dealers.

4. A sustainable funding program to turn this around. Portugal did it. We can too.

**What might we do as individuals and a community to reduce opioid abuse?:**

Educate. Prevention has to be taught in the schools. Stop kids from starting. Educate communities so we reduce the stigma of addiction. We cannot hide from it. Addicts and those in recovery are everywhere. Educate physicians. My God, they are a part of the cause! We have to help those addicted by implementing steps identified above. Addiction is not a choice. My son was a victim. He did not choose to be an addict. Stop talking about it and let's do something about it! Put some people in those talks that have been through this! More advocates for addicts that can help lead them to recovery. Stronger penalties for dealers. It's a joke and a frustration for law enforcement. Provide funding for Narcan to keep them alive until they can be helped in rehab. Expand number of Nar-Anon meetings. There are only 3 per week in the Dayton area.