

# KEN HOUGHTALING

## WILMINGTON, OH

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

I have been the Intervention in Lieu of Conviction Officer for the Clinton County Common Pleas for over 5 years. I accepted this position after retiring from a 36 year aviation career. I had my own issues (alcoholism) - and had been a defendant for OVI and Reckless driving with the Judge that I work for. He asked me if I would consider taking the IILC position, as he wanted someone that had experience with Substance use issues. At the time I accepted I had over 16 years of Recovery from Alcoholism. I grew up in a family/culture of Alcohol and Drug addiction. My mother suffered and succumbed to Alcoholism when I was 4 years sober. My older sister used alcohol and prescription medications for 55 years before seeking help.

I have a work load of 30-35 clients. Most are only on IILC, but a small percentage are also in our Special Docket Drug Court. In my position with the court, I try to help these individuals deal with Treatment, Mental Health issues, seek counseling, manage their Medicated Assisted Treatment when necessary, work through family issues, do job searches and write letters to employers.

No one is immune or exempt from this epidemic. I have attended the State of Ohio's Opioid conference for the past 5 years. I have also studied and taken the CDC-A training. For the past three years I have served on my 2 county ADAMAS Board of Directors.

There is not a day that passes that I do not have some contact or involvement with people that are either directly addicted or dealing with the consequences as family members and loved ones.

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

It is well documented and fact based that both the Pharma Companies and the Medical Profession did not have the best interest of the patients when they were presented with lies about the effects, potency and addictive principals of the synthetic opiates. There were too many drugs available, doctors were told that they were not as dangerous as morphine and heroin for pain management. There was massive marketing and the Medical Professionals were encouraged to believe that Pain was a Vital Sign and needed to be managed. The Pill Mills of SE Ohio and WV - especially in the Portsmouth Ohio area and Ohio River - were in full mode. The well regarded book "Dream Land" laid out the blueprint for disaster. Once law enforcement slowed that Pill Supply, a perfect storm formed for the illicit Heroin Drug Cartels to move in and fill the void.

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

Education - we must educate and bring to light the dangers and warning signs, and we need to direct much more effort and funds to reaching children at a much earlier age. I have seen the drug problem

follow 3 generations in my job with the court system. Counselors must be given the best tools and there needs to be a much greater emphasis on retention of our counselors.

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

Be involved. Join a support group, start a grass roots effort in your community, attend functions and be a voice.

**Anything else you'd like to share?**

We can overcome this problem, it will take much more than continuing to throw money into the fire - it will take the entire nation. There are already improvements that I have seen, especially with the economy improving. One of the best things that can happen for people in recovery, is to obtain a job or go back to school. When their self-worth and confidence starts to improve, their overall outlook on life improves and they have a reason to want to get well.