

THE INITIATIVE

Addressing Substance Use in Dare County



Winter 2021
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THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO: RYAN JONES

December 28, 1980 – November 23, 2020

On November 23, 2020, we lost our son, Ryan, to a drug overdose. He was living in Winchester, Virginia at the time. By the time the medical personnel arrived on the scene, it was too late. He died on his bathroom floor. I think the official autopsy report will read "fentanyl poisoning."

My wife and I are private people. We keep it in the family. One might say we are "old school." But old school doesn't cut it anymore. We all know about the COVID-19 epidemic, but it's way past time for something like Operation Warp Speed to defeat the opioid epidemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that from 1999 – 2018, "more than 750,000 have died from drug overdose. Two out of three drug overdose deaths in 2018 involved an opioid." And these are young people, many with small children. We are witnessing the creation of a whole generation that is growing up without their

parents. Ryan leaves a six-year-old son behind. A son who adored him. After the Thanksgiving break, the teacher asked the returning class if everyone had a nice Thanksgiving. Peyton said, "No, I didn't. My daddy died." What else needs to be said to show the heartache and devastation caused by this disease?

Anyone who has a loved one suffering from the disease of addiction, also known as Substance Use Disorder, will know of the great emotional pain from all the chaos and dysfunction and from seeing a loved one's life unravel. Death takes the pain to a whole other level.

Ryan was, of course, more than a person with substance use disorder. A person with diabetes is more than a diabetic. Ryan was bright, articulate, and incredibly funny. He was a prankster. He never gave up the enjoyment from teasing his sister Megan. He had an appreciation for the ironies in life. He loved to fish, and he loved the Dallas Cowboys. Most of all he loved his son. He was looking forward to spending Thanksgiving, Christmas, and his upcoming birthday with his family.

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SAVING LIVES TASK FORCE

The Initiative is a quarterly newsletter presented by the Saving Lives Task Force, the goal of this publication is to educate, inform and engage residents of Dare County.

- **Our Task Force is** a team of professionals and community members working toward the prevention of substance use disorders and the availability of effective treatment for all Dare county citizens in need of help.
- **Join us for our Virtual Meetings** on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 3:00 pm.
- **For More Information** please contact Roxana Ballinger, Saving Lives Task Force Co-Chair, at 252.475.5619 or roxana.ballinger@darenc.com.

savinglivesobx.com
facebook.com/savinglivesobx



Upcoming Events

- **Drug Drop Event | Wednesday, March 3**
Southern Shores Crossing; 2:30pm to 5:30pm
- **Involuntary Commitment-Clinical And Legal Issues | Tuesday, March 23**
Virtual, 9:30am to 11:30am.
More information coming.
- **NC Controlled Substance System (CSRS) | Reducing Prescription Medication Misuse in Dare County | Tuesday, March 23**
Virtual, 5:30pm to 6:30pm.
More information coming.

Ongoing Events

- **Alcoholics Anonymous | Meetings 7 days a week | Visit the website AAOBX.com for current virtual meeting schedule**
Outer Banks AA Hotline: 252.256.0850
www.aobx.com
- **SMART Recovery Meeting | Virtual Meeting Sun 7:15 pm - 8:15 pm**
The SMART Recovery Meeting has been moved online and can be accessed by this link: <https://www.smartrecoverytest.org/local/meeting/kill-devil-hills-north-carolina-sunday-715-pm-to-815-pm/>
- **Recovery Learning Circle | Mon & Thurs 2:00 pm | Tues & Fri 11:00 am**
Are you struggling with stress, isolation, depression, anxiety or just worried? Join the Recovery Learning Circle (virtually) sponsored by Dare County Department of Health & Human Services. For more information: Dave Edmonds 252.305.4056 | david.edmonds@darenc.com
- **Women of Worth | Groups are being held virtually on Tues & Thurs from 11:00am-12:00pm**
The groups will focus on recovery from the evidence based curriculum, "Helping Women Recover". For more information: Catisha Bryant | catisha.bryant@darenc.com
- **COVID-19 Emotional Support Line | Open Tues & Thurs 9:00 am - 3:00 pm | Call 252.473.8216**
Feeling anxious or down about the COVID-19 pandemic? Want to share your concerns? Talk to a counselor at the Dare County Department of Health & Human Services. While not a crisis line, this service offers support to those who need a listening ear and/or who need to access necessary resources.
- **Breaking Through Task Force | 2nd Tues of the month | 8:30 am**
The Breaking Through Task Force is composed of community members who wish to address communication and stigma concerns about mental health conditions and substance use disorders. For more information: Rebecca rebecca.woods@darenc.com | www.BreaktheStigmaOBX.com.
- **Dare Community Collaborative | 2nd Tues of the Month | 1:30 - 2:30 pm**
The Dare Collaborative is a partnership among providers and families of youth and adults with mental health or substance use issues. Together, they identify services, support needs and try to find ways to meet those needs. For more information: Keith Letchworth | keith.letchworth@trilliumnc.org.
- **Most Therapists / Counselors in Dare are also seeing clients via Telehealth, call the specific therapist for details. www.darenc.com/telehealth**
- **For additional resources related to COVID-19 in Dare County, please visit www.darenc.com/covidresources**
- **Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)**
Triple P is a program for parents of elementary and middle school children. Triple P Online is a 8 module, interactive positive parenting program you can work through at your own pace. It shares some great ideas about parenting and how to help children develop. For more information: northcarolina.tripleponline.net

I find the sentiment that Ryan is not defined by his addiction comforting; However, there is no way around the fact that his disease was a major theme in Ryan's life. When using, getting the drug was first priority; when sober, maintaining sobriety was a constant, daily battle. Everything depended on his sobriety. Ryan did not want to die. He had dreams; he had plans. He needed one more class to get his certificate as a drug counsellor. He had the opportunity to move up the chain in his company. And he was in love and thinking of marriage. He wanted to spend more time with his son. But none of those things would happen if sobriety wasn't maintained.

Clausewitz, the great military theorist, wrote of the importance of the "Center of Gravity" in war. Center of gravity is that which the enemy has that if destroyed, captured, or neutralized will result in the complete collapse of its forces. The COG could be a hilltop, a city, a strategic allegiance, or military support from a third party. A nation at war must protect its COG. Ryan's center of gravity was sobriety, which was under constant attack by the craving for the drug. He clearly knew this. He knew without sobriety everything, and I mean everything would collapse. 2019 was a year of sobriety for Ryan. He told us it was the best year of his life. So many good things happened to him, but when he lost his sobriety in November of 2020, he lost his life.

In the past, The Initiative has published "Voices in Recovery." They are powerful comments and thoughts from those in sobriety. The comments often convey gut-wrenching truths. When going through Ryan's belongings, I found a notebook that Ryan had used during a 90-day rehabilitation. Apparently, the counsellor had given the assignment to describe your relapse.

Ryan wrote:

Relapse Narrative Ryan Jones | 12-19-2018

"After 14 months sober it's now August of 2019. I have been working a good program, working steps, going to at least 5 meetings a week but about the last week or so I haven't called my sponsor very much, I haven't gone to my regular meetings and just feeling like something is off, like I'm missing something but just can't put my finger on it but deep down I know what I feel I am missing and that is heroin. I have really been in my feelings lately, feeling depressed, anxious and been somewhat hopeless. One would think I'd be feeling good considering the clean time I have so I can't explain why exactly I'm feeling these things and why all of a sudden, I'm feeling this at this particular time. I know what I need to do to help with these feelings. I need to call my network, pray, share in a meeting, etc. But I don't. My disease is telling me to white knuckle it and I will be OK.

Well, it is now Sunday morning and the start of the NFL season. I wake up, say a quick prayer and I feel a little better than I have the last few days. I think I might even go to a meeting this evening. It is a beautiful, late summer day. Cool and crisp. I can definitely tell fall is in the air. I turn on the TV and it is the Baltimore Ravens playing at home. The Goodyear blimp shows a camera shot of the city, camera shots of the stadium, of some scenery of Baltimore and immediately my pulse quickens, and my palms sweat. I recognize these sensations immediately. It is the feelings I used to get when I first started getting drugs in Baltimore. And I know what I have to do to fill the void that I referred to earlier as something missing. For the past 14 months I've prepared myself for a situation like this. I know the actions I must take when these feeling occur. But once again I forget all I've learned. It was as simple and quick as that. It's crazy, something as innocent as a few pictures of a city sent me back out there and triggered my relapse.

This must be the rough bubbling water they keep talking about in the relapse river stuff they taught me. Well, as soon as I as I start feeling the things I'm feeling, the thought to use is in my head there is no stopping me.

I know I am home alone all day and don't have to be held accountable to anyone so next thing I know I am on 95 almost in Baltimore. I must have had some sort of reservations because why didn't I erase my dude's number out of my phone? I know why, because I was saving it just in case of a time of crisis like this one. I call him up and he sounds happy to hear from me although I know he doesn't give a shit about me. He tells me where to meet him and as I'm waiting for him, I'm already high. I'm high before I put my substance in my body. I was high as soon as I got on 95 headed up this way.

An hour ago, I just saw the stadium on TV and now I'm in its shadows staring at it. I'm feeling excited and I haven't felt this particular type of excitement in 14 months. I only have \$50 to spend but this is enough to scratch this insatiable itch I have been feeling. I just got the shit from my dude and as I'm putting it in the spoon and adding water my hands are shaking so bad with nervousness and anticipation, I almost spill it all everywhere. You would think I'm a rookie, that this might be my first time. But I've done this a thousand times before. I know what I am doing, and I'll be OK. As I suck that beautiful brown liquid, the color of coffee, in my syringe I begin to regain my composure and I have no trouble hitting a vein. It had been over a year and my veins are nice and fat, practically begging for some attention. As soon as I press the plunger that warm fuzzy, words can't explain, feeling was over me. Damn I've missed this I say out loud to myself. And that is the last thing I remember. I'm not sure exactly what is happening now. I'm outside of myself, looking down at my lifeless body. It is an out of body experience. I'm purple, the color of Barney and I can hear my body's form gasping for air. Now there are flashing lights all around my body as police and EMTs surround me. Two EMTs lay me down and spray something up my nose. I can barely make out the word Narcan as they talk to each other. They spray it again. That's twice and then a 3rd time. I am no longer breathing. I think this can't be happening, it wasn't supposed to go like this. I just wanted to get high once more for old times sake. I then hear one of them say "It's too late. He's gone." Everything turns to black as they drape a white sheet over my body and face. So, this is it. This is how my story ends. I'm dead. Dead on the dirty Baltimore streets, all alone with a needle sticking out of my arm."

R.I.P. Ryan Jones | 1980-2019

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Ryan Jones Continued...

He did not die in Baltimore, and it was a year later than that stated in his narrative, but other than those facts, his prediction was very accurate. When I first read his words, I dropped to my knees and wept. He knew, he knew what awaited him if he did not maintain sobriety. Yet he was unable to protect his hilltop, which caused the collapse of everything. The drug, as it does so many times, won.

I struggle with this powerful allure for the drug. I don't understand it. It is beyond my comprehension. This is why it is so important to listen to those in recovery -- To help us understand. Even if I am incapable of understanding the craving, I am certainly capable of understanding and accepting how powerful an enemy the drug is. For those who say it's a matter of choice, my response is it is not that simple. It is far more complicated. Studies have shown that Substance Use Disorder can cause brain damage, which can impede the ability to think logically and to handle stress.

I write this article for a couple of reasons – one, the process is somewhat therapeutic for me, but the main reason is I want a call to arms. It is too late for Ryan. As he wrote, his story has ended, or has it? I don't want his death to be meaningless. I want others to learn from it. Perhaps something can be done about this disease. I want this disease crushed. I know there are some who will say our nation has already fought a War on Drugs and we lost. Our prisons are now overflowing, and substance use disorder is at epidemic levels. I'm sympathetic to the sentiment. Although I believe law enforcement has to be part of the solution (stopping fentanyl from coming into our country seems prudent) but, yes, jail is not the solution. Prevention is key. Prevention renders that brown sticky substance powerless. Prevention means the drug does not stop to exist, but the drug is now not as powerful. Prevention is the drug's center of gravity. Unfortunately, we know that the best prevention programs possible will not be totally effective. There will be those that, forever reason, will try the drug. Some will be able to walk away, others will not. When prevention fails, then treatment becomes paramount. We need more treatment facilities; they need to be effective; and they need to be affordable. All that will require resources and commitment from the Federal Government. The same type of resources and commitment that the Federal Government has used against COVID-19. Without total commitment, the disease of addiction will continue to kill 70,000 people, year in and year out.

In lieu of flowers, I asked that donations be made to the Saving Lives Task Force. SLTF is in the fight, and the fight begins at the local level. But resources are limited at the local level. Our health professionals and laymen alike need additional resources. We need a grassroots movement consisting of voters and those in local public office to demand that those in office at the state and federal levels recognize addiction as a disease, that it is an epidemic and that an Operation Warp Speed type commitment is needed now. We must stop the deaths. Enough is enough.

Written by Craig Jones

THE INITIATIVE RESOURCES:

savinglivesobx.com

PORT/New Horizons
2808 S Croatan Hwy,
Nags Head, NC 27959
252.441.2324

Trillium Health Resources
www.trilliumncaccesspoint.org
877.685.2415 – 24 Hours a Day

Mobile Crisis Team
24 Hours a Day / 7 Days a Week
866.437.1821

2-1-1 Directory
www.nc211.org

Community Care Clinic of Dare
Syringe Services Program
M-Th | 9 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
252.261.3041

Contact your insurance company to find out more information on local providers and your plan's benefits.