

Crisis resolution on the move

By: Sean Callahan, Editor-in-Chief

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and UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital.



Resolve is a part of UPMC's Behavioral Health services,
specifically crisis services. (SOURCE: UPMC WEBSITE)

The United States is in a mental health crisis. This is the overwhelming consensus of many psychiatric and health organizations across the country, and health experts. For instance, a 2024 article published by Forbes Health cited that in 2022 23.1 percent of U.S adults experienced a mental health condition and 32.9 percent experienced substance abuse in addition to this. The percentage of citizens receiving mental health treatment has increased by more than 2 percent between 2019 and 2021.

Mental health and crisis services, such as that of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's (UPMC) mobile crisis teams, are critical to helping address some of these concerns. These mobile crisis teams are included in Resolve, which is described on UPMC's website as "a partnership between Allegheny County and UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital".

On Thursday, April 11, at 7 p.m, the Psychology Club of Saint Vincent College (SVC) virtually hosted two members of Resolve Crisis Services, Shelby Hogan

and Liz Fry, to discuss their experiences on mobile crisis teams and the work they do. Jacob Rzempoluch, senior psychology major and Psychology Club President, previously interned with Resolve, and was able to invite these team members to impart their knowledge to interested attendees, including fellow psychology students. Many students gathered in headmaster's 404 that day to listen to a brief presentation from Hogan and Fry and asked questions of their occupation.

Mobile crisis teams must respond to community mental health crises and provide face-to-face support. According to Hogan, Fry, and the UPMC website, Resolve operates 24 hours providing crisis counseling and support, referrals, and interventions for adults, teens, and their loved ones.

"You never know what you're going to get. Sometimes you walk into a call and think 'this is going to be so silly,'" Fry and Hogan explained. "But we always [say]: you have to think about the worst-case scenario, so that when you go in, it will often be better."

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Dinner with retired Senator Allen Kukovich

By: Brianna Saylor, News Editor

On Tuesday, April 9, Elaine Bennett, Dean of the School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and Mike Walsh, Saint Vincent College (SVC) alum and Deputy Secretary for Administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, hosted a dinner for students to meet retired Senator Allen Kukovich, who introduced the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in Pennsylvania a little over 30 years ago, which its introduction, has expanded healthcare access to millions of children and families who did not have access to health insurance.

Reflecting on his time at SVC, Walsh explained how he met Senator Kukovich at a dinner like this one years ago. Partnering with SVC to make this dinner happen was particularly meaningful for him because meeting Kukovich as a student set him on a trajectory for a very successful career in public service and public policy. Walsh later became Director of Policy for Senator Kukovich, where he focused on land-use planning and urban revitalization issues and helped launch the Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County. Now, he is the Deputy Secretary for Administration at the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

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NEWS

Psychology club hosts mobile crisis team panel

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The Resolve Walk-in crisis center is situated on Braddock Avenue in Pittsburgh. (SOURCE: WTAE NEWS)

“You never know what you’re going to get. Sometimes you walk into a call and think ‘this is going to be so silly,’” Fry and Hogan explained. “But we always [say]: you have to think about the worst-case scenario, so that when you go in, it will often be better.”

A lot of calls, in their experience, are mostly encouraging children to go to school or get out of bed. They don’t need to get out of the car right away, usually. They remain on the call with the parents or guardians, and sometimes don’t need to get out of the car at all! The situation gets resolved.

“We get a lot of school refusal calls. When we started on Resolve, we did not expect that. The amount of children that refuse to go to school every day and the amount of resources that are used to motivate them is shocking,” Fry and Hogan said.

Both team members began working for Resolve in April of 2020, at the onset of the pandemic. Their experience was drastically different from how Resolve typically operated.

“There was limited access to us. We implemented telehealth for the first time, by starting to do client services over the phone. But a lot of people did not want that! We were shocked,” they explained.

During that time, there were even two-week intervals where Resolve received no calls.

However, as in-person services returned to normal, children, Fry and Hogan say, were and still are the biggest concerns following the aftermath of the pandemic. Whereas adults and even teens have been malleable, children have been developing through the change. In some ways, they have experienced negative developments.

“[We are seeing lots of kids] between the age range of 8 and 12, all getting diagnosed with anxiety and depression. They exist in that. They don’t have much socialization, are addicted to technology. A lot of our cases end up being like that,” they say. “A lot of our cases are like that.”

In fact, Fry and Hogan correlate the number of cases of children not motivated to go to school to the results of the pandemic, due in part to their routines being changed so drastically at a young age, and their worlds changing so suddenly.

“Kids are very smart. They have always been very smart. However, now, kids have more information about adult life and the world, and they are making choices very similar to that. It can be good, but when it comes to going to school or going to bed, those are supposed to be non-negotiables.”

Fry and Hogan ended the event by providing advice for those looking to work in crisis. They emphasized flexibility, being comfortable with not knowing

what to expect, and working with a team. However, they also emphasized setting boundaries.

“You can’t attach yourself to the people you meet. You can only help so much, and then it is up to [the patients] to follow the recommendations you’re providing.”

Students meet to discuss public service and policy

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Students and professors join alongside retired Senator Allen Kukovich to take commemorative photo at guest dinner.
(SOURCE: ELAINE BENNETT)

Kukovich went on to express the importance of networking and getting to know the people in your communities. Kukovich himself spent nearly three decades in public service, some of which involved time in the Pennsylvania General Assembly and continued involvement in economic development initiatives.

“Some of the best ideas for changing policy and for changing the law, those don’t originate in a state capital, in Harrisburg, or even Washington, DC; they usually start in communities where people are having problems and trying to deal with them, and CHIP is a great example of that.”

A common theme throughout the talk was the idea of really taking the time to get to know yourself and find your niche in life. Kukovich and Walsh reiterated the importance of taking the time to get to know yourself before you enter anything—whether that be politics, business, or anything else.

“It might take year of learning and listening, but you have to find something that really matters, something that you yourself can wake up one day and know that you put the effort and the dedication into that and made an impact bigger than yourself,” said Kukovich.

Students interested in public service and policy are invited to learn more about retired Senator Allen Kukovich and CHIP by watching the nearly released documentary, *Children in Crisis: The Story of Chip*, on PBS, which explains how when the steel industry collapsed in the early 1980s, many families were left without any healthcare coverage for their children. As displaced steelworkers banded with church leaders in the hardest hit sections of Pittsburgh, a grassroots program expanded into one of the most important federal children’s healthcare programs ever enacted—the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

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ARTS AND CULTURE

From beekeeping to ping pong

By: Lauren Campbell, *Staff Writer*



The Ping Pong Club hopes to ensure ping pong tables are in every campus dorm, like the one in Wimmer Hall (Campbell)

Great news for aspiring beekeepers, bookworms, and ping-pong enthusiasts: Saint Vincent College (SVC) has announced three brand-new clubs—the Beekeeping Club, the Book Club, and the Ping-Pong Club.

At SVC, students are encouraged to think outside the box and bring their ideas and thoughts to their friends and peers—sometimes, that might include developing a new club or two! Senior student Adam Koscielicki is the president of the Ping Pong Club, which came about after he and his friends were disappointed to find that there were no ping-pong tables in Rooney Hall.

“My roommates and I used to live in Wimmer, and now we all live together in Rooney, but there’s no ping-pong table in Rooney,” said Koscielicki. “We really missed playing ping pong every night, and we just thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if there was a ping pong club?’”

Koscielicki and his roommates, now club officers, have big plans for the club’s future, including ensuring every dorm building has a ping-pong table and organizing charity tournaments to be held in the Carey Center.

Dr. Michelle Duennes, Professor of Biology and faculty advisor for the new Beekeeping Club, said the idea for the club was brought up by a student in her class, club president Jacob Krumenaker, after she talked about her research on bumblebees in class. The idea turned into a club that learns about and celebrates all kinds of bees and focuses on native bee conservation.

The club plans on hosting events with a live bee colony to teach people on campus about native bees and to partner with a

local beekeeper at some point in the future.

“I’m excited that there is a group of students on campus that want to learn more about bees,” said Duennes. “I think there’s a lot of interest in them because they’re in the media, and beekeeping is popular. I’m really excited about just the fact that any student wants to learn about bees for fun.”

The idea for a book club is not new at SVC, as there has been a reading club or two that unfortunately fizzled out in the past. Luckily for the book lovers on campus, the new Book Club is starting this semester.

Club president Samantha Lantz, junior education major, started the club hoping that readers would have a place to talk about their favorite books and learn about new books they may have yet to hear of. The handful of avid readers on campus allowed the club to make a return and have high hopes for its future.

“I hope to make the Book Club bigger,” said Lantz. “Some plans will hopefully allow us to go off campus to meet different authors. It will be a life-changing experience if we meet an author and talk to them about how they came up with the book. The other plans that are in the works are to do things like coloring your bookmarkers, going to used book sales, and more.”

Check out the board beside the Wellness Center in the Carey Center for more information on these and other new clubs.

SPORTS

Men's Tennis in full swing

By: John Syms, *Staff Writer*



Matthew Sadusky, junior psychology major, hits the ball for a point. (SOURCE: WATKINS)

On Sunday, April 7, the Saint Vincent College (SVC) men's tennis team pulled off their tenth win of the season against Westminster College with a score of 8-1. Since then, their progress has been mostly positive. As of Saturday, April 20, the Bearcats have won five games in the President Athletic Conference (PAC) and lost three conference matches. Their conference losses were against Grove City College, Geneva College, and Allegheny College. Allegheny was ranked number one in the PAC Men's Tennis preseason poll.

Last year, the Gators managed to win the conference championship for the first time since returning to the PAC. During the 2022-23 Men's Tennis season, the Bearcats ended their regular season with an overall record of 10-7, and a conference record of 6-2. They were the third seed in the PAC playoffs and won a tournament against the sixth-seeded Westminster Titans. In the tournament's semifinals, the Bearcats lost to second-seeded Grove City College, with a score of 5-0.

In the 2023-24 season, SVC won't play against Grove City until April 18, and they have four more conference matches left. The Bearcats were ranked fourth in the preseason polls, and as of April 11, they are third in the PAC standings. This season, SVC has won ten out of one away games and three out of six home games played.

Head Coach Brian Niemiec will be coaching the men's team for the seventh time in his career and thinks the season has been decent so far.

"We have some great wins under our belt and have been able to bounce back from any bumps we've hit thus far, and we still have plenty of tennis in front of us, and we're hoping to keep up the momentum we have now while finishing out the season."

Niemiec has never missed the playoffs as the coach, but he has never won the PAC title. Niemiec has led his team to one conference championship match, as SVC made it to the PAC championship

during the 2021-22 season but lost to the Grove City Wolverines with a score of 5-1.

The head coach strongly believed his squad would make the conference tournament, but he didn't want to overlook the remainder of the schedule.

According to Niemiec, the men's tennis program is looking good for the future, as the team is filled with so much young talent.

"We have a really solid core of young players; four of our eight starters are freshmen, so our future is looking bright. We also aren't going to lose any of our starters to graduation this year, so our doubles teams will have a whole year together under their belt coming back next year, and all of our starters will have at least one year of college experience on their resumes next year which is a rare thing at our level."

Six teams made the PAC tournament, and SVC competed in the first round of the PAC tournament on Monday, April 22.

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		7		5	2		
		9			4		5
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7	8	2	9				
			8	1			7

Team Standings

WOMEN'S SOFTBALL

Team	W	L	Streak
Westminster	19	9	W3
Allegheny	22	8	W1
Geneva	19	13	W7
Waynesburg	17	12	L1
Saint Vincent	16	12	L2
Bethany	24	9	L2
Grove City	18	14	W3
W&J	11	15	L1
Thiel	10	22	L8
Chatam	9	23	W8
Franciscan	1	27	L25

SCHEDULE: @GENEVA 4/23 3:30 PM, GROVE CITY 4/27 1 PM, PAC 5/2 - 5/4

MEN'S BASEBALL

Team	W	L	Streak
W&J	18	9	L1
Waynesburg	20	13	W3
Allegheny	19	9	L2
Grove City	16	10	W1
Westminster	15	16	W4
Thiel	12	17	L1
Chatham	14	15	W4
Saint Vincent	7	19	L1
Geneva	13	17	L2
Bethany	9	22	W1
Franciscan	4	22	L4

SCHEDULE: @GENEVA 4/23 1 PM, ALLEGHENY 4/27 1 PM, THIEL 5/4 1 PM

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

Team	W	L	Streak
W&J	8	6	W8
Grove City	11	4	L1
Allegheny	7	6	W6
Thiel	8	5	W1
Chatham	7	7	W1
Westminster	4	9	W1
Bethany	4	10	L1
Franciscan	2	10	L1
Saint Vincent	2	10	L4
Waynesburg	1	14	L10

SCHEDULE: END OF SEASON TBD

MEN'S LACROSSE

Team	W	L	Streak
Grove City	11	4	W8
Allegheny	8	6	L1
Westminster	10	5	W3
Saint Vincent	6	8	W2
Chatham	8	7	W1
Franciscan	9	6	L1
W&J	3	9	L3
Bethany	5	10	L5
Thiel	3	9	L5

SCHEDULE: @W&J 4/24 7 PM, CHATHAM 4/27 7 PM, PAC 5/1 - 5/4

MEN'S TENNIS

Team	W	L	Streak
Allegheny	12	5	W7
Grove City	12	6	W3
Saint Vincent	14	6	L2
Franciscan	7	10	W1
Geneva	7	5	W1
W&J	7	9	W1
Westminster	2	10	L2
Waynesburg	2	11	W1
Thiel	1	8	L8

SCHEDULE: @W&J 4/23 6 PM, CHATHAM 4/26 7 PM

*Correct as of 4/20/2024

OPINION

Altoona's Addiction

By: Marisa Hooper, *Contributor*

“He was probably around thirteen years old when it all began. Well, at least that is what I would consider the start,” says Dana, a mother of three whose sons have all served time in prison due to drug-related charges and have struggled with addiction for most of their lives. “It was the weed he was smoking... Yeah that was it...”

Her son, Liam, age 38, is the child most afflicted. Liam has been using illicit drugs from the time he was thirteen, when he was caught stuffing marijuana in his locker. His addiction escalated to the time where he was shooting heroin in his cousin's room at eighteen and to when he was running around naked at a local Sheetz, blissfully unaware and high on meth. In tears, his mother cries out, “I feel hopeless for him. There is only so much I can do for him.”

In the world today, there are many more people, like Dana, who feel the hopelessness that drug-use has caused Altoona. Earlier this year, Altoona Mirror printed an article that featured the Blair County Coroner, Patricia Ross, who reported on the drug-related deaths in the county. “We are out of control. I think we are tremendously out of control,” exclaimed Ross when interviewed. Her report showed that in 2022, Blair County broke the record for drug-related deaths. Fox News and CNN have reportedly done investigations on the high rise of drug activity in Philadelphia, which pinpoints the eastern part of the state as the likely cause of the increased drug traffic and deaths in small-city Altoona.

Along with the increase of drug activity, the population of Altoona has been dropping over the past few decades. The city of Altoona used to be a huge railroad town, but as more of the railroads shut down and people lost their jobs, the more people abandoned the city. The people who have taken the places of these hard working railroaders are people partaking in the drug trade, which worsens each year. The traders see Altoona as a half-way point or pit-stop since Altoona is a more centralized location in the state of Pennsylvania.

The reports have been bleak in this past year especially, with Ross reporting that more than 130 overdose deaths have been investigated by her office

in 2020 through the beginning of 2022. In her first year, Ross scanned her computer and found that she had investigated six overdose deaths in 1999. Even worse is that it is not mainly young people who are afflicted with addiction. Ross reveals from data that it is mainly people in their thirties, forties, and fifties who are reported with overdose deaths in 2021. This would make sense, since data has repeatedly shown that Millennials are the generation most affected by the drug epidemic.

The drug problem in Altoona is a widespread injury, inflicting its pain on all people, even the ones who are not shooting up. “My heart breaks for himI am up at night thinking about whether he is going to be dead in the morning,” an anguished Dana chokes out. Bystanders to this crisis experience the same helplessness from addiction. Family members and friends are hoping and waiting for a day of change that may never come. “I used to believe that one day he would actually get clean, but now....Oh, I hate to say it, but he's too long gone.”

She pulls out albums and shows me photos of Liam. He was once a young boy with a goofy smile full of promise. Now, she scrolls through her phone to find an album titled “Identification photos” with more than a dozen pictures of Liam's head-to-toe tattoo-covered body. “I never know when I could use them. Especially when he runs off far from here and I can't be there in an instant. It happened to all his friends, it could happen to him.” Dana had no idea that all her sons would end up suffering from addiction, and she certainly never thought Liam would be this afflicted.

Dana discussed how she would try and convince her son to attend rehab, but her attempts mean nothing without the cooperation of her son. “You can't just force someone into rehab. They have to want to be there on their own accord. When you force someone to be there, they never stay.” When patients dealing with addiction are admitted into a rehabilitation center, they are allowed to sign out when they want to, even if they have not finished their detox period, therapy, and treatments. “With that in mind, did I really think Liam

would stay? They told him that from the very start. So of course he wouldn't.”

Dana's efforts were more widespread than hospital stays. If Liam was not in rehab, Dana reported that he would be living under the 7th and 8th street bridges or in jail. “I would give him clothes when he was on the streets living under the bridges. I wanted to make sure he was warm and had some sort of clothes.” Yet whenever Liam was high, he would give all his clothes away to the other people experiencing homelessness, too high to realize that he needed those essentials. “I would drop over two hundred dollars on him in two hours to buy him supplies,” Dana describes. “But the moment he comes down from his high, he calls me (on the minute phone Dana bought for him) saying how he needs this or needs that. I ask him where the hell the stuff I bought him went, and he tells me that he is the Messiah and gave it to those in need.”

The worst part of the situation is that Dana could never take Liam into her home or give him money, even if she wanted to do so. Dana is a foster mom to Liam's second child and she adopted Liam's third child, whose biological mom died shortly after giving birth from a heroin overdose. All three of his children are to three different women, all of whom suffer from substance abuse themselves. Dana's youngest child was only in the care of his mother for eight months before Dana had to take the baby. “I wouldn't be able to live with myself if something had happened to my grandchild. I couldn't trust his mom for a second. That's the problem with addicts. They are unpredictable.”

Because Dana has one of Liam's sons through the foster care system, she is not even allowed to have Liam near her house. If she refuses to abide by the rules, the child is taken from her custody and placed into a stranger's home. “I knew the best thing for the baby was to adopt him. That way the foster care system couldn't take him or even worse, he wouldn't go back to his mom.” She thought one day that Liam would get better when he saw his children were being raised by someone else, but that desire died the moment he started using after a short stint of being clean.

In regards to giving him money, Dana refuses. “I used to give him money all the time. Ten bucks here. Twenty dollars there.” Now Dana has learned her lesson. What she thought was food money, Liam uses for drugs. “The biggest amount I give him at a time now is two bucks.” According to Dana, two bucks is not enough to buy a hit, but five dollars is the golden ticket for abusers like Liam to purchase their high. “I don’t want to be the one who pays for his death,” Dana shouts. “I used to get mad at my husband for giving him more than two dollars, and I would tell him that he would be to blame if Liam dies.”

It pains Dana when Liam is not himself. “I miss the boy I once knew. And I try telling myself that the baby I held in my arms many moons ago is still with me, but my counselor has explained to me that he is gone.” Liam treats Dana and the family horribly when he is using. From blaming Dana for his addiction, to loitering around her house, and to shouting at the top of his lungs at night screaming how he is the Messiah from the second coming, Liam’s behavior is making Dana debate whether she wants to sever ties with him for good. “The problem is that I will feel like a bad mother if I don’t try to help him. That’s what mothers do: we give and give and give, even if our children resist. We are always standing there, waiting behind them.”

Asking Dana to remember what made her son initially purchase marijuana, Dana could not answer. When asking Michelle Martellacci, a Telephonic Care Manager who works for UPMC Health plan, how drug addiction starts in people, she gave me simple words as answers. “It’s there, it’s easy to get,” Martellacci plainly divulges. “It only takes one or two hits and then you’re hookedyou’re craving it and it is all you think about.”

Most of the people Martellacci works with are the vulnerable that have both Medicaid and Medicare. To qualify for Medicare, patients have to be at least sixty-five years old or have a chronic medical condition which is mostly related to mental illness or substance abuse. For people to access medicaid, they have to have a low income. From Martellacci’s experience, she has seen a strong correlation with mental illness and substance abuse. “I see it everyday. I feel like people only know half of the problem going on today with drugs. People need to know more.” The “more” that Martellacci is talking about is how people with substance abuse disorders are more likely to be incarcerated and have a mental illness.

Incarceration is especially prominent in Blair County, where District Attorney Pete Weeks stated in an interview with the Altoona Mirror that his key focus for the drug problem in Altoona was putting gang leaders behind bars for a “very, very long time.” Long incarceration sentences are supported by the judicial system of Blair County with its method of keeping drug lords out of the picture for several decades. Despite the logic behind the long incarceration theory with drug ring leaders, this approach puts the dealers in state prisons, not the users. “Liam has only been to jail for ninety days. That was his longest prison sentence.” According to Dana, the jail time was not even from purchasing drugs, but from not appearing in court for public intoxication.

When asking Dana if she believes serving jail time will help Liam, she replies, “It keeps him off the streets. It gives him shelter. But it only makes him detox for a certain amount of time and then he gets released and he is back at it.” The National Institute on Drug Abuse agrees with people like Dana on their stance with drug use imprisonment. Dr. Nora Volkow expresses that “We have known for decades that addiction is a medical condition—a treatable brain disorder—not a character flaw or a form of social deviance. Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence supporting that position, drug addiction continues to be criminalized.

Blair County District Attorney Pete Weeks has explained, there has to be an “appropriate step toward” solving the drug crisis in the area. Perhaps if Altoona is not pursuing the strict jail time route, it needs to invest in the treatment plans for those with a substance abuse problem. Leaning on insight from Dr. Nora Volkow, Michelle Martellacci seconds her statement. “There needs to be something done. In my assigned region, I make sure I call my patients every day to check in on them and see what they need.” Martellacci makes health risk assessment calls for her patients whenever they are discharged. Some of these patients are discharged from in-patient or out-patient rehabilitation centers. “If they need to be referred to more therapy, I connect them with an agency. If they need a prescription, I reach out to their primary care physician. But I can only do so much. The rest is up to them.”

Mental illness has a huge impact on those with substance abuse. “There are so many of my patients with addictions that report having at least one mental health disorder. I have a feeling that one leads to another.” People with mental health disorders turn to drugs as

an outlet. Some people are not provided with the proper treatment needed for their illness, so abusing substances is their coping mechanism. This is a sad reality that our area is now faced with today. The fact that people who need real treatment choose illicit drugs shows that people are desperate and unsure of where to seek help.

There is hope for this population. From hearing the story of other Altoona residents John and Miranda, there is proof that some people do recover. John started using drugs because he was anxious, so he was sold weed from a fellow classmate. “I started going downhill quickly from there,” John shares. “I feel like smoking only made [my anxiety] even worse. John then began to hang out with the wrong crowd. There, that group introduced him to meth and cocaine.

“I was in complete shock,” says Miranda, his mom. “John was such a fun-loving, goofy kid, but once he got into the hard stuff, I didn’t recognize him anymore.” The breaking point in the eyes of Miranda is when one of the users in his group beat him up. Hospitalized, Miranda knew that she needed to do something for her son. “He was going to fail his senior year if I didn’t do something.” Miranda took him out of school and placed him in an in-patient rehabilitation center. “He came back a little more like himself. I am sure John still struggles, but he is moving in the right direction. A positive one.”

“Receiving treatment certainly has helped me get my life back on track. Looking back on myself, it feels like I was throwing it away for a while. I know I still have a long road to recovery, but I will get there in time,” John concludes. Altoona just has to assure that its victims step foot on the long road to recovery as John mentions. As a society, no change can transpire unless there is work done to seek out those who are in the midst of a battle with addiction before they lose.

I certainly hope that one day Altoona will see the numbers it once saw with overdose deaths before the crisis began. These interviewees hold a special place in my heart, as Dana and Liam are my cousins and Miranda and Liam are close family friends. I know for sure that I am not the only one who has seen loved ones suffer at the hands of drugs. Not only for the sake of my family and friends, but for my community as a whole, we must work together to raise one another up from the woes of addiction.

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