

Mother relates story of her son's addiction

Sandy Baiocco watched as police used a Taser to shock her teenage son in her kitchen and thought to herself she was looking at a different person than the little boy she raised.

Baiocco told a crowd of advocates, substance abuse recovery coaches, law enforcement and other public officials how her son, a straight A student who played club soccer at Idaho State University, was overcome by addiction and entangled in the criminal justice system.

Baiocco was one of several presenters who engaged in a community discussion March 29 about prescription drug addiction. The goal of the forum, organized by Andra Hansen and her Brigham Young University-Idaho communication students, was to link public officials into a dialogue and try to find solutions to addiction issues.

Baiocco has channeled the strife of her son's addiction into running a substance abuse recovery center called Center for Hope. She said 3,000 people have taken advantage of its classes and peer support since the center officially opened in September. Baiocco said the month of March saw 579 visitors to the center.

Opioid addiction is a local, state and national problem. In 2015, 52,000 Americans died of a drug overdose, nearly two-thirds of which were linked to opioid drugs such as OxyContin and Percocet, reports the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug overdoses killed more people in 2015 than car crashes and gun homicides combined. That's a stark rise from the 6,000 opioid drug overdose deaths in 1999.

Idaho's overdose deaths are also on the rise. The state reported 218 overdose deaths in 2015, up from 207 in 2013. The state's drug-induced death rate more than tripled between 2000 and 2013, the Idaho Office of Drug Policy reported. In 2013, an Idahoan died every 39 hours from drugs, the Office of Drug Policy said.

Baiocco said her eldest child of three entered his teen years as a promising student and athlete. He suffered a knee injury at 16 that required surgery. Baiocco said she remembers her son comically laughing about being high on painkillers after surgery.

"He said 'Oh my gosh mom, I've never felt this good.' That should have been a warning to me. What we didn't know is he never felt normal and that he never felt good," Baiocco said.

In the eight years since then Baiocco's son has ranged from success to relapse. He's used many different kinds of substances, from over-the-counter to illegal drugs. She said her son at first got high any way he could such as crushing up morning glory seeds and eating them or drinking cough syrup. Then he ventured into harder illegal drugs and ended up behind bars. Baiocco worried her son would wind up dead or in prison and moved the family from their Florida home in 2010 to Idaho. Shortly after, Baiocco said her son burglarized her neighbor's home.

IMPulse

Intermountain Media Pulse

A TRUETONE INCORPORATED COMPANY

**news
CLIP**

11623 Lake Shore
Nampa, ID 83686
(208) 880-9814

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Post Register

Idaho Falls, Idaho

Monday April 10, 2017

by Tom Holm

Page 2 of 2

Baiocco's son did several rider programs, an intensive rehabilitation program at a minimum security prison, and completed the criminal thinking and substance abuse focused Wood Court but relapsed after every program.

"Every time he's gone through these programs he's relapsed within 36 hours of getting out," Baiocco said. "He's in jail because he got two DUIs and he feels like he is pretty much a monster ... He's not a monster; he's a really sick person."

Looking back on the years of watching her son dive deeper into drug use only to emerge sober and then relapse again, Baiocco said she recognizes substance abuse as an illness that can't be treated by "tough love" such as cutting ties with a loved one.

"I think I've learned from him not to be judgmental. We're all just people on our own personal journeys," Baiocco said. "It's a disease. I wish people would be more compassionate and not shame others for it; you wouldn't shame someone with diabetes."

Hansen, a BYU-I communications professor, organizes similar discussions every semester with her students around a central issue. Last November a different class focused on prisoner reentry. She said the purpose of gathering cops, attorneys and public officials to hear about how addiction affects individuals creates a broader understanding of an issue.

"We believe by bringing people with different perspectives together we can better recognize interdependent solutions required to address complex issues," Hansen said. "Perhaps by bringing you together ... we can better address a problem that's causing a lot of pain for people in southeast Idaho."

For Baiocco's son, addiction has been a painful nearly decade-long struggle. She said he asked his sentencing judge to place him in prison because he feels like he's lost control of his life. He was sentenced to prison on a probation violation from a 2011 burglary conviction. His next parole hearing is in July. She said, off drugs, her son is a kind and caring man. But when he had to be forcefully subdued in her kitchen by law enforcement, he was raging — having taken multiple psychoactive benzodiazepine pills — and grabbed a knife. She said that's not her son when he's sober.

"He's a sweet and loving young man. This is not who he is. He can't help it," Baiocco said. "If I could go back and (do) things differently I would not have freaked out, not detach from him, not be angry at him and not blame him ... I'd make sure he knows we just love him."

###

Copyright 2017 Post Register