

Owen County has always been the place I call home. I've met wonderful people and continue to meet more people who always seem to amaze me. I've made many memories with loved ones here and continue to make even more. Owen County may not seem much on the outside but it's the inside that counts. The community of people here has the power to do anything they set their minds to.

Yet there seems to be a shadow lurking in the background. A dark figure moving from unsuspecting victim to the next without hesitation or emotion. This silent killer is what we know as opioids. Opioids have become an epidemic across the nation, now they're hitting our home. Quiet, peaceful nights that are interrupted by the alarming ring of a phone just to find out your loved one has overdosed. Busy days that seem to never end that suddenly come to a stop from a text telling you the bad news. It's a scary, but very real truth that seems to just grow larger by the day. In the United States, 100 people die a day by opioid abuse and 1,000 more are hospitalized and these numbers only increase with time. In addition, Owen County alone had 42 cases of acute drug poisoning, or overdosing, and 55 nondependent abuses, and 30 drug dependencies, all in 2016. These statistics become even scarier when there's no in-patient facilities within Owen County nor are there any hospitals. This explains why Owen County has a total of 65 deaths related to drug abuse alone.

Thankfully, when all else fails, we still have hope. The Owen County Collaborative Addiction Treatment Initiative (OCCATI) is a consortium addressed to solving the issue of opioid abuse in Owen County. They are funded by a Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) grant which are federal funds specifically meant to help rural communities like ourselves. Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) is an evidence based practice that is used to identify, reduce, and prevent problematic use, abuse, and dependence on alcohol and illicit drugs. Implementing SBIRT at the high school level could be critical to defeating the abuse of opioids in our county.

The Owen County Drug Coalition has recently given me, and three other of my peers, the opportunity to go to Washington D.C. for a week to participate in classes provided by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA). During these classes, we learned what we could do to prepare ourselves for situations involving opioids and other harmful substances. The trip was a learning experience and it reinforced the claims of opioids being harmful with statistics and facts.

I'm positive my peers have all faced opioids in one way or another. They or their loved ones may have become addicted to opioids. After all, half of all arrests in Owen County are drug related. It's not always easy to ask for help, especially when surrounded by teens who may be quick to pass judgement. However, the price is too steep to pay not to ask for help. I've found those who admit to their faults and seek help are more respected than those who end up in critical condition because of drug abuse. If an opioid addiction does not take away your life it will certainly take away your money and your time.

As a citizen of Owen County, I plead all fellow citizens to not crumple under the weight of the epidemic that plagues us, but use it as a stepping stone in order to improve life for all future generations of Owen County. Together, we have the power to not only reduce the opioid epidemic, but to make our home opioid free.

Join the Owen County Collaborative Addiction Treatment Initiative on Monday, April 29, 4:30-6:30 pm (with dinner provided) at the Owen County Library to get updated on the grant and their plan and add your input. Together we can make a difference. For more information, contact Carolyn Noe at 859-572-6332 or noec2@nku.edu. To register for the April 29 event, visit nku.edu/ihi.

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