



Shattering the Stigma of Addiction . . .

First off, what is addiction anyway? Substance use disorder (SUD) is a complex condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite its harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s) such as alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or other illicit drugs to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired. People keep using the substance even when they know it is causing or will cause problems. The most severe SUDs are sometimes called addictions.

Healthcare has effective tools including medications for opioid and alcohol use that could prevent many of the deaths associated with addiction, but they are not being utilized widely enough, and many people who could benefit do not even seek them out! Why? One important reason is the stigma that surrounds people with addiction.

People with the disease of addiction continue to be blamed for their illness. Even though medicine long ago reached a consensus that addiction is a complex brain disorder with behavioral components, the public and even many in healthcare and the justice system continue to view it as a result of moral weakness and flawed character. People with addiction internalize this stigma – feeling shame and even refusing to seek treatment as a result.

Stigma and Addiction: A History

Early in the 20th century, morphine, cocaine and opium were common treatments for such diseases as headaches, teething, and menstrual cramps. The 1914 Harrison Act (sought to tax opium and coca imports) brought to question the legality of prescribing medicines containing these ingredients to soothe opiate dependence. The 1919 Supreme Court decision *Webb v. U.S.* deemed it illegal for physicians to dispense narcotics to patients with addiction! Thus, drug use was pushed into the shadows and severed the concept of addiction as a medical condition in the public eye.

Understanding the history is important because it marks the moment when substance use became seen as an illicit behavior and the language to describe the condition was derogatory!

Breaking the Stigma of Addiction means Destroying the Language Surrounding it

"Junkie" "Crackhead" "Alcoholic" "Addict" . . . these are only a handful of terms used to describe those persons suffering with the disease of addiction! I was at a women's group meeting recently and someone used the term "my addict sister!" Gee, we don't use the term "my cancer daughter" or "my MS sister!" These persons are people who are sick—they are NOT their diseases!! Language has the power to fracture the support systems that people with addiction need desperately for recovery. Terms like "co-dependency" and "hitting rock bottom" mislead families into taking a hard-line approach toward loved ones with substance use disorder when we now know that consistency and support are requirements for long-term changes in behavior.

Advocates in the scientific community and media industry are working to educate health professionals regarding medically accurate language in order to stop reports and portrayals that reinforce bias. Let's continue to change the language and shatter the stigma concerning this deadly disease that is killing roughly 250 people in the US every day...so that when a loved one is ready to receive treatment, all one has to do is "raise your hand!"



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 2:00 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

A Message from the Resiliency Work Group

Self-compassion: If you're feeling shame or guilt surrounding your addiction and mental health challenges, it's a perfect time to practice self-compassion.

While we work together as a community to end the stigma surrounding substance use and mental health struggles, think about the idea of becoming your own best friend in your recovery process. If you find yourself hearing or feeling judged from others—whether it be family or friends, social media posts, or health care providers—practicing self-compassion is an invaluable tool. We can give ourselves the same kindness and care we would give a friend. You can write in a journal the things you might say or do to comfort someone. Then read it back and allow yourself to feel those words and apply them throughout your day. You might tell someone they are loved and worthy. You might suggest they practice self-care by going for a walk, taking a bath, watching an uplifting movie, or making an appointment with a therapist who understands their issues. Then realize that you can do all these things for YOU—knowing that stigma is just a misunderstanding that is beginning to melt in the light of education and evidence-based information about mental health and addiction. Take faith in the fact that there are people out there who understand, and who can give you the compassionate care you need to heal. Here at the Saving Lives Task Force, we care, we understand, and we support you. Want more information or training on Resilience? Contact Susan Lee @ leesu1255@gmail.com.

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

ONGOING EVENTS

■ SMART Recovery OBX Addiction Support Group

When: Mondays, 6-7pm for 60 minutes

Where: Nags Head Treatment Center,
2224 S. Croatan Hwy., Nags Head

Facilitators: Scott and Katy Haslar,
smartrecoveryobx@gmail.com

Visit our homepage at <https://www.facebook.com/SMART-Recovery-OBX-102545492070416>

SMART Recovery (Self Management and Recovery Training) is a non-profit, science-backed program that helps people recover from addictive behaviors. It can be used as an alternative or in addition to 12-step programs (such as AA and NA). In SMART, we focus on the present and what you want for your future rather than the past. Being in recovery is individual - it means different things to different people, so in SMART, we encourage you to define what recovery is for yourself.

■ Alcoholics Anonymous: Meetings 7 days a week.

Visit the website AAOBX.com for current virtual meeting schedule

Outer Banks AA Hotline 252-256-0850

<https://aaobx.com/>

■ Outer Banks Alateen, Outer Banks Alateen Meeting, Saturdays, 10-11am, Kitty Hawk Baptist Church,

email alateen@alanonobx.com for information. Alateen is a fellowship of young people whose lives have been affected by alcoholism in a family member or friend.

■ OBX Nar-anon is a means of coping with the insanity brought about from having a family member or friend struggling with addiction. For more details, please contact Holly Henry West at 252-489-7778.

■ Recovery Learning Circle

A peer facilitated, virtual support, coping skills and recovery planning group for everyone. We will be learning awareness and coping skills for dealing with depression, anxiety, isolation, substance use, stress, emotions, interpersonal skills and mindfulness. We develop awareness of our own strengths and priorities, and learn from and support each other in recovery by building hope, empowerment, resilience, personal responsibility and support.

Call Dave Edmonds 252-305-4056 or
David.Edmonds@darenc.com

■ Women of Worth

Groups are being held virtually on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00am-12:00pm. The groups will focus on recovery from the evidence-based curriculum, "Helping Women Recover."

Please contact Catisha Bryant at catisha.bryant@darenc.com for more information or if you would like to join the group.

■ Breaking Through Task Force, 2nd Tuesday 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.

Contact Rebecca.woods@darenc.com
www.breakthestigmaobx.com

■ Dare Community Collaborative, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 1:30-2:30 pm

A partnership among providers and families of youth and adults with mental health issues and/or substance use issues. Together, they identify services, support needs and try to find ways to meet those needs.

Contact Keith Letchworth,
keith.letchworth@trilliumnc.org

It Takes a Village by Ward Blanchard

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and in my hometown of Manteo, NC, that still rings true. I know, because they raised me right here on Roanoke Island, a product of Dare County. From teachers like Mrs. Wilson in 3rd grade to Coach Hendrix and local businesses like the Phillips family and their Island Pharmacy; they all played a role in my upbringing.

Looking back, the authentic connection we had, a feeling of family that my "village" brought me and others... Well, that goes beyond what I can express on paper. I'll be forever grateful for the sense of community and safety that I got to grow up in while living in Dare County.

However, just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to save one too. For many, the lives and development of people we care about are being destroyed by a different pandemic — the disease of addiction.

The impact of COVID-19 over the last 18 months has shined a light on the rampant and devastating effect that substance use and mental health issues are having on our communities. In 2017, 70,000 deaths in the U.S. were opioid-related; that's more than the number of Americans who died during the Vietnam War.

Addiction and mental illness are diseases of "isolation" that our healthcare system just isn't properly equipped to treat. It's lacking in approach, education, and affordable resources.

In a time where quarantine, social distance, and isolation are words we hear routinely, there's an even greater risk. The CDC projects that since August of 2020, approximately 90,000 people in this country have lost their lives because of opioid use. This stat tells just one part of the story; if we included all other deaths linked to alcohol, illegal drugs, and mental illness, it would be too much to bear.

To every village, our children need us. While there's no magic cure, it's proven that people can and do recover. September is National Recovery Month, so there's no better time to encourage and destigmatize treatment for addiction and mental health issues. These are diseases that can affect anyone, regardless of gender, race, age, or socioeconomic status. Thankfully, recovery is for everyone too.

I believe that when treating addiction, there are four vital components to begin with: community, connection, family, and fellowship. More than anywhere I've ever been — I know Dare County has an infinite supply of each to offer its people. To treat the current addiction epidemic in Dare County, the solution requires empathy and acceptance towards those individuals and families suffering from this disease—coupled with united and collaborative efforts from all community stakeholders working toward the same goal of making recovery possible for everyone.

If the founding pillars of our community come together, empowered to have an open, honest and direct conversation of how our amazing "village" of Dare County can work together: law enforcement, school system, government resources, public and private healthcare systems, religious institutions, volunteers, friends, neighbors, and loved ones. Then, we will create true change, true action...through true service to others. That's the village I know of...

Teens, Drugs and Rock & Roll: Part 1

Okay, so we didn't really talk a lot about music, but earlier this year a small group of First Flight High School students agreed to discuss local attitudes toward alcohol, marijuana, vapes, peer pressure and related issues. Much appreciation to Steve Hanf, FFHS Journalism Teacher (and, incidentally, representing Dare County as Teacher of the Year) for helping make this discussion possible. This article reflects the consensus of the interviewees with direct quotes where applicable. As a disclaimer, this article is a reflection of individual experiences. This article is not meant to be any more scientific than putting a finger in the bath water to guess the temperature.

Most teens in Dare are offered to try marijuana between the ages of 12 and 14. Some people are exposed sooner than that. The summer of students' freshman year seems to be a popular time to start trying new things: "they feel older" and the "transition to high school is an interesting time."

The number of times a person is offered marijuana before they try it depends on the individual. If a person feels the need to "fit in more" they are more likely to try it. It also depends on the person who is offering it. If it is a person that "you've known your entire life, you may be more open to it." Some people say, "I'll never do this" and others say, 'Sure, I'll try.' " Because of the local attitudes toward marijuana use, it does not take many times being offered to try it. Peer pressure can play a role, but not as big a role as "conditioning" as one student called it.

"It's like you have a friend or two who does it and then they kind of talk about it as better. They talk about the benefits of it. 'Oh, I can sleep better' or 'Oh, I can study better.' It is not them directly saying 'try this' or 'do this' but it is building up to it so once it is offered the person is more comfortable with it."

Marijuana is usually first offered to a student by someone in their peer group: so less of a Senior offering it to a Freshman and more of Freshmen offering it to each other. Someone in your friend group usually offers it to you first. Exceptions might be at a party where marijuana is being used or if an established friendship exists between the older person and the younger person.

Attitudes toward marijuana come primarily from friends.

"Most people have seen ads or social media campaigns or heard their parents talk about it for a long time. It can get repetitive. But hearing from your friend that 'this is okay' or 'this isn't okay' is a bit more impactful because those are people you've been around. You can relate to them more. They are someone who understands who you are a little bit more."

In the second part of this interview, we will explore: how impactful drug education programs are, do marijuana users worry about adverse effects, how anti-drug messaging can have a greater impact and more.

