

February 24, 2015

Comments from the Executive Director

In my role as the Executive Director it is my responsibility to make sure that you have the information you need to make decisions and set direction for the Board. Over the 47 year history of this Board, we have set the bar high, aiming to bring the most effective prevention, early intervention and treatment services to this community.

Before you begin your deliberation on the recovery home at Greendale, I would like to express my sincere apology for the pain and anguish that has resulted from our efforts to open a recovery home in Findlay. Many have been hurt by the descriptions of individuals in the Greendale neighborhood as well as individuals and families dealing with the disease of addiction. While I know that everyone's fear and emotion about the home is their reality, our Board and the staff of this Board has not, and does not encourage or support judging others.

I would like to thank each individual who came forth in support of our efforts. I hope that whatever decision is made here today, your support will continue.

I would like to thank each person who took time to attend any of the meetings that were held related to the Greendale property.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Ministerial Association for providing an opportunity for our community to seek a resolution and learn new techniques for having critical conversations on issues that are of concern to our residents.

Perhaps there is no scarier word than "heroin". It brings to mind needles, overdoses and death. It tears families apart, separates mothers and fathers from their children, contributes to unemployment, increases the use of our jails and our emergency rooms and puts fear in our hearts. And while it is true that an individual makes a choice when they use a drug (illicit or prescription); no one chooses to become addicted.

Twenty five years ago, it was the rare occasion that the public mental health and substance abuse system had individuals addicted to heroin seek services. In the last five years, the landscape has changed dramatically.

Today, five people die every day in Ohio as a result of accidental overdose. There is a direct correlation between the number of deaths and in the increased use of opiate prescription medication. In the last five years, the number of deaths in our community as a result of overdose and/or suicide has more than doubled. In 2014, the number of deaths in this community related to overdose doubled once again. With each death, the urgency to make needed changes becomes greater.

The crackdown on the prescribing of opiates has resulted in an increased use of heroin. Heroin is an opiate, with the same chemical structure as a prescribed opiate. 80% of individuals who are addicted to heroin were first addicted to prescription medication. Once they could no longer get the prescription medication, they turned to heroin.

Every community in Ohio is struggling to get the necessary services in place to address the needs of individuals who are addicted to opiates. Hancock County is no exception.

In the spring of 2013, the ADAMHS Board engaged the consulting services of Dr. Michael Flaherty, a nationally known expert in the field of addictions to help our community. With his help, our Board has made a commitment to develop a Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC). We started with a large community forum to engage as many members of the community as possible with our efforts. From this, The Board adopted a "Preamble" that includes principles of recovery as well as components of a ROSC. This work was then translated into a ROSC Implementation Framework that has become the Board's Strategic Plan. The Board chose this direction because research demonstrates ROSC represents the best science has to offer to assist individuals with achieving and maintaining recovery from substance abuse and mental health disorders.

A ROSC requires the development of multiple services; the implementation of new assessment and intervention strategies; mobilization of recovery supports; prevention and early intervention; and ongoing evaluation of the Board's efforts. Recovery Housing is just one component of a ROSC. In order to succeed in the transformation of our local system, a ROSC Leadership Team made of up individuals throughout the community was developed along with multiple sub-committees.

While we have attempted to communicate this transformation via newsletters; newspaper articles; public forums, etc., our recent efforts to implement recovery housing have made it abundantly clear that we have not done enough.

Of the 50+ people involved in our various committees, no one predicted the level of resistance and opposition that has been demonstrated by a very vocal faction of the Greendale community. After nearly two months of meetings, large and small, I would like to share the following as you contemplate the decision before you.

- 1. Members of the Neighborhood have brought forth multiple concerns about having such a home on Greendale. Each concern raised was taken seriously, carefully reviewing the science and legal premise for each. Based on the research conducted, placing the home on Greendale is not illegal; does not place youth at risk; and will not decrease property values.**
- 2. The process that was used to purchase the home has been heavily criticized. More specifically, there is a sense that members of the neighborhood should have had a say in the decision about locating the home on Greendale. I want to reassure all Board members that we have used the same process in the acquisition of each of the 11 properties owned by the Board. This process is used to ensure that the individuals represented by the Board have the same rights as you and I when it comes to housing, which does not provide for neighbors having to give permission.**

- 3. I clearly underestimated the level of stigma surrounding individuals who suffer with the disease of addiction as well as how strong a motivator fear can be. To all individuals and families who struggle with this disease, please know that no matter what decision is made today, the Board will proceed with efforts to implement a Recovery Oriented System of Care, including recovery homes. We know that the best way to combat this stigma is through education and awareness. There will be increased efforts by this Board to educate and make the community aware of what a substance abuse disorder is; the extent of the impact; and the treatment and recovery supports that are needed to assist individuals in obtaining and sustaining recovery.**

- 4. Irrespective of where any recovery home is placed in this community, we cannot send a message to our youth that they need to be afraid of individuals in recovery. There are individuals in recovery everywhere: in our schools; churches; places we eat, shop; play, etc. As a result, children are exposed to persons in recovery on a daily basis. It is for this reason that there is no literature or research to support that a recovery home not be located close to a school-they are at no more greater risk than anywhere else in the community. Recovery is something to be celebrated and supported, not feared.**

I have faith in the law that created this Board. The members of this Board represent the brain-trust of the community for making decisions on behalf of some of our most vulnerable citizens. I sincerely thank you for the time and effort you have put into the decision that lies ahead. Whatever decision is made, I beg the Board to stay united in their efforts on their behalf and to hold respect for the decision of each individual Board member.

I am aware that no matter what decision is made about the proposed recovery home, there will be individuals who are unhappy with the result. Whatever the

outcome, we are each challenged to help our fellow residents and their families who are struggling and in need of support as they face the horrible disease of addiction. I urge everyone to become involved, at whatever level they can as we seek health and recovery for our community.

Comments prepared by Precia Stuby