

Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force Report 2014



Overview of the Epidemic



The number of deaths directly related to prescription drug abuse increased nearly 500% from 1999 to 2013. These accidental deaths now outnumber traffic crash fatalities in both Ohio and across the nation. Prescription pain relievers continue to be the key factor behind this epidemic and are responsible for more overdose fatalities statewide than heroin and cocaine combined.

2010

Enough prescription opioids were prescribed to medicate every American adult around the clock for a month

2011

Nearly five Ohioans died each day due to a drug overdose, an average of one person every five hours

2013

Cuyahoga County lost 340 residents to opioids

Fatal and non-fatal drug poisonings cost Ohioans \$3.6 billion annually, or \$303 per resident.

Contributing factors that led to this epidemic include:



- Changes made to clinical pain management guidelines during the late 1990s
- Improper storage and disposal of unused medication
- Marketing medications directly to consumers
- Over-prescribing
- Substance abuse and underlying mental health issues
- Widespread diversion of medications such as: doctor shopping, illegal online pharmacies, and the establishment and recent closure of pill mills

Steps taken to reduce the use of pain pills may have inadvertently produced a dramatic rise in heroin use.



The Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force

The Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force, under the leadership of the **Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH)**, has played a significant role in bringing people together to help fight this growing public health epidemic and reduce the number of deaths.

Dedicated professionals from areas such as drug treatment & recovery, education, health care, law enforcement, medicine, mental health services, prevention specialists, and public health collaborate at the local, state and national level to share information and effect change.

MISSION

To serve the residents of Cuyahoga County by actively working to raise public awareness, promote community action, and provide education related to the dangers and devastating effects of drug abuse.

Recognizing that addiction is a disease, the members strive to increase awareness of the dangers associated with the misuse of opiates as well as to implement strategies and policies that will have a positive impact.

The Opiate Task Force received the 2014 Exemplar Award from **Recovery Resources**, a Cleveland-based non-profit organization devoted to helping people with mental illness, alcoholism, drug and other addictions. This award honors members of the community who have demonstrated a long and distinguished record of exemplary service and support in the areas of prevention and education.

CCBH was chosen by the **Ohio Department of Health** to be one of three recipients of the Centers for Disease Control's Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant. From 2014 to 2018, CCBH will receive a total of \$400,000 to cover project activities. These dollars reflect ODH's commitment to meet the needs of Cuyahoga County residents through specific programming implemented at the local level.

The goal of this grant is to significantly reduce fatalities associated with prescription drug abuse through the development of comprehensive, multi-faceted, population-based programs and policies.

VISION

To create a healthier community by reducing accidental fatalities associated with opiate abuse through collaborative partnerships that focus on prevention, treatment, and recovery.

CCBH has partnered with several members of the Opiate Task Force to fulfill the goals of the grant.

First year sub-grantees include:

The MetroHealth System to provide physician education on proper prescribing guidelines, to increase utilization of the **Ohio Automated Prescription Reporting System**, a database that can help prevent doctor shopping, overprescribing, and abuse, and the expansion of Naloxone distribution sites.

The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office to revamp the existing structure of the **Poison Death Review Committee** to be inclusive of prescription opiates. The data that is gained from this committee will be used to target future education and prevention efforts.

Baldwin Wallace University and Case Western Reserve University to conduct assessments, provide education to faculty and staff, and create policies geared towards reducing prescription drug abuse on college campuses.

We have also partnered with **Discount Drug Mart** and **Marc's** to provide outreach to their pharmacy customers. Methods include in-person distribution of relevant educational material as well as print and social media messaging to raise awareness of the prevalence of the prescription drug epidemic.

How the Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force is addressing this problem

Drug Court

Following the appointment of **Judge David Matia**, the **Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court** began building its **Drug Court Program**. The goal was to help participants break the cycle of recidivism by offering either incarceration or participation in an extensive drug treatment program. Initial participants were accepted into the program in May 2009.

To date, over 350 participants have entered the treatment program in lieu of incarceration. In 2013 alone, the court was referred 118 cases, 87 were admitted into the program, and a total of 54 clients successfully graduated. Supported by an intensive treatment program and the offer of access to lifelong resources, these individuals were able to return to their communities as sober citizens, parents, and employees.



Proper Disposal

Judge Matia and the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office were instrumental in the establishment of permanent medication drop boxes in over 33 local communities. The drop boxes, located inside local police departments, are a permanent and sustainable way for residents to properly dispose of their unwanted or expired medication, significantly reducing the risk of misuse or theft. Of those who reported misusing prescription drugs, 70% got the drugs from a relative or friend.

To locate a drug drop box in your area, please call 211 or visit:

www.rxdrugdropbox.org | www.sheriff.cuyahogacounty.us/rx



The National Drug Take Back Day, locally promoted as **Operation Medicine Cabinet**, is a semi-annual event which allows residents to safely dispose of unwanted and expired medications. Through its partnership with the **Drug Enforcement Agency**, the county sheriff's office, and local law enforcement, the effort has removed over 40,000 pounds of potentially dangerous medication from medicine cabinets across Northeast Ohio. Following collection, the medication is incinerated, which keeps it out of the landfills and waterways as well as the hands of abusers.

Youth Prevention Education

Supported by funding from **Cardinal Health**, a sub-committee of the **Opiate Task Force** focused heavily on youth-led prevention in order to raise awareness about the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs, to develop multi-media messages pertaining to the impact of prescription drugs, and to increase advocacy skills.

Contrary to many media messages, state and local surveys continue to show that the majority of middle and high school kids continue to make healthy choices and do not partake in the use of drugs and alcohol. **The Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network**, a leadership group made up of high school students, developed the **"We are the Majority"** theme to get that positive message out to their peers.

In June 2013, eight students from across Cuyahoga County had the opportunity to attend the **Youth to Youth International Conference** held in Columbus, Ohio. This four day conference assisted both youth and the professionals who serve them by offering new strategies and techniques in prevention and program development. The students formed bonds with fellow Ohio students, allowing them the unique opportunity to continue to strengthen their prevention messaging and programs in their respective schools.

In the fall of 2013, several events were aligned with the **"We are the Majority"** theme. Youth leadership training was held on September 21 at **Cleveland State University**, engaging over 100 young people from across Cuyahoga County in youth-led prevention initiatives focused on prescription drug abuse.

Participating organizations had an opportunity to receive a \$500 stipend for training about the implementation of the **pHARMING Effects** program. The eight groups that were selected gathered at the **Cuyahoga County Board of Health** on November 16.

Research shows that youth are more likely to change behavior based on peer influence rather than adults presentations. The **pHARMING Effects** utilizes the voice and leadership of youth to reach other youth and deter risk taking behavior through skits, videos, and audience participation. Following this training, the **pHARMING Effects** program has been delivered to over 1000 school-age youth.

For more information please visit:

www.cardinalhealth.com/us/en/generationrx/

Organized by the **Youth Advisory Committee of the Ohio State University Extension**, a Youth Summit was held November 9 at **Cleveland State University**. Topics were comprehensive and included healthy living, entrepreneurship, youth voice, social issues, and service opportunities. All sessions were youth-led.



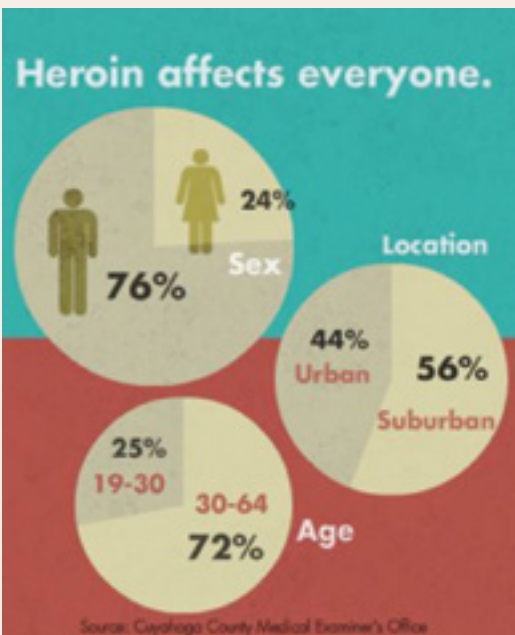
On April 30, over 100 young people from across Cuyahoga County took part in the **"We are the Majority"** rally to celebrate their decision to stay alcohol and drug free. Students, youth leaders, school officials, parents, and professionals gathered at the **Cleveland Public Library**, heard prevention messaging and participated in teambuilding activities. Afterward, they marched to City Hall to listen to speakers who inspired them to continue to make good choices.

Among the speakers were **Judge Michael Astrab**, **County Medical Examiner Dr. Gilson**, **Judge Michael Ryan**, **Jaclyn and Nolan Brandt of Robby's Voice**, several law enforcement officials and city council representatives.

These initiatives were developed in collaboration with the **Community Awareness and Prevention Association**, the **Cuyahoga County Board of Health**, **Drug Awareness and Prevention**, **Ohio State Extension of Cuyahoga County**, the **SAY Coalition**, and the **Westshore Enforcement Bureau**.

To view coverage of the rally provided by WKYC Channel 3, please visit:

<http://www.wkyc.com/story/news/local/cuyahoga-county/2014/04/30/drug-free-we-are-the-majority-community-awareness-and-prevention/8532615>



Understanding the shift towards heroin

Local heroin use is not only on the rise, it is taking lives at unprecedented levels. According to the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner, heroin is now the most commonly-abused drug associated with overdose deaths in Cuyahoga County.

The shift toward heroin is due to a number of factors:

- Increasing availability throughout Ohio
- The shutdown of southern Ohio pill mills
- More hospitals adopting proper prescribing guidelines

With fewer pills on the street, heroin has become a cheaper alternative for abusers. Although prescription pills are still readily available, the increased presence and purity of heroin as well as changes in the formulation of some pills to make them tamper resistant have caused users to make the switch.

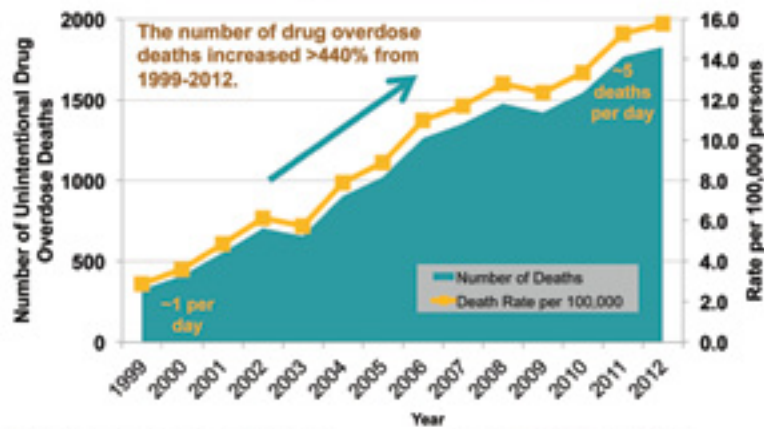
For more information, please visit the microsite produced by the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office:

www.letsfaceheroin.com

**Cuyahoga County lost
194 residents
to heroin in 2013**

**Heroin deaths
have risen nearly 400%
since 2007**

Ohio Deaths and Death Rates per 100,000 Due to Unintentional Drug Overdose by Year, 1999 - 2012¹



¹Source: ODH Office of Vital Statistics, ODH Violence and Injury Prevention Program

Local steps taken to combat the epidemic

Over 600 public officials, medical and legal professionals, educators, addiction specialists and individuals whose lives have been impacted by heroin gathered at the **Cleveland Clinic** on November 21 in an effort to find practical solutions to the region's heroin epidemic.

A **Community Action Plan** was formulated over the course of several planning meetings and finalized during the summit.

The Action Plan is divided into four specific areas:

Prevention and Education | Healthcare Policy | Law Enforcement | Treatment

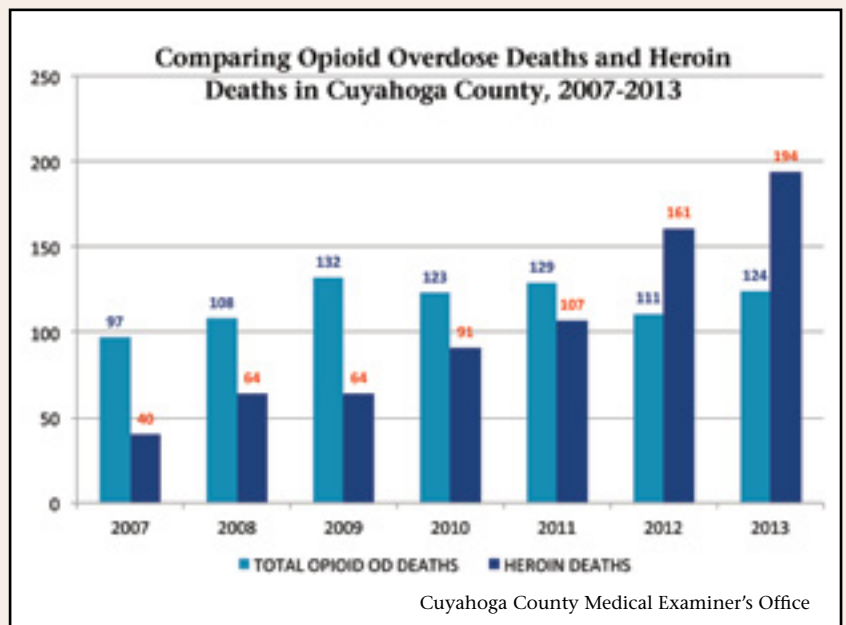
A PDF version is available at:

http://medicalexaminer.cuyahogacounty.us/pdf_medicalexaminer/en-US/HEROINACTIONPLAN.pdf

Led by U.S. Attorney Steven Dettelbach of the **United States Department of Justice**, a committee was formed following the summit to continue the momentum of implementing a high impact, comprehensive approach towards reducing the prevalence of heroin in Cuyahoga County. This committee's work has received national attention and is being used as a model across the country.

The **National Association of Medical Examiners** recognized the research of **Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner Dr. Tom Gilson** with the **Susan P. Baker Public Health Impact Award**.

Camille Herby, a former graduate intern at the **Medical Examiner's Office**, received the Outstanding Practicum Poster award from **Case Western Reserve University** at the **Innovations in Population Health Conference** for her work on the county heroin epidemic.



It is common knowledge among law enforcement officials that they cannot arrest their way through this epidemic. However, as a way to send a message about the severity of this epidemic, prosecutors can now charge heroin dealers with involuntary manslaughter for being responsible in the death of a customer.

The **Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County** also launched a multi-media campaign in the winter of 2013 which continues

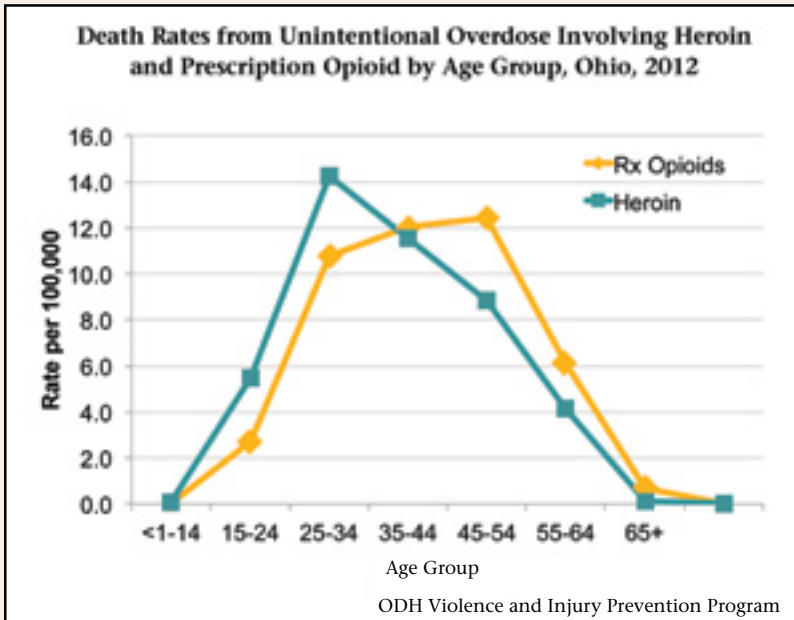
to run today. The campaign included radio and TV spots, billboards, and bus signs. The prevention campaign targeted the following demographics and the people who care for them:

Youth/Teens ages 12-17

Middle aged men

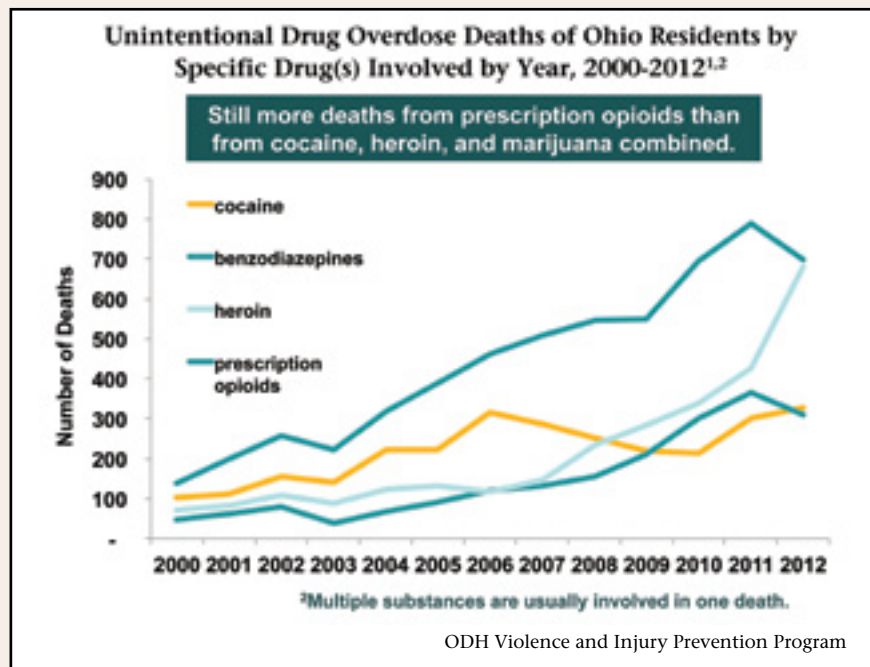
Women aged 18-25

Since the launch of the campaign, monthly calls received have increased from 105-260. Approximately 50% of the callers were seeking help for themselves.



Due to the overwhelming number of heroin addicts seen in his court room, Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Michael Astrab went to several communities with a town hall style program: **Heroin in the Suburbs**. His goal was to raise awareness of the prevalence of heroin and also inform parents about keeping their families safe.

The program has been delivered to an average of 60 community members at each event. Several members of the Opiate Task Force have served as expert panelists representing public health, the court system, law enforcement, medicine, prevention and treatment.





Project DAWN: an antidote to heroin overdose

Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided With Naloxone) is a

community-based overdose education and naloxone distribution program that was created as a way to combat Ohio's opioid overdose epidemic.

Naloxone (also known as Narcan) is a medication that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug (heroin or prescription pain medications). When administered during an overdose, Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and quickly restores breathing.

Naloxone has been used safely by emergency medical professionals for more than 40 years and has only one critical function: to reverse the effects of opioids in order to prevent overdose death.

Key Points:

- Naloxone has no potential for abuse.
- If given to a person who is not experiencing an opioid overdose, it is harmless.
- If administered to a person who is dependent on opioids, it will produce non life-threatening withdrawal symptoms.
- It does not reverse overdoses that are caused by non-opioid drugs, such as cocaine, benzodiazepines (Xanax, Klonopin, Valium), methamphetamines or alcohol.

It takes less than 30 minutes to obtain a kit that could save a life.

Attendees learn to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of overdose
- Distinguish between different types of overdose
- Perform rescue breathing
- Call emergency medical services
- Administer intranasal Naloxone

The kit includes:

- 2 vials of Naloxone medication
- 2 nasal atomizers
(the medication is sprayed into the nose of the individual experiencing an overdose)
- 1 face mask
- 1 educational DVD
- 1 educational booklet



MetroHealth Hospital, a key partner of the Task Force and sub-grantee of the ODH grant, dispenses kits to eligible patients in the Emergency Department as well as several community sites including:

Cuyahoga County Board of Health: Fridays from 9 a.m. – noon

Free Clinic of Greater Cleveland: Fridays from 1 – 5 p.m.

Cuyahoga County launched Project DAWN on March 1, 2013 and has since registered over 500 participants and documented at least 31 lives saved.

Registrant Data

- 67% are male
- 80% are white
- Average age is 36
- Ages range from 18-74
- 60 % identified with being addicted to prescription opioids prior to using heroin
- 45% have experienced an overdose
- 7% report taking opioids prescribed by a physician for management of chronic pain



Dr. Joan Papp, MetroHealth physician and Opiate Task Force member, has been instrumental in advocating for legislation surrounding **Project DAWN**, playing a key role in the passage of House Bill 170. Prior to the passage of this bill, Naloxone had to be given directly to the addict. Now a family member, friend, or loved one can obtain a kit. This law also extends access to first responders (police, fire, paramedics) in addition to extending prescribing abilities to nurse practitioners.

Dr. Papp and the **Opiate Task Force** are also in support of **House Bill 363**, a **911 Good Samaritan Bill**, which aims to encourage individuals to seek medical assistance in the event of an overdose. This law would provide limited immunity from the arrest of a minor drug possession for victims and witnesses who call 911 in the event of an overdose.

A recent survey conducted at the Scioto County and Cuyahoga County Project DAWN locations found that 75% of survey participants had witnessed an overdose.

Only 58% of those who had witnessed an overdose reported calling 911.

Project DAWN is funded by Cuyahoga County Executive Ed Fitzgerald's Office, MetroHealth System, and the Ohio Department of Health.

For more information please visit:

www.metrohealth.org/projectdawn | www.ccbh.net

Physician Education

Knowing that there is a direct relationship between the heroin epidemic and prescription opioid abuse, emphasis is placed on educating medical practitioners about opioid prescribing guidelines, Naloxone, and the current state of the epidemic.

In addition to **Dr. Papp** and the **MetroHealth System** providing educational guidance as a deliverable for the ODH grant, **Opiate Task Force** members are delivering education to first-year residents at **Case Western Reserve School of Medicine**. A one day training for physicians, co-sponsored by the **Academy of Medicine Northern Ohio** and the **Cuyahoga County Board of Health**, will take place in the fall of 2014.

A Face to the Epidemic

The words “drug addict” present a variety of mental images depending on our individual experiences. Perhaps we think of a scruffy, under-educated, unsuccessful individual or a school mate who rarely attends class and has no friends, or a homeless “junkie” hiding in an alley.

It’s time to throw away those mental images. Opiate addiction knows no boundaries when it comes to socioeconomic status, age, race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation.

The following is the story of Robby Brandt, a bright young man with a loving, supportive family, living in the suburbs of Cuyahoga County as written by the Brandt family.

Robby’s Story

How do you even start to tell the story which defines the peak of happiness and the depth of despair for any parent?



Robby Brandt

His smile, probably the most definable characteristic of Robby. Everyone always talked about his smile, and they should have because it was his trademark. Didn’t matter if it was a smile of celebration, or the wry grin he would get when he was either engaging in or finishing mischief. It was a smile that put everyone at ease, made you feel good no matter what the situation was.

Robby was, well, Robby. An X-generation daredevil, there was nothing too fast, nothing too challenging for him to try. All the things that would cause your stomach to twist around itself were the things he thrived upon. On his bike, skateboard or roller blades, there was never a ramp or jump too big to challenge. No rollercoaster too high or fast, and unfortunately, no speed limit he didn’t like to test. I don’t know if he enjoyed conquering the obstacle, or the reaction of those of us who witnessed these feats of daring, maybe a bit of both.

Robby loved to get a rise out of people, and there was no end to his creativity. The hairspray driven potato launcher was among his greatest achievements, but it was Halloween where he shined every year as he dressed as Michael Myers and ran the neighborhood with his chain saw, scaring any child or adult that he could sneak up upon. He was a natural at whatever he tried; athletics, music, motorcycles, horseback riding, didn’t matter, he was as good as he wanted to be in a matter of minutes.

Point is, Robby loved life and lived every moment to experience all it had to offer. Sometimes that meant important things, like school, were pushed to the side, but to him, there was more that life had to offer than just books. His presence was infectious and his ability to talk, well, relentless...

But it was Robby’s heart that made him special. Robby cared about people; he was the go to guy when things were tough. He was the guy that spent time

with the “old folks” at the nursing home where he worked (I guess they were happy to have someone to talk to, and he talked as long as they listened). Even after he joined the Ohio National Guard, not extra push-up or drill sergeants could contain his zest for life which was captured by the tattoo stenciled down his entire side – “Carpe Diem,” seize the day.

Robby was the son any parent would be proud of, and we were. But, Robby was also an addict, and his zest for living was rivaled by his struggle to beat the grips of addiction.

Like many kids, Robby experimented with pot while in high school. Unfortunately, his personality always drove him to push a little further, and drugs were no different. After having his wisdom teeth removed, Robby became addicted to prescription pain killers. That addiction slowly changed him, as the effects of the highs, lows and withdrawals were manifested in his actions and attitudes. He was able to kick the habit prior to leaving for boot camp in October of 2010, but when he returned home for Christmas break, he was introduced to the devil – heroin.

Robby returned to the army, finished his training, and returned home only to seek out the drug that was now imprinted on his brain. His behavior rapidly changed, and all the signs were there, and we were finally able to put enough pieces together to uncover his addiction. We asked, and he happily provided every detail, almost relieved that he would finally have the support of his family to get the help he needed.

Robby completed inpatient rehab with flying colors and a resolve to stay clean, but the drug and those who surrounded him were too strong a pull, and he relapsed a couple of months after. Inpatient rehab seemed to help, but it was clear; this was going to be a long battle.

Over the coming months, Robby fought hard, but could never really give up the draw of a good chemically driven buzz. Chewing tobacco, snuff, energy drinks, poppy tea and any number of “legal” alternatives served as substitutes for the drug his body really craved.

Even at that, it appeared Robby was on the right track. He was preparing to deploy to Afghanistan, a dream of his, was working, and had even started to talk about moving out. Things seemed promising, although we were always aware that another relapse was a probability, we hoped against hope that that day would not come.

On October 20th, Robby disappeared from work and was not responding to calls or texts. We searched, in vain, to find him, to be there to help him, to be there to save him, but the efforts were not successful. On the morning of October 21st, the scene you watch a hundred times, a thousand times, on tv played out for real. We were informed by Police that our son had been found; his battle was over.

Robby did not want to be an addict. He worked hard to break away from the death-grip of addiction. He had dreams, vivid dreams of his future which he wrote about in letters. He planned on talking to schools, educating others on the toll addiction takes on the addict and the family. He was starting a foundation, “Live Clean,” to deliver that message.

Robby may not be here to deliver the message, to tell his story, but his spirit and his dreams are very much alive. Now, through this foundation, his voice will be heard, the silence will be broken, and his mission of service to others will be fulfilled.

We Are and Will Always Be Robby's Voice

Robby's Voice has been a great addition to the Opiate Task Force. Members of Robby's Voice continue to be heard by several groups and organizations. They have spoken to over 150 parents, families and individuals who are looking for guidance. They surpassed the 10,000 mark in terms of the numbers of students, parents, school officials and community members they have educated.

Robby's Voice message is sustained by over 2,000 Facebook friends and they have had over 250,000 visits to their website. Race IV Awareness is an annual 5K run/walk hosted by Robby's Voice where over 400 participants show their support.

For more information, please visit:

www.robbyvoice.com

The Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force is committed to significantly reducing fatalities associated with opiate abuse.

**For more information or to become a member,
please visit our newly redesigned website:**

www.opiatecollaborative.cuyahogacounty.us



[Twitter.com/OpiateTaskForce](https://twitter.com/OpiateTaskForce)



[Facebook.com/CuyahogaCountyOpiateTaskForce](https://facebook.com/CuyahogaCountyOpiateTaskForce)

Questions?

Please contact:

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Community Partners

Academy of Medicine Northern Ohio |
www.amcno.org

ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County |
www.adamhsc.org

Baldwin Wallace University | www.bw.edu

Buckeye Community Health Plan |
www.bchpohio.com

Case Western Reserve University | www.case.edu

Cenpatico | www.cenpatico.com

City of Cleveland Department of Health |
www.clevelandhealth.org

City of Garfield Heights | www.garfieldhths.org

City of Independence | www.independenceohio.org

Cleveland Clinic | www.my.clevelandclinic.org

Community Awareness and
Prevention Association |
www.bbhcapa.org

Concerned Members of the Community

Connections | www.connections.cleveland.org

Cuyahoga County Board of Health |
www.ccbh.net

Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas |
www.cp.cuyahogacounty.us

Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner |
www.medicalexaminer.cuyahogacounty.us

Cuyahoga County Office of
Health & Human Services |
www.cuyahogacounty.us

Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office |
www.sheriff.cuyahogacounty.us

Discount Drug Mart | www.discount-drugmart.com

Drug Awareness and Prevention, Inc. |
www.drugawarenessandprevention.org

Euclid Police Department | www.euclidpd.org

Glenbeigh | www.glenbeigh.com

Marc's | www.marcs.com

MetroHealth System | www.metrohealth.org

New Directions | www.newdirect.org

Ohio Attorney General's Office |
www.ohio.gov

Ohio State University Extension
Cuyahoga County | www.osu.edu

Parent Advocates

Partnership for a Healthy North Royalton |
www.partnershipnr.com

Premier Physicians |
www.premierphysicians.net

Recovering Addicts

Recovery Resources |
www.recres.org

Robby's Voice |
www.robbyvoice.com

Rocky River Municipal Courts |
www.rrcourt.net

Social Advocates for Youth (SAY),
Bellefaire JCB | www.bellefairejcb.org/say/say-social-advocates-for-youth

St. Vincent Charity Hospital Rosary Hall |
www.stvincentcharity.com

Stella Maris, Inc. |
www.stellamariscleveland.com

The Northern Ohio Academy of Pharmacy |
www.northernohioacademyofpharmacy.org

United States Department of Justice |
www.justice.gov

United States Attorney's Office |
www.justice.gov/usao

United Way Cleveland |
www.unitedwaycleveland.org

University Hospitals |
www.uhhospitals.org

Westshore Enforcement Bureau

WKYC Channel 3 |
www.wkyc.com