

To: Mr. Barry Denk

From: Mike Krafick, CRS Supervisor

Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission

Re: Heroin Crisis Affecting Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Denk:

My name is Mike Krafick, I am a Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS) and CRS Supervisor at The Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission. I am also a recovering heroin addict. I have been in recovery since April 24, 2008.

I started abusing drugs and alcohol at a very young age, starting with beer and marijuana, and experimenting with harder drugs as I got older. By the time I graduated from High School I had tried every drug available except for heroin. The only reason I had not tried heroin sooner was because it was not available, I did not know anyone in my school or area that did heroin. I can remember the first time I tried heroin like it was yesterday, I remember every detail about the day (the clothes I was wearing, who I was with, and even the weather), I even remember thinking that this is something I'm going to do again tomorrow. I did not know it at the time, but looking back, I was definitely hooked the first time I did it. At first, heroin was not easy to get where I lived so I had to drive to the city (Pittsburgh) to get it and half the time I ended up getting ripped off or robbed. For the first year and a half I was able to maintain a job and an apartment even though I was using every day. I started out snorting it with the idea that I would never use a needle, and as long as I didn't shoot up, I wasn't a junkie.

The first time I overdosed I was using by myself in my apartment, snorting heroin and taking Xanax pills. A friend found me, called 911, and I was taken to the hospital by ambulance. I was revived with Narcaan and left the emergency department AMA to go home and finish the rest of the drugs I had left. Looking back, overdosing did not seem like a big deal to me, I didn't see it as a near death experience. I just thought that I would need to be more careful and try to not to use alone. It was not long after that experience that I used a needle for the first time and from that point on, that was the only way I did heroin. Over the next several years, my addiction progressed and I was no longer able to keep a job, pay my rent, or hide the fact that I was using heroin. All the friends that I had that weren't using didn't want anything to do with

me anymore so the only people I was around were other people that got high. It became normal to me and my world became centered on finding, using, and selling drugs. I ended up in the hospital 4 more times for overdoses' and there were several other times I probably should have gone to the emergency room but didn't because my friends were afraid to take me.

There were several points throughout my addiction when I didn't want to use anymore but did not know how to quit. I tried going to rehab several times, mostly when I didn't have any other options. I went to keep my parents happy, to stay out of jail, and even a few times because I wanted to. Each time I went to rehab, I did a little better and stayed clean a little longer, but always fell back into the same pattern and lifestyle. Changing my friends and lifestyle was the most important thing for me to find recovery. I have been in recovery now for 7+ years and my life has gotten so much better. I have a chance at a normal life because I had access to treatment and also because I had access to Narcaan when I overdosed in the past. From my experience with addiction and recovery as well as my time spent working with the Drug and Alcohol Commission I have seen first-hand the importance of access to treatment as well as the many different pathways to recovery.

Now as a CRS with the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission I get to help other people find long-term recovery. It has been very rewarding to give back and to help others achieve recovery. No matter how far a person's addiction has progressed, recovery is possible.

I believe that the more access people have to Narcaan, the more people that will be saved from overdose situations....and in turn, the more people that will have a shot at recovery. I also believe that the Good Samaritan Law will have an impact on the people that are not taken to the emergency room because their friends are afraid of getting in trouble. I had a friend that died of a fatal overdose, 911 was not called by the people with her because they were afraid, so they just left her there to die alone. Her name was Holly, and she will never get a chance at recovery.

Sincerely,

Mike Krafick  
CRS Supervisor and person in long-term recovery