

## There is a Way Out of The Heroin Crisis

Everyone shamed Lamar Odom, calling him a “crack head,” a “drug addict,” a “loser,” but once he was found in critical condition, fighting for his life, people suddenly started to care. Kind of like what’s happened to every kid I know who has overdosed and died from heroin. Many people shut the addict out and were quick to make judgments, yet when the addict died, they all came running back.

In the town I grew up in, Andover, MA, the prevalence of heroin has been on the rise for as long as I can remember. Each overdose and each death is a traumatic experience for not just the addict’s family and close friends, but for the community as a whole—for me. The last four kids who died were all people who went to school with me and each death was upsetting.

It all seems so messed up. But why?

It’s a subject kept on taboo, that is, until yet another life is taken. We pay more attention to deaths attributed to guns, cars, murder, and suicide while every year, drug overdoses kill nearly 44,000 people in the United States.

And the reasons deaths are rising is because use is, too. In 2006, there were 90,000 users in the United States. Six years later, that number had doubled. Hitting closer to home, in 2014, Massachusetts alone had 1,000 opioid related deaths.

Part of this is the result of the rise in addiction to prescription painkillers. Many painkiller addicts turn to heroin, which is, ironically, cheaper and more readily available on the street than prescription narcotics.

According to *The New York Times*, deaths due to heroin overdoses have practically tripled in the past three years. Many of these deaths are those of young adults in suburban towns.

I find myself puzzled each time I hear of yet *another* heroin overdose of a youth in my town. I ask myself “Why?” But as a non-addict, it is impossible to fully understand someone’s decision to use heroin. To understand the lure of heroin, I have looked for reasons—for answers.

In a documentary, Keagan Casey, a former Andover High School student, interviewed current heroin addicts and asked them what addiction meant to them.

“A disease of the mind,” described one of the addicts Casey interviewed. “It is a lot more than picking up a drug and putting it back down. Its not that simple.” He said being addicted to heroin is like “selling your soul to the devil.”

Addicts enslave themselves to their drug. Whether it is the doctor shopping, a.k.a. pharmaceutical theft, prostitution, or the endless lies, I’ve seen first hand the awful situations addicts put themselves in just to keep up with this addiction.

Even with such a high rate of death, you never think it is going to be the loss of *your* friend that pains an entire community. Though, as heroin is so popular in Andover these days, it was only a matter of time before that happened.

There is a way out of the heroin crisis. First, we must accept that this *is* a crisis before we can begin working on the solution.

To start, Andover has begun bringing awareness to its community. Recently, hundreds of people showed up at the “Andover Cares” concert event at a local park in town, which *The Eagle Tribune* reported was “intended to lift the veil of secrecy and social stigma off opioid addiction.”

Though addiction may stem from a lapse in judgment, addicts *are not* bad people. They are sick people—and they need our help.

Meagan Johnson, whose sister, Kelly, died from a heroin overdose last January, stresses, “The day we learn not to judge others, to always be kind and compassionate to people and to help those in need will be the day we are one step closer to finding a solution to this horrible epidemic.”

## References

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