



Transforming Tragedy: A Father's Vision for College Recovery

"Safety Net: Helping College Students in Recovery Thrive" is a 15-minute mini documentary and showcase of the successful college recovery community we helped build, at my alma mater, Florida State University (FSU) in honor of my daughter Christine Ortoll who lost her life in November of 2020 to a fentanyl overdose.

Our collegiate recovery community at FSU is called Living Intentionally, Finding Togetherness (LIFT). The mission of LIFT is to support students interested in recovery from addiction and substance misuse to thrive during their college experience. Students learn beneficial coping skills in an accountable recovery community where they can develop friendships with like-minded peers.

In its' first year, LIFT engaged with over 1,000 students. Research shows students that participate in college recovery are more apt to have higher graduation rates, higher GPAs, are less likely to relapse and have a greater likelihood of continuing to thrive in society.

Our charity's national initiative is to make having a collegiate recovery program on every campus a reality for all higher education, as per the latest research appx 24% of all college students meet the medical definition of substance abuse. The need is obvious, as the leading cause of death for college students is drug overdose; yet less than 5% of all colleges have an effective recovery program in place.

Here is a link to our mini documentary, Safety Net.

<https://vimeo.com/893587253/16e5310734>

We hope you can utilize this film to inspire conversations on campus with your faculty and student administration to develop a collegiate recovery program and other supportive harm reduction and lifesaving programs such as provide Narcan distribution. as a potential life saver at your school for all your students and staff. We have curated an information guide with research and talking points about the benefits of collegiate recovery programs and harm reduction programs below as a companion resource to our film.

*Why higher education should have collegiate recovery programs and other harm reduction programs such as Narcan distribution.
Naloxone, commonly referred to by the brand name Narcan, is a medication used to reverse opioid overdose in all public areas and a recovery program in place, supported by research documentation.*

1. **Legal Reasons**

- Legal Obligations: Colleges have a legal obligation to provide a safe environment for their students. In the case of an opioid overdose, the failure to have Narcan available and accessible could potentially result in legal liabilities.

Source: The National Law Review, 2019

- Good Samaritan Laws: Many states have enacted "Good Samaritan" laws that provide legal protections to individuals who seek help or administer life-saving measures in cases of drug overdose. Having Narcan available on campus can promote prompt action without fear of legal repercussions.

Source: NaloxoneInfo.org

2. **Moral/Ethical Reasons**

- Duty to Care: Colleges have a moral and ethical responsibility to care for the well-being of their students. Implementing a Narcan program and recovery support system demonstrates a commitment to addressing addiction and saving lives. The prevalence of this condition is highest among young adults (18 to 25 years old) than in any other age group, the 5.2 million young adults with a substance use disorder (SUD) represent 25.8% of the total population of individuals with SUD. Nearly 40% of these individuals attend college and due to stigma and other reasons are left without recovery resources.

- Stigma Reduction: Having Narcan available and a recovery program in place helps reduce the stigma associated with addiction. It sends a message of support and encouragement for students to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016

- Fostering Belonging: Recovery communities serve as powerful symbols of the institution's commitment to diversity and support for students from this identity group. The investment of resources (e.g. space, staff, budget) signals that students in recovery belong and are important to the campus community.

Source: Dunn, D., Boulden, K., & Cheifetz, S. (Expected 2025) Solidarity, Substance Use, and Stigma. In Brennan, K. & Gorman, K. (Eds.), A University-Wide Approach to Changing Campus Cultures of Mental Illness Stigma)

Magolda, & Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2011). Contested issues in student affairs: Diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue (1st ed.). Stylus Pub

3. Financial Reasons

- Cost Savings: Investing in a Narcan program and a recovery support system can lead to cost savings in the long run. By preventing fatal overdoses and supporting students in their recovery journey, colleges can potentially reduce the economic burden associated with medical emergencies, dropouts, and academic underperformance.

Source: De Martell, Sierra Castedo, "Cost-Effectiveness of Collegiate Recovery Programs" (2019). UT School of Public Health Dissertations (Open Access). 42.

Source: Journal of Drug Issues, 2018

- Increased Retention Rates: Students who receive support for addiction are more likely to stay in school and complete their degrees. This translates into improved retention rates, which can benefit colleges financially.

Source: Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 2015

Consulting with your board of trustees, student affairs, and legal experts can help your higher education institution tailor the approach to their specific needs and requirements.

Together, I know we can impact this public health crisis and save lives.

Regards,

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