

# INTO LIGHT PROJECT

Real People. Real Stories.

## THANK YOU

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the families who courageously shared the stories of their loved ones. Your openness and vulnerability bring humanity, hope, and understanding to this important conversation. By allowing us to see the whole person—their joys, talents, and dreams—you help break down stigma and remind us that every life matters. Thank you for turning grief into a powerful message of compassion and change.

## Into Light: Real People. Real Stories.

The community of Berkshire County welcomes you to Into Light, a nationwide arts-activism project that uses portraiture and storytelling to reduce stigma surrounding the opioid epidemic and to honor local lives lost to overdose.

Founded by artist Teresa Crowler after the loss of her son to overdose, Into Light brings visibility, dignity and humanity to people too often defined only by their addiction. This exhibition features hand-drawn portraits paired with narratives that illuminate the full lives of these individuals, how they were loved, and why they mattered.

We bring Into Light to the Berkshires to:

- Reduce stigma-related barriers to seeking support
- Educate providers, students and the community on the opioid epidemic and the pathways to recovery
- Send a message of love, remembrance, and community care

The road to recovery starts with a conversation. Together, we can change the conversation around addiction and help erase the stigma.

Through the power of art and storytelling, Into Light brings the community together to reduce the harms from substance use disorder and build a better Berkshires for all of us.



## Reflections

As you continue through the exhibition, or as you prepare to leave, consider carrying these questions with you:

- Did anything about one of the individuals represented here surprise you?
- How did the artists convey their dignity, humanity, and presence?
- How does knowing a person's name and story change your perception?
- What assumptions do we often make about people experiencing substance use disorder?

These reflections are not meant to be answered quickly. They are offered as an invitation to see more clearly, to listen more closely, and to remain open to conversation beyond this space.

As you reflect on the portraits and stories shared, we encourage you to share what you learn and understand with others. This can include taking an "Ask me about" button home with you, to keep for yourself or to share with others. You're encouraged to take and share more than one.

Be mindful of your own needs as you move through the exhibit. Bearing witness to the lives that have been lost brings up grief and pain. Please be gentle with yourself.

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## REDUCING STIGMA

Stigma remains one of the greatest barriers to seeking and accepting support, particularly for young people and families. Into Light confronts stigma directly through education, public engagement, and compassionate storytelling.

"The biggest killer out there is stigma. Stigma keeps people in the shadows. Stigma keeps people from asking for help." —*Jerome Adams, former US Surgeon General*

## Into Light: Berkshires

This exhibition reflects a shared commitment to improving community health, strengthening prevention efforts, and supporting children, families, and systems of care in Berkshire County.

These portraits remain locally owned, allowing them to travel to schools, service providers, libraries, and other community settings for years to come.

The following pages reflect only ten of the nearly five hundred lives lost to overdose in the Berkshires since 2013. On the gallery walls, they are joined by twenty others we have lost throughout the Commonwealth.

We honor the beauty, complexity, and humanity of each life represented here, and we acknowledge the profound magnitude of each loss. By trusting us with these stories, the families have transformed private grief into public understanding, and remembrance into action.

We hold this work with care, respect, and gratitude.

### IN LOVING MEMORY

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Sam Bernier  
Jimmy Boland  
Jesse Boland  
Jenn Carrigan  
Jen Cohen

Jeff French  
Kelsey Guettler  
Terry Levesque  
David Taylor  
Austin Vincent



## Samantha L. Bernier

**Loving, caring, giving, joyful, spontaneous**

Samantha, known to those who loved her as Sam, lived a life defined by warmth, humor, and a deep love for her family, friends, and animals. Those closest to her describe Sam as goofy, silly, and impossible to fully capture in words—she was simply Sam. She grew up in Adams, Massachusetts, where her caring nature and full-of-life spirit were evident to those who loved her. Always loving and generous, she was happiest when she was spending time with the people she loved. She enjoyed laughing, dancing, and playfully picking on her family—mom Terry, dad Tony, her brother Ricky, her sister Colleen, and especially her daughter, Cheyenne, now 17.

Family adventures and trips were meaningful to Sam, including visits to places like Six Flags, Florida, Rhode Island, Universal Studios, and SeaWorld. These moments of togetherness reflected how important connection was to her.

Sam had a creative soul. She was artistic, with a passion for music, art, drawing, and coloring. She loved animals deeply, a love perhaps best demonstrated by rescuing a dog named July with a friend. July remained by her side for more than ten years.

Sam worked as a laborer and was known for her strength and determination, even while living for 25 years with the disease of addiction. Her family saw how the disease changed her over time, in what Cheyenne stated was from “a happy-go-lucky person to someone we didn’t recognize anymore.”

Sam’s greatest hope for the future was simple and genuine: to get back on her feet and be with her family. Cheyenne said that she fought hard, coming close to “overcoming her demons.” She misses the person her mom was and regrets that the family didn’t get more time with her.

Sam’s struggle has left a lasting impact on those who loved her, developing compassion and understanding for those with substance use disorder. They resolve not to judge others facing such challenges.

Sam is missed in every way. Her family remembers her love, her laughter, her creativity, and the joy she brought into their lives. They continue to hold her close in their hearts, while also holding in their prayers all those who are still struggling.

**September 9, 1987–October 18, 2025 — Age 38**

*Samantha’s daughter, Cheyenne Bernier, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: SHAWN FAUST

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## James Ryan Boland

**A proud father first, hard-headed, goofball, talented, intelligent**

Jimmy was born on Mother's Day, the second of three siblings. "He was perfect with chubby cheeks, blond hair, blue eyes, and a rosy Irish face full of freckles," his sister, Becky, said. His charming personality, wit, and sweetness won over everyone he met, even the doctors and nurses who cared for him toward the end of his life. He was funny, and quick to make others laugh. Even as a child, Jimmy's emotions ran deep—no mistaking how he felt or why.

As a little boy, he was rarely without his blue blankie, keeping it tucked away long after he no longer needed it. Summers meant family trips to Hampton Beach, where Jimmy boogie boarded, played arcade games on the boardwalk, ate fried dough, and stayed up later than usual with his siblings. Fair-skinned and sunburned every year, his love for the ocean never faded. After his younger brother, Jesse, was born, when Jimmy was ten, those beach trips took on new meaning when seen through younger eyes.

Being outside was a priority for Jimmy. He loved hiking in the woods, riding dirt bikes, watching motocross, and being near the ocean. Motocross, in particular, was a lifelong passion—one that brought him trophies, broken bones, and a deep sense of joy. He also played hockey, snowboarded, followed live music across many genres, and enjoyed long, stubborn debates about politics. He also relished being home, having quiet time.

Jimmy attended technical high school and became a licensed electrician, proud of his meticulous skills. He loved taking things apart and putting them back together—bikes, cars, tools—anything mechanical. He built a career he truly enjoyed, forming close bonds with coworkers and helping his family with projects whenever he could, never expecting anything in return.

Of all the roles he held in life, being a father meant the most. Jimmy's twin children, James and Joelle, now 13, were his greatest joy and proudest accomplishment. He loved watching them explore the world. Jimmy encouraged curiosity and learning and believed less screen time was better. He filled their lives with his presence and affection, calling them his "little turkeys." He wanted them to know that they were deeply loved. Jimmy never married, but was with his high school sweetheart, Heather, for ten years, later starting his family with Jacinda, an exceptional woman and loving mother.

Faith was an important part of Jimmy's inner life. He considered himself a devout Christian. A tattoo on his left arm—Jesus with three crosses—reflected his faith and remains meaningful to his family, who see it as a symbol of what Jimmy believed and hoped for.

Jimmy lived with substance use disorder for more than fifteen years, struggling first with opioids and later with alcohol, believing he could overcome it on his own. Addiction changed him at times, creating distance and pain, but it never erased who he truly was. In his final months, the physical toll of addiction took away the work he loved and, ultimately, his life. His father, who passed in 2016, never saw the sober son he longed for.

At his core, Jimmy was generous and compassionate, always giving without judgment. He understood hardship and had empathy for those often overlooked or criticized. His life was so much more than his addiction. He was a son, a brother, a friend, and most of all, a proud and loving father. He is loved beyond measure and deeply missed.

**May 13, 1984–September 29, 2023 — Age 39**

*Jimmy's sister, Becky McConnell, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## Jesse A. Boland

### **Funny, vibrant, bright, athletic, forever missed**

The youngest of three children, Jesse, was welcomed on the first day of Spring by his mother, Michele, his older siblings, Jimmy and Becky, and his father, Jim, who lovingly raised Jesse as his own. Jesse's arrival completed the Boland family. Becky, who was just 14 when Jesse was born, said; "I pretended he was mine; I would race my mother to his crib to be the first to hold him when he woke."

Jesse grew up with a strong appreciation for sports, especially football and baseball. He was a loyal New England Patriots and Boston Red Sox fan, often attending Patriots games at Gillette Stadium and Sox games at Fenway, providing endless stats about his teams. He played sports throughout his childhood and high school years, earning the respect of teammates and coaches. Jesse, known as "Boland" or "77," was a steady teammate, bringing energy and encouragement to everyone around him. He was also the life of the party at pregame pasta dinners at Mama Rancourt's house. Through the years, Jesse maintained close ties with childhood friends, Steve, Dan, Dylan, and Zack, all of whom were by his side when he passed. Another dear friend, Max, though separated by distance, immediately sent his condolences, love and respect for Jesse.

Jesse enjoyed live music, spending time outdoors, and shared a love of fishing and passion for motocross and dirt bikes with his brother Jimmy, who he attended races with at Unadilla during the summer. Despite being the youngest in the family, Jesse grew to be the tallest, reaching 6'3" by the end of high school. He was sensitive, polite, and kind-a "giant teddy bear." In his teens, he worked as a hay baler to earn money. He truly loved being able to surprise and give back to others.

After graduating from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), where he earned a bachelor's degree in science in sports management, he worked at North Adams Regional Hospital for Berkshire Health Systems and briefly volunteered as a Little League coach. He dreamed of purchasing a remote cabin in the woods and working as a physical therapist.

Those closest to Jesse remember his sharp sense of humor, a natural ability to make people feel welcome, and a love for good food and cooking—a passion he shared with his brother-in-law, J. Jesse was especially gentle with children and adored being an uncle to his nieces and nephew. In his final year, Jesse adopted a boxer mix named Daisy, proudly caring for her and walking her throughout town, stopping in stores for her daily treats. Though he never married or had children, two relationships were deeply meaningful to Jesse, first with his high school sweetheart, Olivia, and later with Michaela. Both women were selfless, positive supporters of Jesse and remain in touch.

Jesse lived with substance use disorder for nine years, a disease that changed him and weighed heavily on both him and his family. Despite periods of recovery, the impact of addiction affected his health, relationships, and sense of self. Ultimately, he was diagnosed with endocarditis and had open heart surgery at age 25. Four years later, Jesse later passed from a brain hemorrhage, a mere month before his brother, Jim.

Jesse is remembered as a loyal friend, a loving son and brother, a devoted uncle, and someone whose quiet acts of kindness left lasting impressions on those around him. He is deeply missed and lovingly remembered.

**March 20, 1994–August 30, 2023 — Age 29**

*Jesse's sister, Becky McConnell, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## Jennifer B. Carrigan

**Creative, unique, deep thinker, blunt, honest, real**

Jenn Carrigan was blunt, genuine, funny, and full of personality—a woman who cared far more about being real and honest than what others thought about her. She loved to read and write and enjoyed all kinds of music, her favorite being metal. “She was going to school to be a nurse, before she got sick with sepsis,” her daughter, Taryn stated.

Jenn was a talented cosmetologist with a gift for making people feel beautiful, inside and out. She later worked as an intake coordinator at Berkshire Medical Center and at Dion Money Management. Even when her own life was difficult, she was often the first person to offer help to someone else. Jenn shared her story openly and honestly, and people appreciated her for that—she didn’t hide her struggles, and she didn’t judge others for theirs.

Jenn was the proud mother of three children: Taryn, Hannah, and Caiden. They were her greatest accomplishment, and everything she wanted for the future centered on them. In later years, she worked hard to stay sober and healthy so she could be there for her kids. As her health declined, the combined weight of sepsis, COPD, and addiction became overwhelming.

Jenn lived with substance use disorder for nine years. Her disease changed her deeply, and for her family, watching that change was heartbreaking. Her daughter remembers how painful it was to see the vibrant, loving mother she knew slowly fade, and how difficult it was to witness Jenn lose hope in herself and in life. “Once her body started shutting down, I think she just gave up. She relapsed and passed,” Taryn said.

Still, even in the hardest moments, Jenn’s heart for others never disappeared. She was someone who gave even when she had nothing, who listened, who told the truth, and who made people feel seen. Her honesty and willingness to share her story helped others feel less alone.

Jenn had three brothers — Michael, who passed before her, Jason, and Joe—and her parents, Cyndi and Ronald Goss. Cyndi and Jenn were best friends; inseparable. She was not married, but she and her high school sweetheart, Terry Levesque, the father of her children, always found their way back to one another. Terry also lost his life to addiction in 2016, leaving their children to grieve both parents far too soon.

One small but loving memory still makes her children smile: the way Jenn insisted on decorating the Christmas tree just right. Years later, Taryn, Hannah, and Caiden realized how much of that perfectionism came from their mom — and how those little traditions still carry her presence.

Jenn wanted very simple things for her future. She wanted to be able to breathe, and she wanted to be happy. And more than anything, she wanted to be there for her children.

She is remembered as creative, unique, loving, honest, passionate, and real. Her family misses her laugh, her presence, and the way she loved them. Her grandchildren miss their Nene.

Her children continue to carry both her memory and her lessons forward—including her belief that recovery is possible. Taryn shares her own personal story of her 10-year sobriety to help others in active addiction or recovery find hope for their own path forward.

Jenn Carrigan’s life mattered. She was more than her illness. She was a mother, a daughter, a sister, a helper, and a woman whose love lives on in those who knew her.

**June 27, 1976–September 11, 2022 — Age 46**

*Jennifer’s daughter, Taryn Levesque, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## Jennifer Cohen

### **The most vibrant sunshine and warmth of our lives.**

Compassionate, creative, and curious, Jen knew how to live in the present and savor every moment. Spontaneity was her guide, sending her on far-reaching journeys to different states, to the ocean, to music festivals and the great outdoors. It also inspired her to pick up a variety of creative hobbies. She particularly enjoyed jewelry-making but had a special touch that made everything from gift-wrapping to window-decorating beautiful. Jen found happiness in the simple things in life. Even as a child, her mother Gwen remembered Jen waking in her crib with a huge smile, ready to greet the day. Jen freely shared this joy with everyone she met. Whether it was through a warm hug, a compassionate word, or just her gentle presence, Jen was endlessly generous with her love, especially towards those who were often overlooked.

"Jen carried a light within her that illuminated every room she entered," Gwen said. "She loved people exactly as they were, no matter their appearance, life story, or status. She made sure they felt seen and wanted. Jen saw people's hearts."

Jen also had a serious, contemplative side. This was seen in her dedication to her Jewish faith and her pride in blowing the shofar for the High Holiday celebrations. Her family and her congregation carry fond memories of Jen, petite and young with strawberry blond hair, blowing the ram's horn with remarkable power and precision.

Jen lived with substance use disorder for seventeen years. She became more withdrawn and isolated when her symptoms recurred. During a period of recovery in her early thirties, Jen began making plans for her future: eating well, exercising, and researching careers that aligned with her interests. She became a part-time owner of Eagle Street Music, where she loved interacting with children who took lessons there. Later, she began contemplating a career in social work, specifically working as a drug counselor. She spoke often about her desire to become a mother someday, too. Gwen's last memories of Jen are of her smile and pride as she celebrated her nephew's graduation. Her parents, Gwen and Guy, and siblings, Rebecca, Sarah, and Joshua, carry her in their hearts and miss her very much.

"Jennifer had immense love and support from friends and family, but the decisions were hers alone," Gwen said. "It has left me feeling helpless. I also feel anger toward those who treated her unkindly, because Jennifer was always gentle, loving, and compassionate. It makes me want to reach people living with substance use disorder and help them understand the ripple effects of loss, while also offering compassion and understanding through sharing our story."

**May 17, 1984-July 1, 2023 — Age 39**

*Jen's mother, Gwendolyn Cariddi, and sisters, Rebecca and Sarah Cohen, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: SHAWN FAUST

NARRATIVE WRITER: ANGELA DAY



## Jeffrey Richard French

### **This was a beautiful, sensitive, loving, human being**

Known for his sense of humor and his warm, welcoming presence, Jeff accepted people of all ethnic backgrounds and cared deeply for his friends and family. As the youngest of three boys, he shared a particularly close bond with his mother, MaryAnn, and was often her companion. Together, they regularly visited his grandmother at her nursing home—trips that often included a stop at the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Music played an important role in Jeff's life. He loved hip hop from an early age and enjoyed break dancing as a child. Jeff also loved sports and spent time playing basketball and skiing. An accomplished athlete he also participated in baseball and soccer throughout his life.

Family was central to Jeff's upbringing. He shared many family vacations, including trips to Disney World, California, and several family-focused Club Med resorts. Holidays were often hosted at the family home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and brought together extended family, friends, and children's friends, creating lasting memories.

Jeff graduated from Pittsfield High School and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in multicultural communications from Westfield State University. He had strong skills in communication, organization, and marketing. After college, he worked for the United Nations Association of Greater Boston, where he managed marketing for a model United Nations program that taught conflict resolution skills to students in inner-city Boston schools and as a district and legislative aide for a state senator. In later years he built a successful career booking famous hip hop artists including Nas, Jay-Z, and Snoop Dogg, to perform in Myrtle Beach, SC. Jeff also appeared as an extra in several films. By far, his greatest accomplishment was being a great hands-on father to his young son, Aiden Jeffrey, who was four years old at the time of Jeff's passing. Although he never married, Jeff remained friends with Aiden's mother, Anayeli.

Family oriented, Jeff was close to his brothers Brian and Kevin, his step-sister Lauren, and their spouses, and was a devoted uncle to his eight nieces and nephews.

Living with addiction brought years of struggle for Jeff and for those who loved him. Over time, the disease strained Jeff's relationships and caused deep pain for his family. They describe the anguish of knowing that, despite all their efforts, they could not save him. He did not want to be defined by the disease, yet it held him in a grip that was painfully hard to break. Watching someone so deeply loved—someone with such goodness and potential—slowly slip away was heartbreaking beyond words. Finding the right kind of help was nearly impossible. Through it all, Jeff held onto hope that he would one day find lasting recovery. The last time his mother spoke with Jeff, she was leaving for a vacation. He told her, "I'm going to use these two weeks to get better. If I can't do this on my own, I promise I'll go into treatment." He died shortly afterward.

Even many years later, friends continue to reach out to Jeff's family to share heartfelt stories about how he helped them and what he meant in their lives. One friend described him as a kaleidoscope. "Whatever way you turned him, he showed amazing, beautiful colors," MaryAnn shared.

Jeff is remembered for his smile, his laugh, his phone calls, and his presence. His life is remembered as that of a beautiful, sensitive, and loving human being.

**August 21, 1975–October 28, 2013 — Age 38**

*Jeffrey's mother, MaryAnn Yarmosky, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: JEREMY HEBBEL

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## Kelsey Lyn Guettler

### **Beloved, missed, stolen, compassionate, unforgettable**

If you were strolling around Adams, Massachusetts, in the mid-1990s, you might have seen a little Buzz Lightyear tearing around the streets. Or a lion, depending on the day. That was Kelsey Lyn Guettler. She was a shy kid, but stubborn and creative. She refused to relinquish her new favorite outfits, even after trick-or-treating season was weeks in the past. Scared of Santa, the Easter Bunny, and clowns, Kelsey found solace in Disney characters, her pink blanket, and sucking her thumb. She was a late bloomer, but a happy kid.

Drawn to the arts, Kelsey loved sketching, dancing, painting, and music from a young age. She also swam and played lacrosse, going on to become a certified lifeguard at the YMCA and captain of the lacrosse team in high school. She graduated from Hoosac Valley High School in 2012.

Kelsey's instinct to care for others and spread kindness informed her life. She worked in home health care as a certified nursing assistant and behavioral specialist at Hillcrest Commons. Family-oriented, Kelsey was close with her sister, Kimberlee; her mother, Deanna; her father, Dick; and her cousin Tyler. She adored her two sweet sons, Declan and Garret. In her free time, she collected gemstones, listened to music, read horoscopes, and doted on her cats.

Kelsey's father remembers her for her contagious laugh and frequent phone calls. Kelsey never missed an opportunity to tell him she loved him and appreciated his help.

Not one to express negative feelings, her loved ones remember her unfaltering positivity, kindness, and caring nature.

The Christmas before Kelsey's passing, she found the Elf on the Shelf during the annual family hunt. Dick remembers a last lunch with her, nothing too out of the ordinary; she was struggling with the Registry of Motor Vehicles and her license. Her deeper personal struggles were virtually invisible to her loved ones.

Substance use made Kelsey more withdrawn. Her behavior and moods were more erratic, and her decision-making skills were altered, but she maintained her positive outward nature. Despite Kelsey's efforts to shield her loved ones, they were constantly worried about losing her, in fearful anticipation of phone calls bearing bad news.

Kelsey's absence is felt in countless ways. Her family remembers her smile and laugh, warm presence, and the sweet girl who ran around in her Buzz Lightyear costume.

### **March 29, 1994–April 5, 2023 — Age 29**

*Kelsey's father, Dick Guettler, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: LIVIA COHEN



## Terry "Teto" Levesque

**Resilient, strong, funny, loved, stubborn**

Terry was a devoted father. His children—Taryn, Hannah, Brandon, Tanner, Taylor, Caiden, and Teven—were his greatest pride. He was also a brother to Chad and Bob Levesque, and the son of Michael Levesque. His mother, Cyndi was heartbroken when Terry passed, they were best friends. She passed after Terry. Taryn said: "I am sure Terry was there with open arms when she got there and they are probably dancing in heaven together."

Terry loved spending time with his family. He enjoyed traveling when he could and was a devoted Kansas City Chiefs fan. After a serious fall off a roof that left him paralyzed from the waist down, many of the things he once loved became harder to do, but he remained connected to the people he cared about most. Family traditions, like the kids playfully pushing their faces into birthday cakes, were part of what made time together special and fun.

He was known for his ability to make people laugh and smile. He had a playful, gentle side that showed in small moments, like building igloo forts for his children in the winter or sending milk-carton boats down a stream with notes inside for Alice in Wonderland. Terry also dreamed of one day living off the land, which he called "Alaska livin', kiddo."

Terry was a skilled roofer, logger, and woodworker, and he had a love for cutting hair. He hoped to one day become a barber. Terry was married to Rose, and they had children together, and he also stuck by his high school sweetheart, Jenn, the mother of three of his children.

When Terry was in recovery, he was deeply involved in helping others. While living in a sober house, he spoke at meetings and at the local detox center, encouraging people to believe that recovery was possible. He received his one-year coin just six months before his relapse. He also helped create a fatherhood program in the Berkshires with his sponsor, Frank Busner.

Those who loved Terry saw how addiction changed him. When he was well, he was funny, kind, and full of life. When he was struggling, the disease took over, and he was no longer himself.

Terry's death was traumatic for his family. His daughter Taryn found him and tried to save him, and then had to tell her younger siblings that their father was gone. His loss continues to shape their lives even now, and Taryn misses the ability to hear his laugh and to call on him when she needs him.

Taryn now lives in recovery herself. She has been sober for ten years and is raising two children. Her father's life and death changed how she sees addiction, and she now speaks openly to help others understand how powerful and devastating the disease can be—and that it is possible to survive it. She said, "A craving only lasts about eight seconds, if you can make it eight seconds- you can make it!!"

**June 14, 1976-September 7, 2016 — Age 40**

*Terry's daughter, Taryn, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: LIVIA COHEN



## David Taylor

### **Lovable, kind, charming, full of potential**

Very much a people person, David was known first for his kindness but also for his smile and distinct dimples. "His features were unique," his sister, Beth, stated. "He was Irish with red hair, tall, and lots of freckles." He was witty, and charming, and loved to make people laugh. David was very much a people person. Those who knew him remember his big bear hugs, his voice, his conversations, and the way he could make someone feel better simply by talking with them.

David was smart, especially with technology. He enjoyed working with computers and problem-solving with electronics, and he had an exceptionally good memory. David liked watching movies, playing video games, listening to music, and spending time with his family. He was proud of being a Scorpio and took pride in his tattoos, especially as his interest in tattoo art grew in more recent years.

Family memories of David are vivid and specific. He loved ordering food from Village Pizza. He would walk through the snow to the store just to get candy. He helped with everyday tasks—walking the dog, letting him out, feeding his sister's cats. His sister, Chrissy, taught him how to drive in the empty car lot at Scarfoni Ford. When he was around six or seven years old, they would walk together down Eagle Street to get his hair cut, and afterward he would happily tell everyone he passed that he had a new haircut and soak up the compliments about looking "fresh."

From his mother came memories of long drives together—getting coffee, listening to music, and talking. Even as a child, David enjoyed classical music. Holidays mattered to him, especially Christmas. He loved being together with family and sharing food. One Christmas stands out: David walking around with a big hunk of ham in his hand, his favorite, knowing it was the last piece.

David lived with substance use disorder for eight years. Over time, the disease changed him. The loving, kind boy his family knew became more lost, suppressing his emotions and growing more ill-tempered and manipulative. Though he had so much potential, his addiction prohibited him from achieving significant life events and accomplishments typical of someone his age. His family struggled with not knowing what was true, worrying about his safety, and setting painful but necessary boundaries to protect themselves and their children. Much of their grief began long before David's death, as they lived with a constant fear of losing him.

Still, David loved his family in the best way he could during his struggle. His deeply loving nature never fully disappeared. He dreamed of getting into recovery, leaving North Adams, and starting fresh somewhere warm. He wanted a different life, that included his daughter, Justina, now eleven, whom he loved. Beth says, "Now that he is passed, it is hard to bring up his name without getting seriously emotional."

David is missed for his smile, his hugs, his laughter, and his random text messages.

### **November 19, 1993–September 9, 2021 — Age 27**

*David's sisters, Beth Piantoni, and Christine Tower, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: JEREMY HEBBEL

NARRATIVE WRITER: BARBARA FRANCOIS



## Austin J. Vincent

### **Funny, handsome, loving**

Austin was always active and on the move. He grew up playing football, playing cards with his Gram and Aunt Louise and helping out their neighbors, and playing with the family dogs. As an adult, Austin could be found outside four-wheeling, snowmobiling, or taking joyrides down back roads. Hunting and fishing, skills he learned as a child from his father, Patrick, also kept him on the move no matter the season. An adept outdoorsman, Austin attended wildlife camp and hunting trips out of state for boar, deer, and pheasants. He took great pride in his skills, particularly when he could bring large bucks home for his family to eat. Cooking and grilling became an extension of this passion. Every year, he looked forward to salmon river fishing and ice fishing, though he usually gave these catches away. His dream was to one day become a professional fisherman and have his own fishing charter.

Everything Austin did, he did with joy, and frequently had company on his adventures. With a booming laugh, a cheeky sense of humor, and a kind heart, he could win over just about anyone. Austin had an army of friends wherever he went—and if he didn't already have friends there, he would swiftly make some.

"Austin could make anybody laugh and was my social butterfly," his mother, Deanna, shared. "He made friends everywhere he went. He was thriving in recovery for a short time before he passed away. So many people came up to me to tell me how Austin was the funniest guy they knew, and that he helped them in recovery."

Austin was close with his best friend and fishing buddy of many years, Jason. When Jay moved to Maine, Austin loved visiting him and spoke about moving there someday. His family, however, was always at the center of his world. He was a loving son, brother, and uncle. He admired and looked up to his brother, Dylan, and had many adventures with his oldest brother, Michael. His bond with his sister, Ashley, was special: he was her protector, and they would do anything for each other.

In his first football game during his senior year of high school, Austin tore his ACL. Pain medication provided relief before and after surgery, but the relief was temporary. When he was no longer issued medication, he began using substances. Austin's loving nature remained present throughout the years he lived with addiction, and Deanna supported him and shared in his recovery journey. After months in recovery, he unknowingly purchased fentanyl, and passed away from fentanyl poisoning.

"Austin had a huge heart and lots of love to give. Now, I want to educate others about fentanyl, especially children and teens in school."

**June 23, 1995–December 14, 2023 — Age 28**

*Austin's mother, Deanna Siwek, provided the information for this narrative.*

PORTRAIT ARTIST: CLAYTON CONNER

NARRATIVE WRITER: ANGELA DAY

# Who We Are

The mission of the **Berkshire Overdose and Addiction Prevention Collaborative** (BOAPC) is to collectively implement local policy, practice, systems, and/or environmental changes to reduce harms from opioid and stimulant use, and to prevent substance-related deaths and harmful impacts throughout the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County. BOAPC provides an engaging space for community partners to work together to identify needs in the community and implement solutions. BOAPC.org

The **Northern Berkshire HEAL Coalition** was established in 2022 through the National Institute of Health HEALing Communities Study to reduce opioid overdoses. Currently funded by opioid settlements from eight municipalities and North Adams Regional Hospital, the coalition's primary goals are to bolster harm reduction, treatment, and recovery supports, address underlying root causes contributing to substance use disorder, and provide communications and education to reduce stigma. The Coalition focuses on building collaboration among a wide range of community sectors, including service providers, first responders, elected officials, and people with lived experience. For more information, contact Community Coordinator Anna Youngmann at: [ayoungmann@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:ayoungmann@berkshireplanning.org)

The **North Berkshire Opioid Abatement Collaborative** (OAC) is an intermunicipal agreement among Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, and Williamstown to pool municipal abatement funds from opioid settlements. In collaboration with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and Berkshire Health Systems, the OAC provides municipal oversight and vital funding to the HEAL Coalition to coordinate overdose prevention efforts throughout the region.

As the region's leading healthcare provider, **Berkshire Health Systems** (BHS) is committed to advancing health and wellness for everyone and to partnering with community organizations to improve the overall quality of life in the Berkshires. BHS offers a range of care and treatment options for people with substance use disorder, including 24/7 emergency care at all three BHS hospitals across the county (North Adams Regional Hospital, Berkshire Medical Center, and Fairview Hospital); inpatient detox, clinical stabilization, and behavioral health services at Berkshire Medical Center; primary care-based services through the Substance Use Treatment Clinic at Hillcrest Family Health in Pittsfield; and a broad spectrum of both mobile and office-based harm reduction resources through the Berkshire Harm Reduction program. BHS is proud to be the premier sponsor of Into Light.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

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New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, and Williamstown

Partners in the North Berkshire HEAL Coalition

Carol Cushenette

Dick Alcombright

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

PREMIER SPONSOR

Berkshire Health Systems

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS

The Ruth Proud Charitable Trust

Plunkett Hospital Trust



### Substance Use Disorder (SUD) in Berkshire County

Although Berkshire County has a strong service network for substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, gaps persist and the need remains high. In 2024, Massachusetts recorded 1,314 fatal overdoses, a 38% decrease from 2023, while Berkshire County saw 41 overdose deaths, a decrease of only 13%. The county's fatality rate of 31.9 deaths per 100,000 residents remains well above the state average of 18.4, with Berkshire County again having the highest overdose fatality rate in the Commonwealth.

Local opioid response efforts are robust. In 2024, the Berkshires distributed 13,347 naloxone kits (triple the state ratio) and 19,200 fentanyl test strips (2.6 times the state ratio). Naloxone is a safe and effective medication that reverses overdose. Fentanyl test strips allow individuals to ensure their supply is not contaminated by fentanyl, a potent and often lethal drug.

More than 3,000 residents—about 2.5% of the county—are active on Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), more than double the state average of 1.1%. Emergency response data likewise reflects both the severity of the crisis and the quality of the response: 271 opioid-related EMS incidents per 100,000 residents compared to 208 statewide, and 244 opioid-related Emergency Department (ED) visits per 100,000 versus 135 statewide.

Stimulant use is an increasing concern. In 2024, Berkshire County had triple the Massachusetts rate of stimulant-related ED visits. Stimulants (including cocaine, methamphetamine, and misuse of prescription medications such as Adderall and Ritalin) carry serious health risks, including memory loss, anxiety, paranoia, and cardiovascular complications. Many people are unaware of the risk for fentanyl contamination in stimulants, including counterfeit medications bought online or off the streets.

Despite these challenges, Berkshire County offers multiple entry points for care. Services include harm reduction programs like Berkshire Harm Reduction; inpatient detox and stabilization units at Berkshire Medical Center and other facilities; multiple outpatient treatment programs with same-day appointments for counseling and medication-assisted treatment; and four peer-led recovery centers across the county.

There is a persistent shortage of recovery residences and supportive housing, particularly for women and individuals with co-occurring disorders, making housing a critical gap in the continuum of care. Transportation, maintaining MassHealth enrollment, and social stigma also remain barriers for people to remain connected with care. Service providers, first responders, educators, local government, and our friends, family and neighbors are vital to helping individuals overcome these barriers and connect with the supports they need to thrive.

### Local Resources

**Berkshire Harm Reduction** (BHR) provides free harm reduction services countywide, including naloxone, fentanyl and xylazine test strips, STI screening, Hepatitis C testing and treatment, syringe exchange, safer use supplies, comprehensive wraparound services, home delivery and mobile outreach.

**SafeSpot** is a free, confidential, 24/7 spotting line that helps ensure people are never alone when using substances. By calling 800-972-0590, individuals connect with a trained operator who stays on the line, offers support, and activates emergency help if needed. The service is judgment-free and staffed by people with lived experience. [www.safe-spot.me](http://www.safe-spot.me)

**Inpatient and Residential Treatment** providers such as Berkshire Health Systems/ McGee, Brien Center/ Keenan House, Alternative Living Centers (ALC), Greylock Recovery and others provide extended-stay facilities to help patients focus on their recovery, living with others on a similar journey in daily counseling, care and community.

**Outpatient Treatment** providers (Brien, Spectrum, SaVida, CleanSlate, Common Collab, ALC) provide flexible, non-residential clinical services, including medication management and individual and group therapy, typically with same-day or next-day intake.

**Recovery Centers** including Have Hope Peer Recovery Center (North Adams), George B. Crane Memorial Center (Pittsfield), Living in Recovery (Pittsfield) and Rural Recovery Resource's South County Recovery Center (Great Barrington), provide safe spaces, coaching, and support groups for individuals and families. They provide positive social connections for peers in recovery and connection to additional resources.

In addition, there are many other AA, NA and All-Recovery meetings throughout the county, in addition to one-on-one support.

**Supports for family, friends and other loved ones** include **Learn2Cope**, a peer-led support network that offers education, resources, and hope for family members and friends who have loved ones who have been affected by substance use disorder ([learn2cope.org](http://learn2cope.org)).

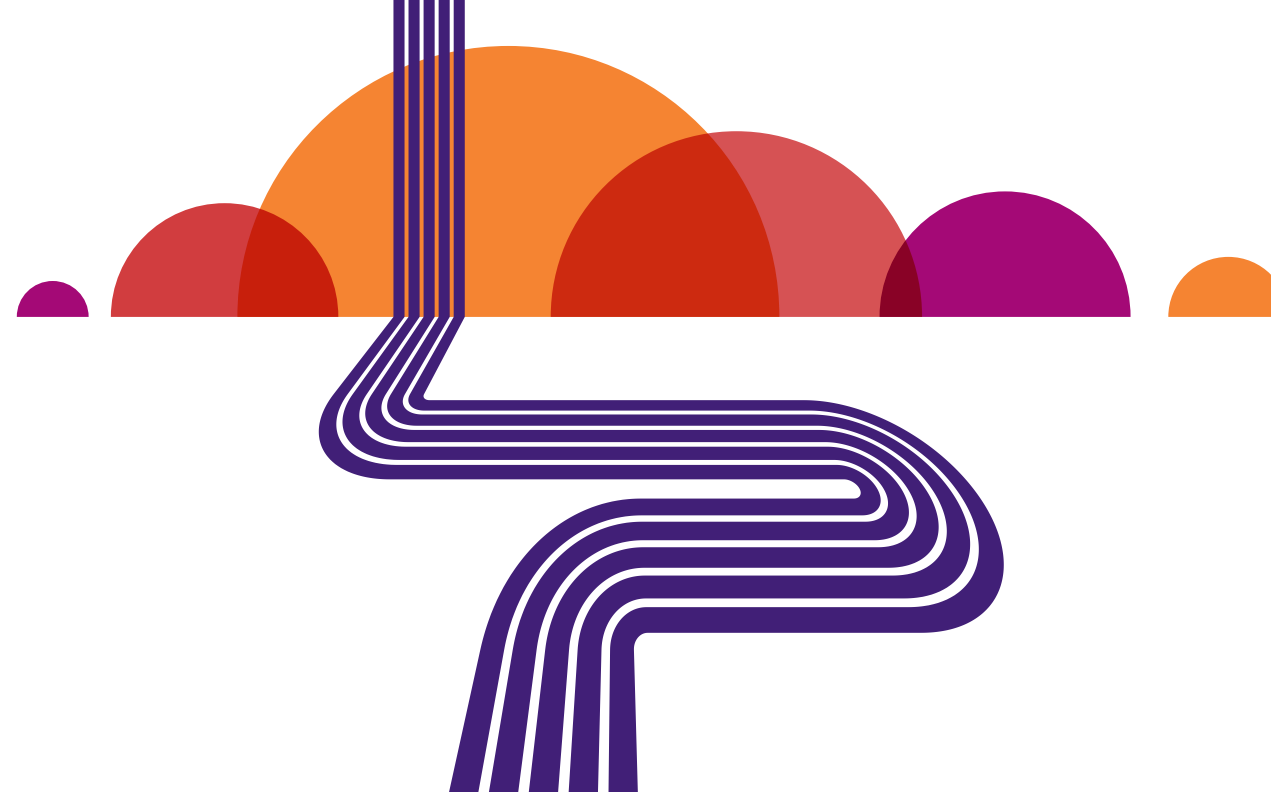
**SADOD** provides support to family, friends, first responders and service providers who have been affected by substance-related deaths ([sadod.org](http://sadod.org)).

**Family Resource Centers** at Northern Berkshire Community Coalition (North Adams), 18 Degrees (Pittsfield) and Clinical Support Options (Great Barrington) can provide additional support to young people and their families.

**To learn more: [BOAPC.org/Support](http://BOAPC.org/Support)**

# Five Things to Know About Addiction

- 1 Addiction is a medical disease** that affects the brain and behavior. Genetics, past trauma, and life circumstances can increase someone's likelihood of developing an addiction. The good news is that addiction is treatable. There are many life-saving medications, therapies and community supports in the Berkshires.
- 2 Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) is a brain disease** that causes overpowering urges to use opioids. Anyone can be affected, regardless of a person's job, education, income, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion or gender.
- 3 Some people are prescribed opioids** like morphine, codeine, oxycodone or fentanyl. Others try street drugs like heroin and/or fentanyl. These all have a high potential for addiction. What may start as medicinal or recreational use can escalate. A person may continue to use opioids to avoid significant withdrawal symptoms, which can be prevented with medication.
- 4 Recovery from OUD requires more than willpower.** Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), such as buprenorphine and methadone, can help people with OUD manage cravings and withdrawal symptoms. These treatments decrease overdose deaths by 50%, help people with OUD stay in recovery, and increase the likelihood of achieving long-term remission and recovery.
- 5 Even casual opioid use can lead to an overdose,** which may be fatal if naloxone (NARCAN®) isn't given promptly. The fact is: Any overdose is too many.



## Your Recovery. Your Choice.

Treatment can begin in as many ways as there are people. Some choose a few days of inpatient detoxification. Some may continue on in a residential treatment program or a supportive home where they can share their experiences with others.

Other people choose individual, group, or family outpatient counseling and behavioral therapy. Peer groups like Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous and spiritual pathways such as Recovery Dharma are also options.

### MEDICATION FOR OPIOID USE DISORDER

Methadone and buprenorphine are safe and effective medications that help to reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms, empowering individuals in their recovery while reducing overdose risks. Injectable options, such as Sublocade or Brixadi, require only one clinical visit each month and can now begin right away. Treatment plans and schedules are based on what's best for you or your loved one. MOUD can also start any day or time, 24/7, at any of the three Berkshire County Emergency Departments (North Adams Regional Hospital, Berkshire Medical Center and Fairview Hospital).

Inpatient treatment can also be highly effective, and sometimes necessary, for Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) and benzodiazepines. Outpatient treatment, including for Stimulant Use Disorder (StUD) and Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD), may involve behavioral therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Contingency Management, and Motivational Enhancement Therapy, combined with peer support and, in some cases, Clinical Stabilization Services (CSS) when withdrawal symptoms are severe. Local providers are ready to discuss pathways with you or your loved one, with most providers offering same-day or next-day intake.

# Helping Others With Recovery Goals

When a loved one is early in their recovery journey, including returning home from treatment or incarceration, the transition can be hopeful, stressful, complicated, and fast-moving. Families and close friends can play an essential role in helping the person feel grounded, connected, and supported. At the same time, it's crucial that you have clear tools, limits, and strategies so you can offer support without becoming overwhelmed.

- **Warm, Welcoming Connection.** Set a calm, welcoming tone and avoid pressuring them to share before they're ready.
- **Open-Ended Questions.** Use questions that invite sharing: "How are you feeling about being home?"
- **Direct but Compassionate Intentions.** Clarify your desire to support their recovery without controlling their choices.
- **Active Listening.** Let them finish their thoughts, reflect back what you heard, and avoid immediate advice-giving.
- **Lead With Empathy.** Normalize feelings of fear, hope, grief, or stress common in early recovery. Validate their feelings and experiences without judgement.
- **Non-Stigmatizing Language.** Avoid terms that carry negative connotations. Use person-first terms such as "person in recovery" or "person working on sobriety."
- **Collaborative, Realistic Goal-Setting.** Support small, achievable goals like maintaining appointments, rebuilding routines, and connecting with peers.
- **Respect Their Autonomy.** Support works best when your loved one maintains a sense of agency.
- **Ask About Their Support Team.** Help them stay connected with counselors, navigators, recovery coaches, and/or peer supports.
- **Offer Support but Manage Expectations:** It's important to balance compassion with clear boundaries. Friends and family often feel pressure to "do everything," which can lead to burnout or resentment. Be clear about what you can do (e.g. provide a ride, remind them of an appointment, listen without judgment) and cannot do (e.g. loan money, cover ongoing bills, tolerate unsafe behaviors, provide them with a place to live). Reinforce that setting limits is an act of care, not rejection.
- **Communicate Limits Calmly and in Advance.** Explain your reasons in a way that emphasizes safety and well-being rather than punishment. If you're unsure if you can commit to something, say so upfront. It's better to under-promise and over-deliver than to create unrealistic expectations.

Setting boundaries isn't about saying no; it's about saying yes to healthy relationships and sustainable support. When you care for yourself first, you create the space to care for others. Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint—your role is help the person set their own pace and maintain healthy limits so you can all stay strong for the journey ahead.

# LANGUAGE MATTERS

The words we use and the stories we tell are the first step to reduce stigma and save lives. People with substance use disorder (SUD) are not defined by their disease. Using clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing language reflects this reality, honors their dignity and supports their pathways to health and recovery.

INSTEAD OF:	USE:
<p>Terms such as these blame the illness on the individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addict</li> <li>• User</li> <li>• Substance or drug abuser</li> <li>• Alcoholic</li> <li>• Drunk</li> <li>• Former addict</li> <li>• Reformed addict</li> <li>• Junkie, crackhead, pill-popper, etc</li> </ul>	<p>Person-first language distinguishes the person from the disease:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person with substance use disorder (SUD), with opioid use disorder (OUD), with alcohol use disorder (AUD), etc</li> <li>• Person who uses/used substances <i>Distinction from occasional use v. chronic or compulsive use</i></li> <li>• Person with living/lived experience</li> <li>• Person in recovery or long-term recovery</li> <li>• Person in remission from SUD</li> <li>• Person who previously used drugs</li> <li>• Member of a recovery community</li> </ul>
<p>These terms can feel vague and morally judgmental, and negate the fact that SUD is a medical condition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abuse (conflates with violence)</li> <li>• Habit</li> <li>• Misuse (when non-prescribed)</li> <li>• Problem user</li> <li>• Drinking/ drug problem</li> </ul> <p>Terms like "suffers from" or "is a victim of" sensationalizes, rather than normalizes, the condition</p>	<p><i>For alcohol and non-prescribed drugs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance Use</li> <li>• Riskier use/ Heavier use</li> <li>• Non-medical use</li> <li>• While "unhealthy use" is acceptable, it also implies there is such a thing as "healthy use"</li> </ul> <p><i>For prescription medications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misuse</li> <li>• Used other than prescribed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opioid substitution therapy</li> <li>• Replacement therapy</li> <li>• Methadone Maintenance Therapy</li> </ul> <p>"Therapy" implies someone must be in mental health therapy to receive medication—while still recommended, this is no longer required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) or substance use disorder</li> <li>• Medication for addiction treatment (MAT)</li> <li>• Addiction medication</li> <li>• Pharmacotherapy</li> <li>• Treatment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In compliance</li> <li>• Clean</li> <li>• Non-compliant</li> <li>• Dirty</li> </ul> <p>Associates illness symptoms with filth; negates the person's choice in making health decisions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In remission or recovery</li> <li>• Abstinent from alcohol/ drugs</li> <li>• Not currently or actively using substances</li> <li>• Opted not to engage with services</li> <li>• Chose not to follow the treatment plan</li> <li>• Continued or Resumed active use</li> </ul> <p><i>For toxicology screen results:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing negative</li> <li>• Substance-free</li> <li>• Testing positive</li> <li>• Unexpected result</li> <li>• Results are inconsistent with treatment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addicted baby</li> <li>• Crack baby</li> <li>• Born addicted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infants Prenatally Substance Exposed (IPSE) <i>Preferred term over "Substance Exposed Newborns"</i></li> <li>• Baby with signs of withdrawal from prenatal substance exposure/ neonatal abstinence syndrome</li> </ul> <p>Newborns are not medically capable of experiencing addiction, but may experience withdrawal symptoms</p>

While some people in recovery find words like "addiction" or "alcoholic" stigmatizing, others prefer them. Others do not like being referred to as a "person with a disorder." The above are guidelines, and it's best to follow the individual's lead and reflect back their preferred language.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

- Speak openly and compassionately about addiction. Help others understand that addiction is a disease, not a choice or personal failing.
- Commit to using person-first, stigma-free language that honors the humanity of people affected by substance use disorder.
- Share education and resources, such as those on [BOAPC.org/Support](http://BOAPC.org/Support).
- Use an “Ask Me About” button to share the message of Into Light with the community.

## OFFER SUPPORT

- Provide a listening, non-judgmental ear to those affected by substance use disorder and their loved ones.
- Join or support local recovery-friendly events, such as Overdose Awareness Day on August 31 and National Recovery Month every September.
- Abstain from or model safer consumption of alcohol, especially around minors and people in recovery.
- Normalize talking about substance use disorder, harm reduction, treatment and recovery, just as we talk about other chronic illnesses such as diabetes or cancer.

## CARRY NALOXONE

- Naloxone can reverse an overdose and causes no harm. Everyone should carry naloxone, the same way you have a fire extinguisher or first aid kit.
- Naloxone is available for free throughout the county, including Berkshire Harm Reduction, community organizations, and from over 120 free boxes throughout the county. **To find a location close to you: [boapc.org/naloxone](http://boapc.org/naloxone).**
- Naloxone is also available from a medical provider or pharmacy, though costs may apply.



**WE CARRY NALOXONE**

**YOU CAN TOO**

[boapc.org/naloxone](http://boapc.org/naloxone)

Berkshire Overdose & Addiction Prevention Collaborative

# KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE.



Unconscious or falling asleep



Slow or shallow breathing



Unresponsive with gurgling or choking sounds



Blue-purple lips and gums



Blue-purple or ash-gray skin tone

## HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO'S OVERDOSED

- 1. Call 911.**  
Say “someone isn’t responsive.”
- 2. Give naloxone (Narcan®).**  
Spray 1 time in the nose. Wait 3 minutes. If it works, turn the person on their side. If no response, spray again in the other nostril.
- 3. Give Rescue Breaths**  
If no response to naloxone, make sure mouth is clear. Tilt head back, lift chin, and pinch nose. Give 1 breath every 5 seconds. Give CPR if you’ve been trained. Continue until help arrives.
- 4. Stay until help arrives.**

**DON'T USE ALONE**  
Call SafeSpot at 800-972-0590 to talk to a peer while you’re using substances. You never have to use alone. Free and confidential.

Naloxone (Narcan) is widely available throughout Berkshire County! [boapc.org/naloxone](http://boapc.org/naloxone)



**[intolightproject.org](https://intolightproject.org)**

A collaborative effort among the Northern Berkshire Opioid Abatement Collaborative (Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, and Williamstown) and HEAL Coalition, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Berkshire Overdose and Addiction Prevention Collaborative (BOAPC), and Berkshire Health Systems/ North Adams Regional Hospital.