



City of Angels

Children of Addictions



This story about City of Angels NJ is from Joy Tozzi, co-founder of City Of Angels NJ, Inc.

Drug and alcohol addiction has touched the lives of many people in my life. My journey began 22 years ago and has finally culminated in the past few months. The story that I didn't realize until recently began when I was 16 years old when my mother opened my bedroom door the first morning of Easter break to tell me that my close friend who I just saw the night before killed himself while on a mixture of drugs, he was 18. Then eight months later during Christmas break the door again opened to tell me another close girlfriend of mine was found dead as a result of a cocktail of drugs, she was 18 years old. At the young age of 16, I was left with the harsh reality that I had lost two people that I cared about deeply.

The years after that were then coping with these losses and consoling one another and then there was the reality that I wasn't even aware of but was happening despite my naivety. That was the fallout of the young ones who were friends and relatives of those were gone, watching many of them follow down the same path of addiction, without the same outcome, but still a harsh life of addiction and much pain on the family.

The experiences of my childhood came back to me when someone I was very close to came to me asking for help with a serious addiction. I spent the next five years trying to find help for my loved one. I was hopeful when they were admitted into a treatment center only to have my hope crushed when the insurance ran out and this person was released before being able to complete the program. The days that followed were consumed with trying to find another place that could help, going to a hospital at all hours of the day and night only to be told the patient isn't "sick" enough, or this hospital is not set up to deal with this. The situation was getting out of control. When this person said that they wanted to die we turned for help only to be told the "patient was not suicidal enough." After that I was left to watch this person detox alone without the help of experts. Alone in that apartment not knowing

what to do or what to expect and not knowing whether this person was going to live or die. Experiencing the sickness that one who is heavily addicted to heroin goes through was one of the hardest things I ever saw someone go through, and the helplessness watching the pain of someone you love changes who you are and what you believe.

I worked for an organization that funded prevention programs and therefore I had access to experts in the field and people who by the grace of God educated me about addiction. Understanding addiction was important to me because I wanted to help this person I loved and I didn't understand why it was so hard to get over addiction and why it was so hard to get the right kind of help. I was lost within "the system" and unfortunately still did not know what to do. Subsequently I watched this person suffer with addictions for 20 years.

Many years later substance abuse situations came back into my life. I served on the Board of Education in Hamilton Township, and what people don't see as an active member of the community is the daily hardships and struggles that many children go through. As member of expulsion hearings I was able to see firsthand how substance abuse was affecting our children. Most of the students that came before us had issues relating to or pertaining to substance abuse. It was clear to me that addiction was prevalent still within our society and that this issue needed to be dealt with. Over the next several years I saw the unfortunate fallout of what substance abuse created and it was happening within our very community. At that time I was still not clear about what to do to address it. Of course we did the policy items and worked with the school system to help with education and prevention, but on a personal level I felt we needed to do more and I believed that there was a calling from God for me to make this a mission within my life.

Unfortunately, addiction again hit close to home with the loss of K.C. Meara. All of a sudden I was 16 again, dealing with the devastating loss of yet another beautiful boy and the suffering of another family. My heart was broken and I felt guilty that I had not done more to address this issue of

addiction. The creation and mission of City of Angels became clearer with the loss of this sweet boy. This organization is a piece of what he has left behind in his death. We know he is watching over us and giving us the strength to move forward and help people like him to try to beat this horrible disease.

With that said I wanted to speak about the movie and why I feel so strongly about it and what it means to me. "City of Angels" is my favorite movie, I've watched it over a hundred times, I think the emotional side of me liked the idea that there were angels, soft spoken, caring, gentle beings out there watching over us, guiding us, never angry, or judging, kind and loving. I think I said to Paul Tessein (the founding father of COA) that he was like an angel watching over those people with addictions helping them, guiding them holding their hand and finding a way, and he was doing this all the time. I spoke to him about watching the movie. I felt that there was some connection between what he was doing, what I was seeing within our society and this movie, but still was not clear what it was.

After several conversations with Kevin and Paul, months of prayer and asking for guidance and all the little miracles that happened in-between, COA came to life. Those angels have been working for years, but we as a group of loving caring individuals only had our first meeting in February of this year. I believe in COA because this time His will is being done, we are angels working to do good things for our community. I want to help and I believe we can make a difference in people's lives. I want to be part of the solution along with my friends, these beautiful angels who are out there already helping, dedicating their time and finding solutions, educating each other and working together. When we all work together toward an ultimate goal and we do it with hearts full of hope, maybe we will never have to read about another tragic loss from the pain associated with addiction.

Sincerely,
Joy Tozzi, co-founder of City Of Angels NJ, Inc.

Road to recovery

The road to recovery is a difficult one to travel. For many seeking freedom from addiction, this road is filled with heartache, pain and numerous immovable obstacles. Unfortunately, as a society we lose too many along the way. Their journey ends far too soon.

There are natural obstacles that accompany addiction. These obstacles include denial, relapse, environmental issues and other psycho-social factors. On this road, some miss their turn and are forced to turn around and start over. For those who manage to get into treatment and successfully complete a program, their return to people, places and things that encourage or allow substance use and abuse is enough to detour them from the road to recovery to the road to destruction.

The road to recovery is full of pot holes. Pot holes big enough to stop someone from attempting to make the journey.

The perception is that those who find themselves addicted to either alcohol and/or other drugs are either weak or they are victims of their own doing.

The fact is that addiction is a

disease just as deadly as cancer. Yet those struggling with the disease of addiction do not receive the same level of care as those with other illnesses.

With no other disease is treatment or length of stay determined or cut short by insurance companies.

With no other disease are those seeking help told "sorry we don't have any beds available. ... Call back later and we might be able to help you."

With no other disease would a person be admitted to the hospital then released when they are considered "medically cleared" with a list of phone numbers to call, with no guidance as to how to get help.

City of Angels NJ, Inc (COA) hopes to create a bridge between addiction and recovery, a bridge of support that assists families and individuals who seek treatment.

By intervening early in the recovery process and providing a judgment free supportive environment for those re-entering society, COA hopes to deliver a clear message that there is hope for a substance free future, that the journey to recovery is accessible and worth the trip.

Families Restored

ADDICTION IS A DISEASE. LET'S TREAT IT THAT WAY.

Treating addiction is as successful as treating other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma. Addiction recovery benefits individuals as well as families with one in three New Jersey residents reporting they know someone in recovery. Still, there is a large addiction treatment gap with more than 50,000 residents, including 9,400 adolescents, demanding treatment and unable to recover because they can't access it.

NCADD
NEW JERSEY

Learn how you can help close the addiction treatment gap:
NCADDNJ.org

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