

Addiction destructive to more than just the user

By Lisa Wall Editor | Posted: Monday, April 20, 2015 12:00 am

Shattered lives. Those two words best describe the effects of prescription drug abuse on those suffering from addiction as well as their family and friends.

In part two of The News Herald's three-part series on substance abuse, Burke County resident Whitney Wade shared her story of how addiction can shatter a family and the long, painful struggle of putting the pieces back together. Both Whitney and her father, Scott, who is featured in Burke County Sheriff Steve Whisenant's video about prescription drug abuse, decided to speak out as a means to come to terms with what they're facing and to help others who have experienced similar circumstances.

As Whitney explains in her story, there are many stereotypes about the those who fall prey to addiction, yet anyone of any social standing can be someone who is using drugs.

“Drug abuse is happening everywhere — street corners, doctor’s offices, straight-A students and top athletes. I’ve met orthopedic surgeons and pilots who were addicted to pain medicine,” Whitney said.

And those who have friends or family members who are battling addiction know all too well the impact it can have on their lives. Often it begins with hiding the truth from loved ones until the effects of the abuse can no longer stay beneath the surface. By that time, the situation has escalated to the point in which that person is only a mere shadow of who they once were. Addiction leads honest people to lie, steal and betray. It makes reasonable and pleasant people moody, angry and sometimes violent. It spurs depression and desperation that consume not only the addict but everyone around them.

For families dealing with a loved one who's an addict, there is no clear path drawn as to how to help or how to cope. And sometimes, even the best efforts to help someone turn their life around prove futile and leave those around them with their own sense of depression and desperation. No one ever wants to give up on someone they love, but learning to love an addict and help an addict can be an overwhelming challenge.

“As the sister of a sibling who has struggled with addiction, I cannot even begin to explain how easy it is to give up, and throw your hands in the air and say ‘just forget it’ out of anger and pain,” Whitney said. “But, had everyone who has surrounded our family throughout the years of addiction turned their backs, walked away and said ‘just forget it,’ my brother wouldn’t be here today.”

Her quote perfectly describes how the feeling of surrender and loss of hope extends beyond the abuser to family and friends. While one struggles to stay clean, those around them struggle to cope with the devastating effects of their actions. Oftentimes, families are challenged to decide when their support is enabling drug use and addictive behavior and when it's time to draw the line and use "tough love" to force addicts to make a decision to change.

What makes this difficult is that addiction is a disease, and once someone is infected, it can be very difficult for them to face the internal struggles and realize the damage they are doing to themselves and those around them. But admitting there is the problem is the first step to recovery. And while many will never admit their addiction, and others will detox and then relapse over and over again, some will stay on course to regaining their health and their life.

For those battling addiction who are ready to face the reality of their situation and begin the path to recovery, there is help. Even more important, there is hope.

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