

Good morning. My name is Tim Robinson, Founder and CEO of Addiction Recovery Care.

There were more deaths due to overdoses than to car accidents last year making addiction a public health crisis. The addiction epidemic is not just costing us thousands of lives, it is also threatening our economic security as employers struggle to find and retain employees who can pass a drug screen. In September, our Kentucky Chamber of Commerce CEO wrote an Op Editorial that called addiction the number one economic concern in our state.

Everyone is looking for a silver bullet to our addiction crisis. There is no single intervention that alone is a silver bullet. Addiction recovery requires a whole person approach which starts with identifying those in addiction, intervening with treatment, investing in their economic future through education and workforce development, and inspiring them to join the effort to do for others what was done for me: help another person discover their destiny and walk out their own recovery.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to you because recovery is personal to me. I started drinking in my first year of law school at the University of Kentucky to cope with my mom passing away from terminal lung cancer during finals. For the next eight years, I almost drank myself to death. Ten years ago, while I was a prosecuting attorney in Lawrence County, Kentucky, a court bailiff who was a recovering alcoholic and pastor, led me to a spiritual awakening at my desk. He became my sponsor and my pastor. He carried me for a while; He walked with me and poured his recovery and his faith into me. Addiction recovery is personal to me because I am a survivor.

Two years later, I resigned as prosecutor, gave my practice to my law partner, and in 2010 opened Karen's Place, a recovery center for women in Eastern Kentucky. Since opening our first center, we have realized that addiction is a disease that devastates all aspects of a

person's life, and that a holistic approach is crucial for long-term recovery. Addiction impacts someone's mind, body, spirit, and purpose. We have been determined to treat addiction medically, clinically, spiritually, and vocationally.

Though our treatment centers are led by an addictionologist and are nationally accredited, Alcoholics Anonymous has taught us that a spiritual awakening is the foundation of lasting recovery. In that tradition, we have developed a spirituality program that inspires hope and offers those coming out of addiction an opportunity to understand that God is the source to find hope, forgiveness and redemption. Much like hospice care centers and Catholic healthcare systems, we employ chaplains and pastoral counselors who work alongside of our clinical staff. Though we consider the faith-based aspect of our centers to be the heart of our success - our spirituality program does not replace medical and evidence-based clinical practices - it is an addition to them and makes our care more comprehensive.

Treating the whole person has led to great success. Our clients stay in treatment for 60-70 days compared to a national average of 25-30 days. This objective measure shows our residential centers to be twice as effective as the national average. Readmission is another objective measure. Those in addiction who relapse most often return to the same center 40% of the time. Less than 10% of our clients readmit.

As we built our treatment network we have had a great need for addiction treatment workers. We created an internship program and issued a challenge: clients who interned with us until their 1 year clean and sober mark would be guaranteed a job. Today, seventy of Addiction Recovery Care's two hundred employees are graduates of our centers and products of our internship program.

We formalized our internship program by becoming a state certified Peer Support Specialist (PSS) training program. A Peer Support Specialist is a recovering addict who has at least one year of sobriety. After a forty-hour class, they become a Medicaid billable behavioral health practitioner and can provide those in addiction with peer support.

SOAR, an economic development initiative in Kentucky's 5th Congressional District, connected us with the workforce board Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, and their Executive Director, Jeff Whitehead. With the workforce board providing funding, we partnered with Sullivan University to transform our internship and peer support program into a workforce development opportunity. Our program graduates become state certified and earn a college certificate. There is also soft skills development in professionalism and workplace ethics. They receive other skills such as CPR, first aid, using an electronic medical record, and HIPAA compliance that are transferable to other career paths especially in the medical field. In just one year, a person in addiction can go from an IV needle heroin user to employed and earning a living helping others follow their path of recovery.

In October 2016, we started our first class, and sixteen Peer Support Specialists graduated in May 2017. Out of the sixteen graduates, fourteen of them are at least eighteen months clean and sober, working full time, paying taxes and are transitioning off of public assistance. These fourteen people now have great purpose and meaningful careers. We now have over fifty more recovering addicts in the academy today. Some of the graduates have even been promoted to middle management, and others are continuing their education for careers such as counseling.

Prior to the Academy, 40% of our clients moved on to our transitional program. After starting the Academy, 70% of our clients now choose to continue treatment, which means treatment motivation has almost doubled for those who have been given a meaningful career opportunity. It has exponentially multiplied the success of our treatment outcomes as 85% of our first

academy class are at least 18 months clean and sober and employed as productive citizens today.

Vocational education as a part of the continuum of care for addiction treatment drives greater levels of success due to three major reasons: 1). When someone enters treatment and knows there is a second chance career path it inspires hope and increases treatment motivation, 2). The 12<sup>th</sup> step of AA informs us that sharing our recovery is one of the foundations of long-term sobriety. This concept suggests that finding purpose in helping others strengthens your recovery and helps you to continue to heal from addiction; and Finally, 3). Experiencing the dignity of work gives recovering addicts who have reentered the workforce a positive self-image, confidence and helps them to establish career goals and plan for their future. A great example of this is Vanessa Keeton. She was an IV-needle user who entered one of our residential centers and completed our internship program. She became a treatment center director while earning a college degree and purchasing her first home. Recently, she resigned as our HR director to focus on the business she started that now supports her family.

We are also seeing success in other vocational education programs such as our maintenance internship. We are in the process of adding automotive, culinary arts and welding certificate and apprentice programs.

The hope of America is not merely surviving. The hope of America is an opportunity to flourish. That is what our brothers and sisters in addiction need; an opportunity. An opportunity for treatment and vocational skill building that leads to a meaningful career path, and when the opportunity is given...I have seen us not just survive, but thrive.