How can we STOP the heroin epidemic?

STORIES of HEROIN AND OPIATE PREVENTION EDUCATION

Alex’s Story

If we are to get our arms around the growing addiction and overdose death crisis, it is critical that we prevent students from ever misusing opiates in the first place. HOPE’s first initiative “Alex’s Story” is currently serving as a primary prevention agent in our school communities. It is providing valuable awareness and education to high school audiences on the progression of drug use from experimentation, to regular use, and then addiction.

“Alex’s Story” is a dramatic re-telling of one New Hampshire teen’s real-life slide down the slippery slope of drug use into heroin addiction and the difficult journey to recovery.

Alex is a young man, but his story is retold by an actress so both young men and women can relate to the events that led to his addiction.

Alex Berry (pictured right) with Brittany Irish, the professional actress who portrays Alex in “Alex’s Story” touch the hearts and minds of their high school audiences in profound and moving ways.

Book a performance today! tiger-psu@plymouth.edu
“Alex’s Story” is proving effective with teen audiences because:

- **Authenticity.** It is a true story of a New Hampshire teen—100% of the dialogue shared is Alex’s own words from his experience with drug use, addiction, treatment, and recovery. As prevention specialists, CADY has ensured the messaging is science-based and accurate.

- **Relatable.** Alex is the boy next door—he comes from a good family, participated in sports, and was a boy scout. Youth say… “if he experienced addiction, then it could happen to me too.”

- **Peer-to-Peer Model.** It is highly effective because it utilizes a peer-to-peer strategy—where kids “tune out” adults they “tune in” to their peers. We know in the drug prevention field, that a power differential between adults and youth exists and this can make communication difficult. It is the equality in power status between youth that makes peer-based communication most successful. High school students are a hard to reach audience—HOPE is designed to bridge this communication gap.

- **One-of-a-kind presentation.** Most motivational speakers on this serious subject matter are older adults communicating their experience and tragic loss from an adult perspective. As stated above, adult to youth messaging typically does not produce long-term behavior change whereas Alex’s experience is resonating with young audiences because he just turned 20 in January. You can hear a pin drop in large school auditoriums.

- **Emphasizes Progression of Drug Use to Addiction.** Most youth and many adults don’t realize that use of all types of drugs serve as risk multipliers for opiate and heroin addiction (i.e., alcohol addiction increases risk of heroin addiction two fold; marijuana 3X and Rx Opioid painkiller addiction 40X). This presentation clearly defines early onset of any drug use as a gateway to problems and addiction.

- **Counters Myths and Stereotypes**—Alex’s message reinforces that addiction can happen to anyone—especially teens. Science states that the developing teen brain is vulnerable to addiction. From experience we know that kids don’t want to be lectured at about the science of addiction—but they are receptive to the message when imbedded in a storytelling format.

- **Treatment**—Beyond the primary prevention mission, Alex is encouraging kids currently in trouble with drugs to get help before it’s too late. At one school, a 15-year old girl who disclosed she was a heroin addict was connected with help.

- **Cost-Effective**—Where most motivational speaker fees run in the thousands of dollars and come with additional obligations to purchase their products (bracelets; books, etc) the total cost of a full-school presentation of HOPE’s “Alex’s Story” is $825 plus mileage.

The bottom line—addiction is stealing the lives of our young people. We need to reach our kids before drugs do.

HOPE (Heroin and Opiate Prevention Education) provides a powerful primary prevention approach for high school aged youth and serves as a crucial mitigating factor in the non-medical use of prescription painkillers and illicit use of heroin in our state. According to the National Center on Substance Abuse and Addiction, 9 out of 10 individuals who struggle with addiction began drinking, smoking, and using other drugs before they turned 18 years of age. It is imperative that we keep a focus on prevention because we need to block entry to the addiction pipeline—when we prevent youth substance abuse, we prevent addiction.

“Alex’s Story” is a collaborative project of

Students get direct answers to their questions during a Q&A with Alex