

As a person who can speak from personal experience and someone who considers themselves a success story when it comes to medicated treatment for opiate dependence, I hope that my personal story can make a difference when it comes to new legislative law that could encourage the education and much-needed funding of our current drug addiction epidemic.

My addiction story begins in Upstate New York 1998. Access to nearly pure heroin in the Northeast back then was extremely easy. Most of my friends and I were High School graduates at the time but we had also started experimenting with heroin. It didn't take long for most of my friends to either overdose or end up in one rehab or another. At the time there was no methadone clinic or long-term inpatient rehab for opiates anywhere within an hours drive or more. In fact it wasn't until 2006 that the first methadone clinic in our area had opened. That 8 year period from 98' to 06' was the worst time of my life for sure. I was constantly in and out of jail and finding myself in very dangerous situations on a daily basis.

In 2009 after almost 3 years on methadone maintenance in New York I gathered enough courage to move out west and start over. I moved to California and was able to quickly transfer to another methadone maintenance program in San Francisco. I eventually moved to Oregon and was able to transfer once again to another maintenance program in Medford. I now live in Grants Pass and I am still on methadone. The program has made it possible for me to live a normal life and kept me away from going back to using drugs. The methadone maintenance program is much more than just taking medication everyday. It's committing to outside support, sponsorship and attending groups/classes etc. Without outside funding for programs like this I really don't know how my life would have turned out but I can honestly say that I would most likely be either dead or in prison by now for sure. These days because of my long-term commitment and success with the program which has been mostly government-funded at this point I'm able to use my story to help others going through the same hardships I did, point them in the right direction and help them stay on the right path. Unfortunately my story is not typical but it's definitely not unheard of. I have met many others like myself who were lucky enough to get the support of the community and enough funding to support their recovery.

Of course this is just a brief summary of my never ending recovery story and I could easily write a novel about my troubled life. The point here is to hopefully have others realize how important successful programs like the one I've been following for all these years are for so many people dealing with not just opiate addiction but addiction of all kinds.

---Benjamin Lewis, District 4, Grants Pass---