

Ground Zero: Beyond The Overdose Epidemic



Leslie Ostronic & Joe Timmerman

Cover image:

A man rides his bike while holding a peanut butter and jelly sandwich he made at River Valley Organizing's syringe exchange in Portsmouth, Ohio. The exchange, which used to be hosted at the Portsmouth City Health Dept., is held three days a week after starting in 2011. According to Abby Spears, the Coordinator of Injury Prevention at the Portsmouth City Health Dept., the syringe exchange is up to about 2,900 unique participants since it first started. "We are providing services across roughly 16 zip codes between five states," Spears said.

"DREAMER BOY" By: Nick Browning

Subtle voices ; sleepy haze
Muffled noise ; beginning phase

Restless sleep, sets the stage
for senseless thoughts and odd delays

Threatening themes infect my brain
project on screens, then focus fades.

A host of dreams evoke a craze,
of throatless screams and faceless names.

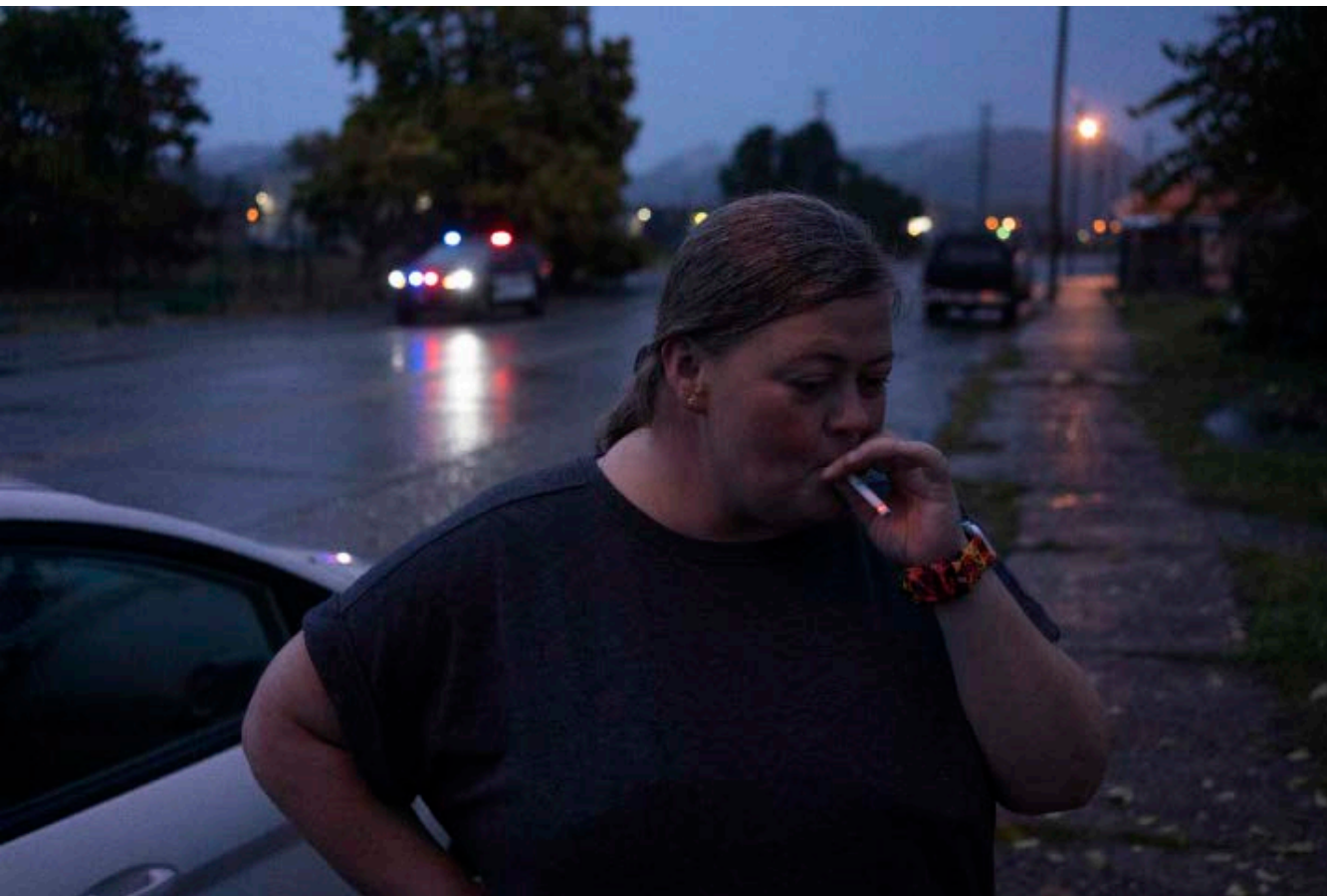
Muted words that pierce through pitch;
I'm trying to fight with heavy fists.

With bated breathe, my lungs deflate;
With every step, two less I take.

Awake in sweats, I face the day;
A light peaks through a broken shade;
Hours pass, the day is gone;
The moon is back, the nights begun.

Hopeann Lovinroff-Moran rests her hand on her OhioCAN banner, a non-profit that she extended into her hometown of Youngstown, Ohio. This banner includes close to 5,000 people who have passed away to the drug epidemic. "We just keep making it larger but now we're to the point where we're probably going to have to you know make two... we started out with two little poster size banners." Lovinroff-Moran, who lost her step-daughter, Jody, to an overdose in 2018, knew multiple faces on the banner but wasn't able to point them all out because she couldn't find them.





It has forever changed my life & the lives
of most of my community, the loss
has been monumental.



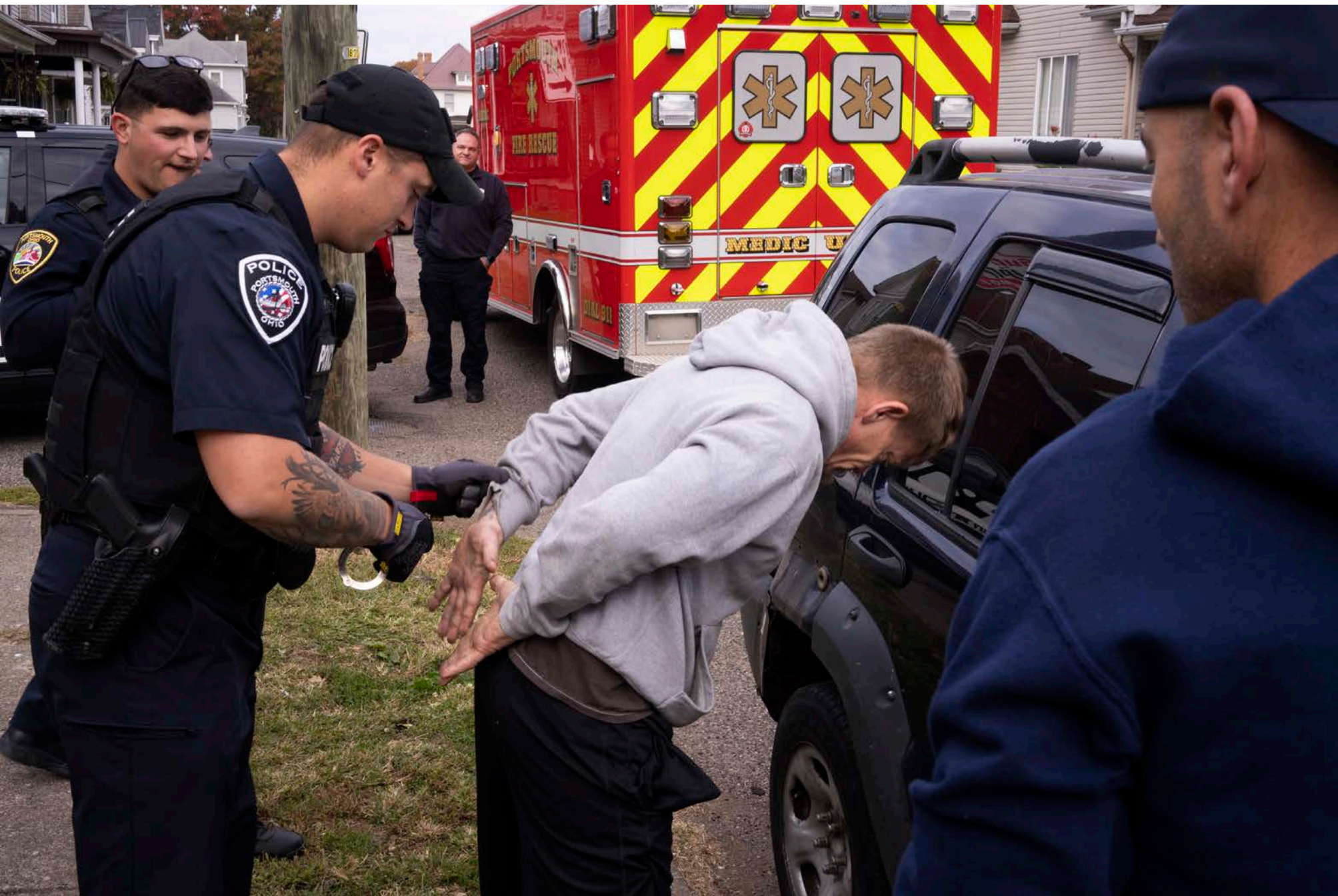
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River Valley Organizing's building includes many names across their walls. "These are folks that have died either by overdose or in a drug related death," said Abby Spears, the Outreach and Policy Coordinator for RVO. "Those are just the ones we know... so just imagine all those people that are dead..." said Menace.



Jayson Jarvis, of Portsmouth, carries containers each filled with up to 3,000 dirty syringes into his home next door to the syringe exchange. Jarvis works the syringe exchange alongside Abby Spears every week, and the pair have known each other for their entire lives. According to Jarvis and Spears, the exchange averages about 250 people per week, and around 950-1250 per month.



Portsmouth Police Department officers place a homeless man under arrest for an outstanding warrant after responding to an emergency 911 call of a possible overdose and finding him laying on the sidewalk. According to officers at the Portsmouth Police Department, this man had been clean off drugs and in treatment for a few months about a year earlier.



Kenneth Tarvin, left, a peer supporter and quick response team member at The Counseling Center, offers resources and follow-up care options to a homeless man after responding to the man's overdose. "Listen, bro, all hope ain't lost. It's just a bump in the road. You just got to get through it, you know?" Tarvin said to the man.



Every DAY is A
Reckoning...



Abby Spears and Menace embrace after Menace shares some of his recent hardships. Spears is the Outreach and Policy Coordinator for River Valley Organizing. Menace is a team member of the organization that educates and distributes Narcan to the community. “Ultimately, it is about a continuum of support,” Spears says.

My definition of an epidemic is
~~that~~ something that effect the mass
to the point of uncontrollable outcomes

menace



Menace, foreground, spends time with friends at Kendall Heights in Portsmouth, Ohio. The area is more commonly known as “Wayne Hills,” the previous name for the housing area. Because of the area’s significant amount of drug use and overdoses, the sign was previously vandalized to say “Wayne Pills” and a neighborhood cat was named “Narcen.”





This epidemec has shown
me that its only going to
keep growing and we have
to figure out a way to
get a grip on it



Words cant even
describe
how I
Feel about
it...



Addiction is the single greatest threat to the people of this region. Addiction is an invisible enemy waging an invisible war. Addiction can strike anyone, anywhere, at anytime. It has all but wiped out an entire generation. If you have not been affected by it yet, it is only a matter of time before you will!

—John Brown

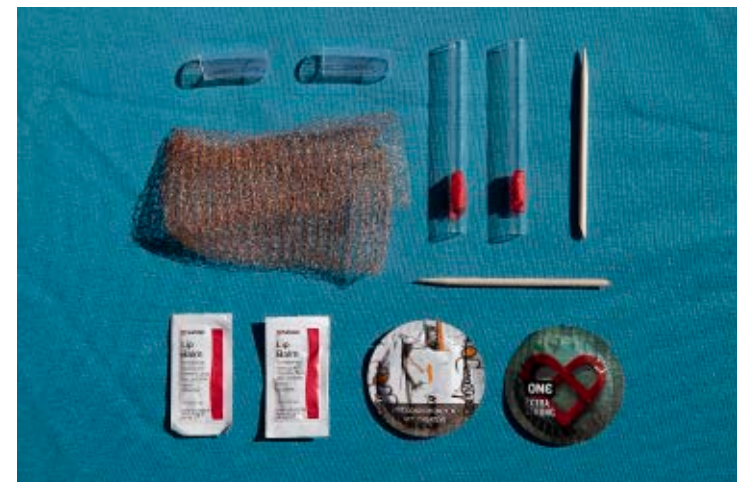


Danielle Suttles, 43, of Newark, right, waits in line for the Newark OhioCAN Thanksgiving lunch and underground syringe exchange alongside Aline Belcastro, of Baltimore, middle, and Dead Barnett, of Groveport. Suttles, Belcastro and Barnett each said they are homeless, and come every Saturday for the hot lunch and syringe exchange. According to Belcastro, she has overdosed 5 or 6 times using fentanyl and meth, and she has been narcaned twice, the most recent time being in February. "I poked myself till I looked like a pin using old needles," Belcastro said. "I still feel like we're taking a chance, but it feels safer," she said about using clean needles from the syringe exchange.



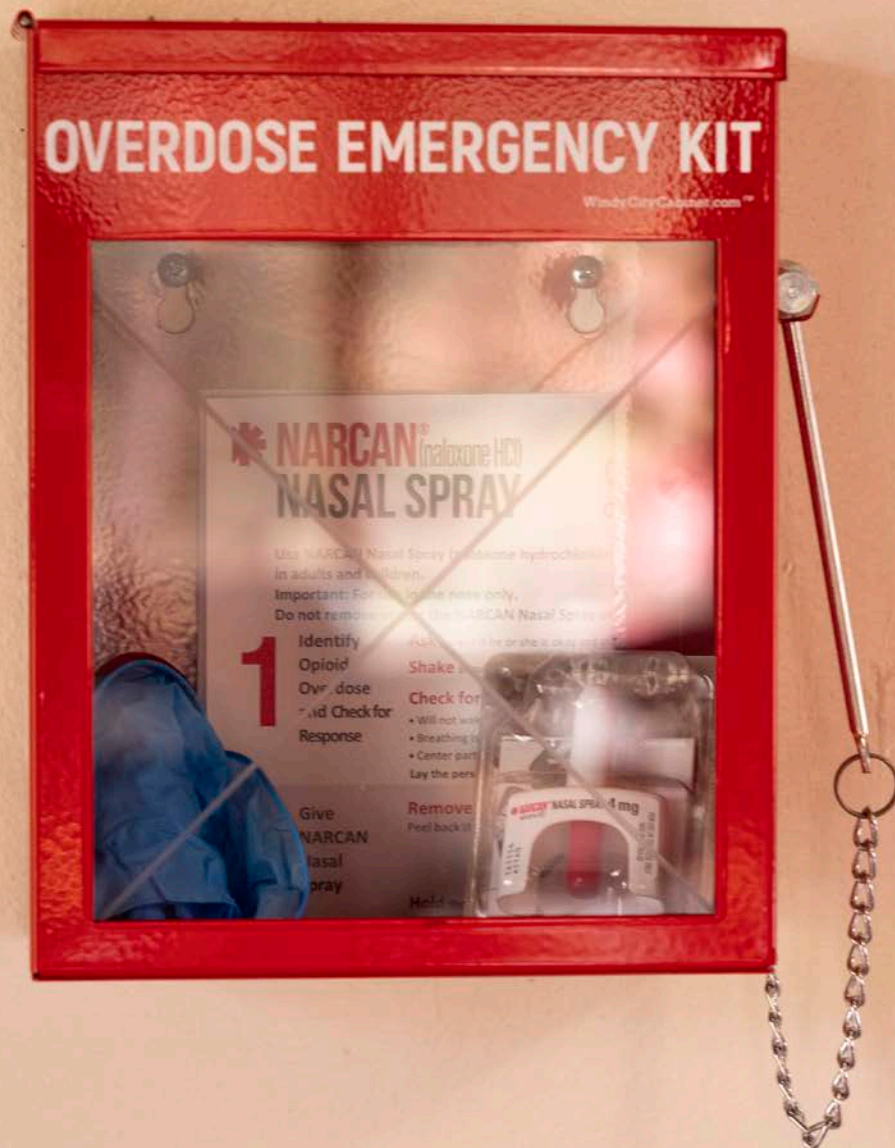
Despite the syringe exchange ban in Licking County, Trish Perry still creates “harm reduction kits” that are present at Newark’s unsheltered events. “We work to make sure people have those tools to stay alive...dead people do not get into recovery.” Each kit is designed to help users safely consume drugs.

Three different “harm reduction kits” that are available at Newark’s unsheltered events.





The drug epidemic has taught me that no one is immune. It has also showed me how a mother's love has no bounds and unconditional love is a must. The words "tough love" should not be in a sentence or conversation when referring to substance use disorder. We truly^{do} live in "Denial Ohio". Mainly, I have learned, I will never give up!! on anyone...

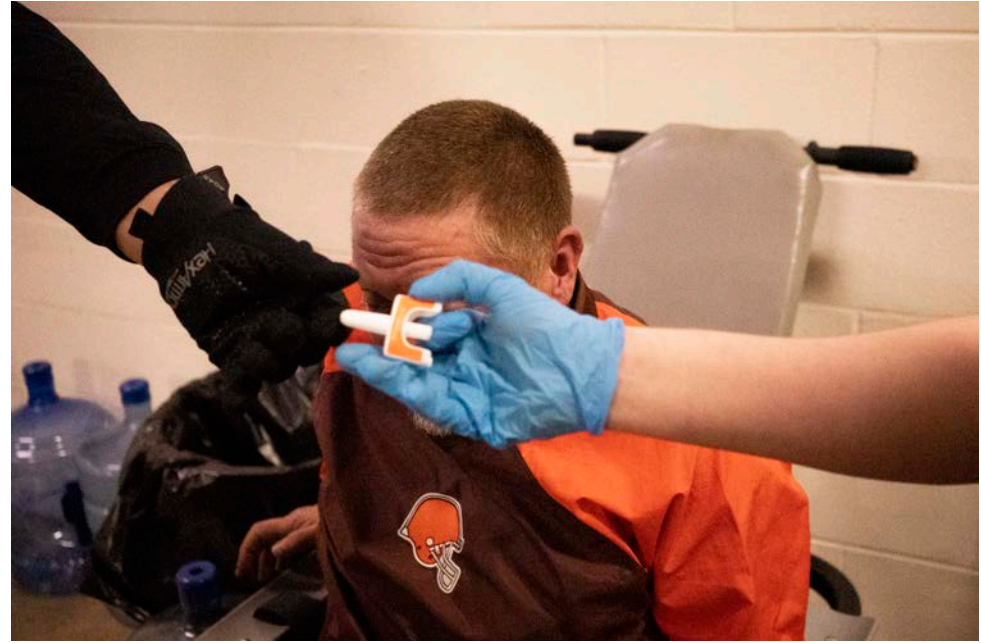


"It is our duty to
love the unloved,
help the helpless,
and bring hope to
the hopeless."
- Anthony Douglas Williams





Tyler Spriggs, a police officer at the Portsmouth Police Dept., talks to a man high on drugs outside an apartment building in Portsmouth, Ohio, after responding to a 911 call. “In this job, you’re kind of like a social worker, marriage counselor, everything combined,” Spriggs said. The man was put under arrest after being unable to calm down and taken to the Scioto County Sheriff’s Office jail due to an outstanding warrant.



Officers at the Scioto County Sheriff’s Office jail show one another how to use narcan in case the man overdoses. At one moment, the man was sweating with his arms and legs flailing, and in the next moment, he would pass out while the jail decided what to do with him. According to Capt. Josh Sherman, this man was most likely speedballing, meaning he was high on both a stimulant and a depressant.



A man most likely high on a stimulant and a depressant, called speedballing, passes out due to the strength of his high, only to wake up moments later. The Scioto County Sheriff's Office jail refused to accept the man because of "poor condition," leading the EMS crew to transport him to the hospital, which later released him without arrest after the man's high wore off. According to Officer Spriggs, the arresting officer who responded to the initial 911 call, this cycle happens all of the time.



Tyler Spriggs, a police officer at the Portsmouth Police Dept., talks to a man high on drugs outside an apartment building in Portsmouth, Ohio, after responding to a 911 call. "In this job, you're kind of like a social worker, marriage counselor, everything combined," Spriggs said. The man was put under arrest after being unable to calm down and taken to the Scioto County Sheriff's Office jail due to an outstanding warrant.



Robert Wender, of Springfield, Ohio, winces while Lieutenant Alexander Hamilton injects a shot of insulin in his arm after responding to Wender's 911 call about waking up in the middle of the night with low blood sugar. According to Wender, he moved down to Portsmouth a week and a half ago for the recovery services, but dropped out. He usually uses fentanyl, but says he has been clean for about a week, and that the fentanyl makes his diabetes worse.

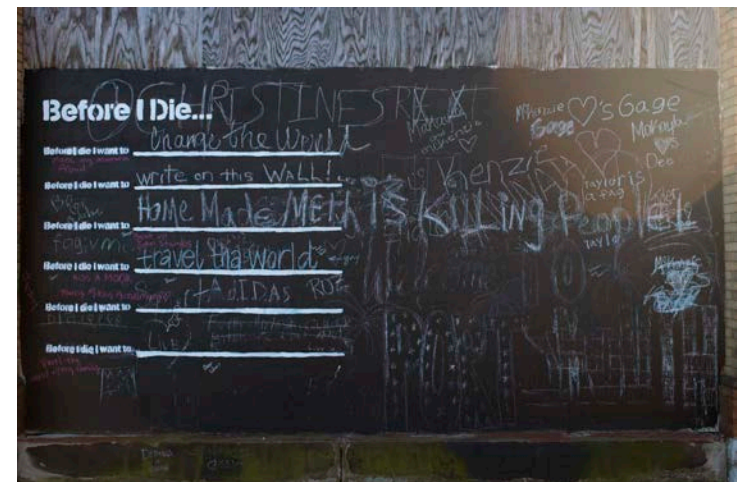


The fight we'll never win.

A. Hamilton



A syringe is left in the leaves near a homeless camp
in Portsmouth, Ohio.



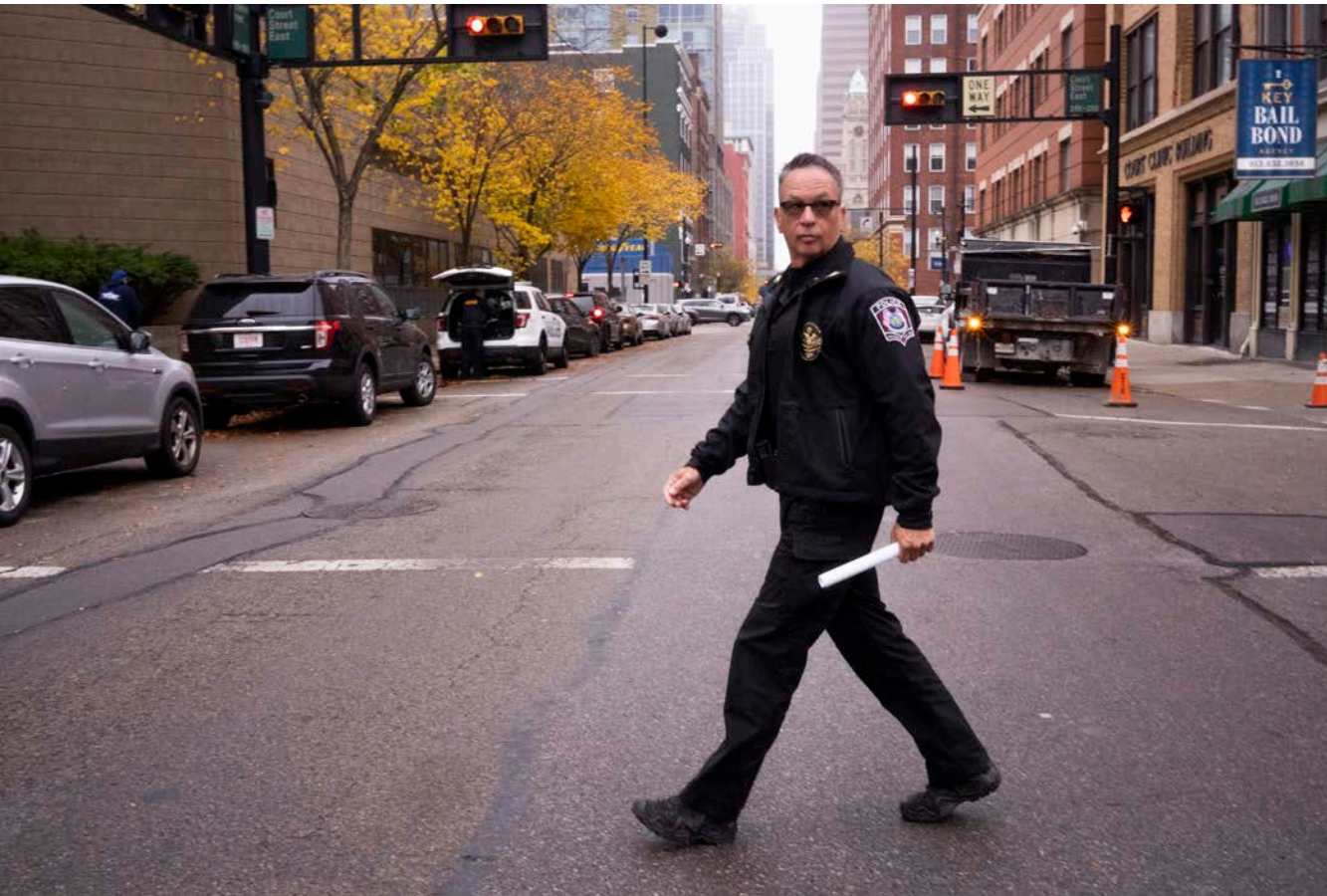


When I think about the opioid epidemic in Ohio I reflect back to the friends; family, and all the people that have lost the battle to addiction. We are fighting this disease from ground zero in Portsmouth, Ohio. I have been in and out the rooms of NA/AA for over 15 years of my life, and the only solution I found was 1. Reaching out to people willing to help. 2. Fully admitting that I had a problem. I am forever grateful for the people at treatment centers, family, and my family I found in recovery. Grateful for the people that laid the foundation before me that recovery is possible! Any addict can recover! I do not hide that I am in recovery, I recover not just for myself but the friends I have lost along this journey. I will continue to fight this fight and to help others in Aidan Blinn's recovery!

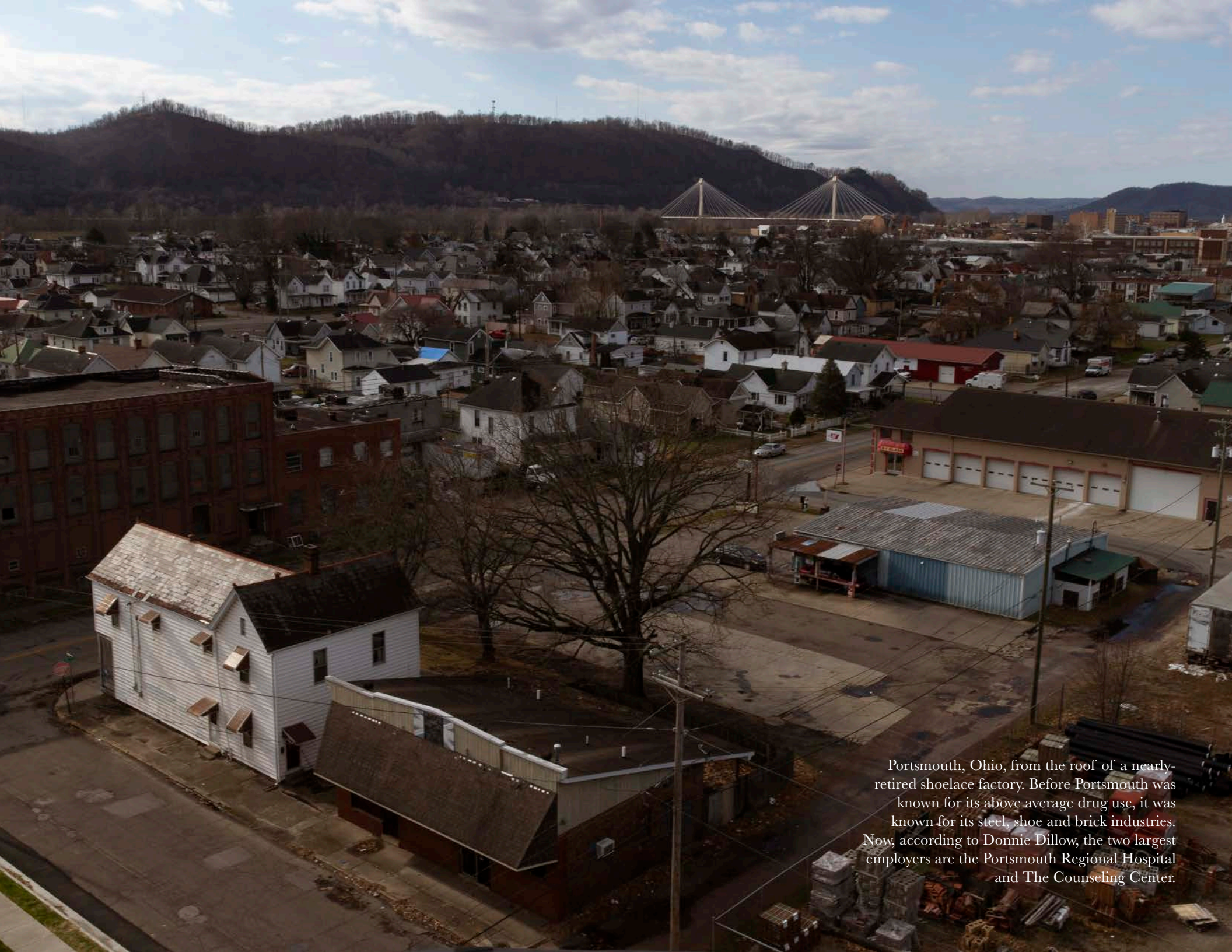
Love Donnie Dillan

A chance to live for the
future and not the past.
As a physician, the passion
to de-stigmatize the disease
of addiction. To "Treat
the disease that caused
the disease"
Richard H. Hays





WE MUST CHANGE THE WAY
WE VIEW AND DEAL WITH ADDICTION.



Portsmouth, Ohio, from the roof of a nearly-retired shoelace factory. Before Portsmouth was known for its above average drug use, it was known for its steel, shoe and brick industries. Now, according to Donnie Dillow, the two largest employers are the Portsmouth Regional Hospital and The Counseling Center.



The Counseling Center bought an old shoelace factory to expand and upgrade their facilities. “We call it the mothership,” said Donnie Dillow, one of TCC’s employees. Dillow looks forward to the expansion and the people it will help.

Arnell Johnson, a client of The Counseling Center, and Tonya Sturgill, Director of Programming and Clinical Services at the Highland County Probation Department greet each other outside of the courtroom before Highland County drug court.



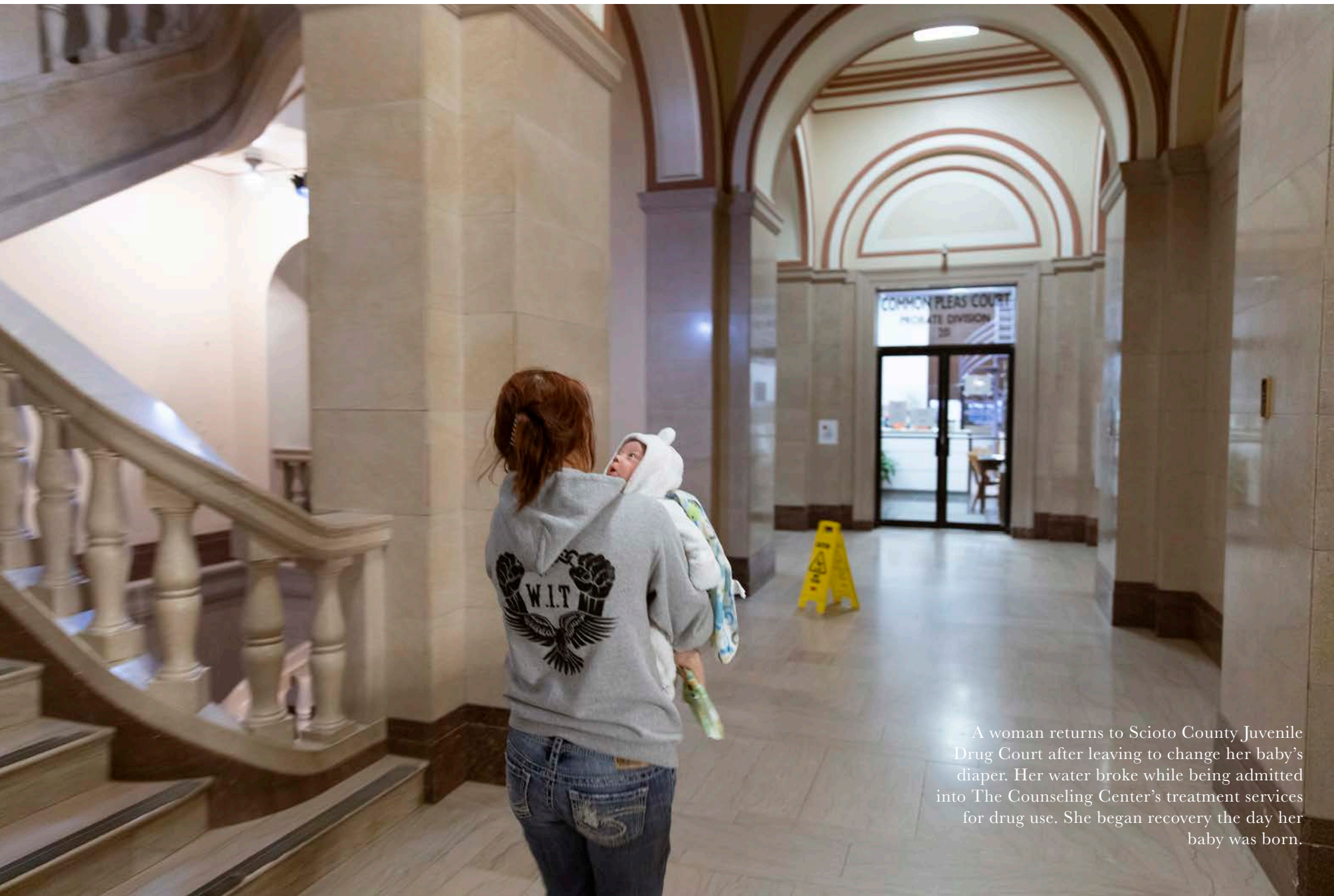
The epidemic concerning OD's/
Not just In Ohio but all accross
the world saddens me. I've lost alot
of friends to this and understand
the struggles of addiction first
hand. I pray for the family and
friends that have experianced the
loss of loved ones due to this situation
If not addressed soon will become
the number 1 cause of deaths in the
United states. May peace be with
you all.

Arnell Johnson

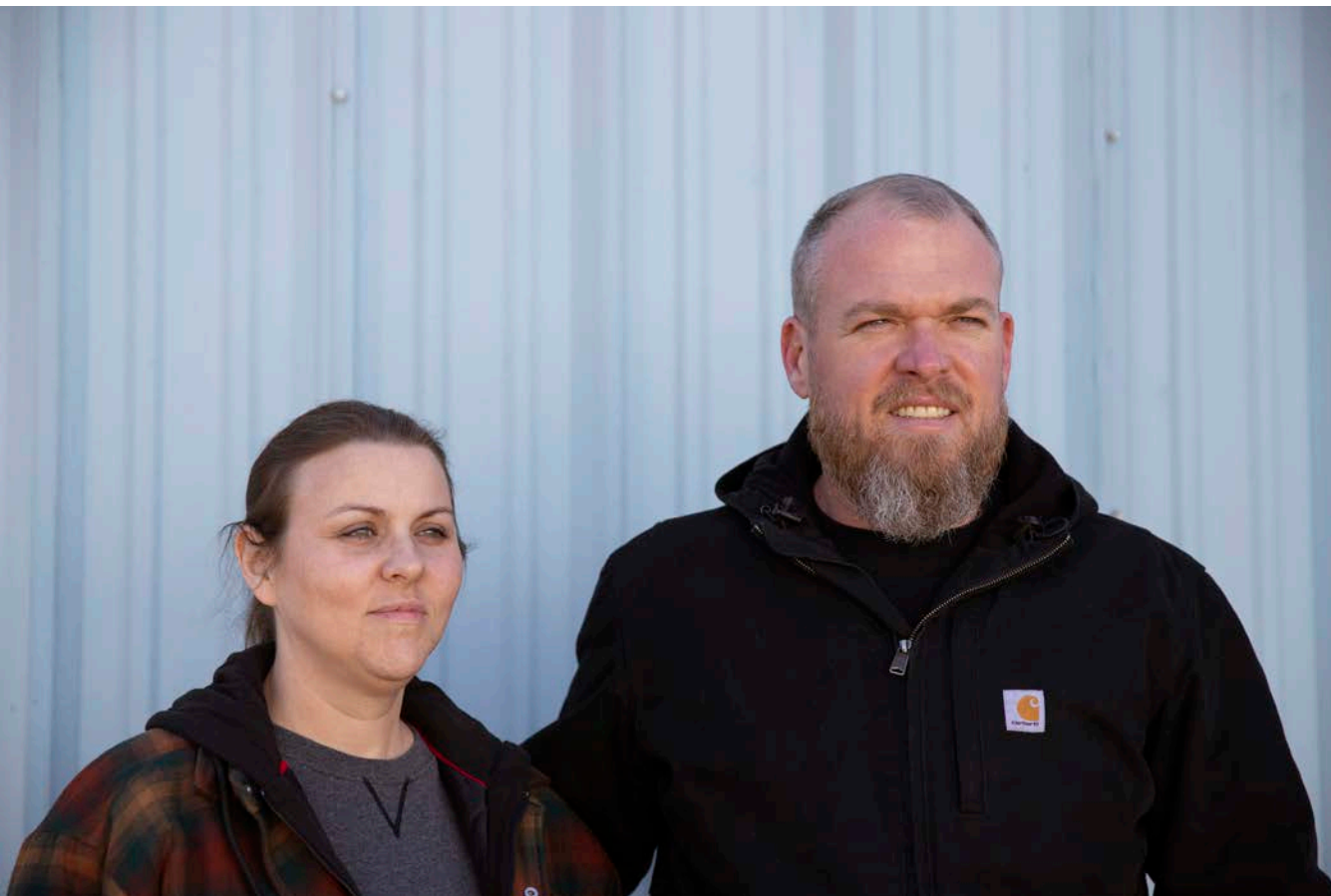


Judge Lemons lets one of the children at Juvenile Drug Court sit on his lap at the stand. This court in Scioto County is designed to help parents in recovery complete treatment and be reunited with their children. “We are like a family here, and we treat them like family...and that’s how it should be,” Judge Lemons said. The court works closely alongside Child Protective Services. “If people are in a safe environment and they are clean they should get to see their kids,” Donnie Dillow said, “Their kids need them.”





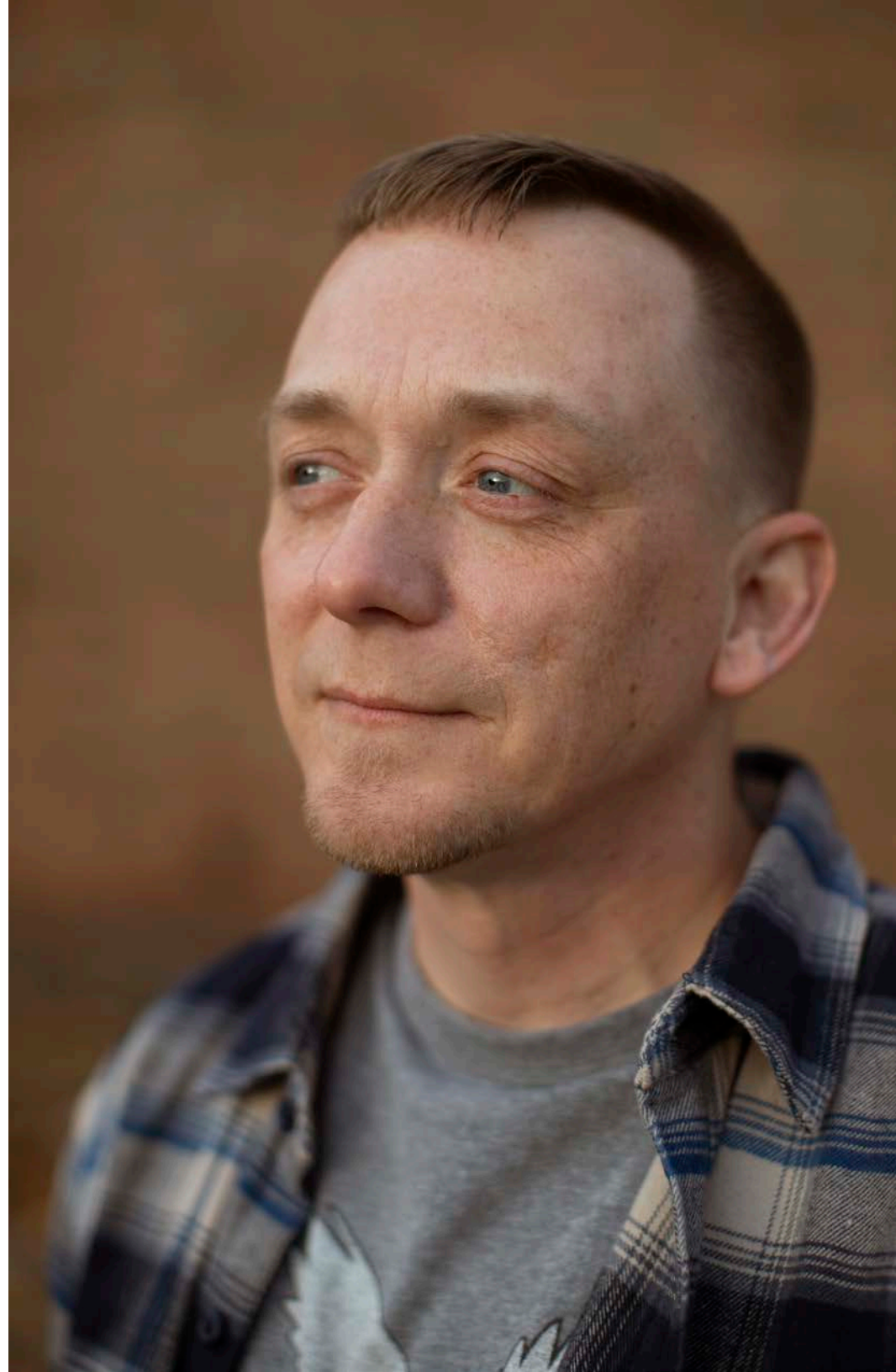
- A woman returns to Scioto County Juvenile Drug Court after leaving to change her baby's diaper. Her water broke while being admitted into The Counseling Center's treatment services for drug use. She began recovery the day her baby was born.



Opioid epidemic = 0
My Family = 1
My community = 1
We survive,
We grow, We Win.
Recovery
Wins

Justin
Collins

Drug addiction is not an addict problem. It is a Community problem. When we can all agree that working together to find a solution is the way to a better Community, we may finally see a change. Rob Elkins





Melissa Sluder, 33, enjoys the company of her five children and parents. This is the first time all of the children have been together with their maternal grandparents. Her parents drove 15 hours to see her during Sluder's first four hours pass in treatment. Sluder graduated from Scioto County drug court in July, 2022, and is slowly regaining full custody of her children that still have open cases.



The sun rises over Portsmouth as the U.S. Grant Bridge connects Portsmouth, Ohio, to South Portsmouth, Kentucky.



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