

CARS CAYUGA ADDICTION RECOVERY SERVICES NEWS

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Michael Ingiosi's Story: From Addiction to Advocacy

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After being prescribed opioids for post-surgical pain for more than a decade, CARS' Peer Advocate Michael Ingiosi originally came to CARS voluntarily to overcome addiction in 2015. Due to a congenital heart condition, Michael could only use prescription medications to relieve significant post-surgical pain. However, long-term prescription use led to his misusing opioids and addiction.

Michael initially responded to his addiction by attending recovery meetings at an out-of-town outpatient clinic. However, he soon realized he was not doing enough to defeat his addiction by limiting himself to recovery meetings alone. A sense of shame over needing help to fight his addiction, along with his resistance to change, had kept him intentionally isolated in his desire for recovery and away from Ithaca's recovery options. Fortunately, his desire for positive change led to his accepting a local referral to CARS and, following three weeks at a nearby inpatient program, Michael was able to begin his road to recovery here in October 2015. However, at about the six month point of his recovery at CARS, in March 2016, Michael suffered a significant setback in the form of a relapse.



The Relapse

A combination of factors, for which he takes full responsibility, contributed to his relapse. At the time, assuming his treatment medication provided an adequate safety net, Michael had been attempting to assist another person with addiction who he was not in a safe place in his recovery to help. Moreover, a lack of adequate resources, including a sponsor he retained who was unable to meet his needs, along with a continuing sense of personal shame for needing help, leading to his avoiding engaging with his local treatment community, led to his relapse.

By Michael's estimation, his months of relapse, marked by his persistent denial that it had occurred, were the most difficult times of more than ten years of addiction. After hitting rock bottom in July 2016, Michael went to New Jersey in search of support. However, because of his congenital heart condition, Michael had not realized the stirrings of a serious health crisis.

A Three-Month Hospitalization

By September 2016 Michael had been clean in New Jersey for almost two months but he kept losing weight. Pouring himself into recovery, he had been attending six meetings a day to "build up strength" to achieve his objective of returning to Ithaca and CARS. However, along with weight loss, he was experiencing night sweats and sickness. He did not know that IV drug use combined with his genetic heart condition had led to endocarditis, sepsis, and blood clots.

During a three-month hospitalization in Pennsylvania, Michael had three heart surgeries: an emergency embolectomy, open heart surgery, and pacemaker surgery. While

hospitalized, Michael realized almost every patient on his floor was recovering from endocarditis and sepsis brought on by IV drug use.

Following his release, Michael returned to Ithaca in January 2017 to focus on rebuilding his family and to resume his recovery at CARS. Determining to let go of his shame of attending local meetings and to succeed in recovery, he immersed himself in Ithaca's recovery community. Committing fully to his recovery at CARS, obtaining a new sponsor he could relate to, and attending local meetings led to his successfully completing CARS' outpatient program for the first time. Since his program completion, Michael's commitment to assisting others with addiction led to him serving as a sponsor, interviewing on local radio about his experiences, leading a recovery group at CARS' residential center, and eventually becoming a certified Peer Advocate at CARS.

Building a Recovery Foundation

When asked what he would say to those who have yet to begin, or are new to recovery, Michael advised,

"Get support. Ask for help. Asking for help is a humbling experience, but it is so worth it. There are people who will love you back to health. We all need support. Cover it from every angle, because that's how addiction affects us."

From addiction to recovery, Michael is an inspiring example of how letting go of shame, asking for help, and getting support can build the foundation needed for successful recovery.