

An OASIS of Healing for Family Recovery

Break the silence
End the stigma
Never forget

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On the peaceful banks of the Monocacy Creek in Bethlehem stands a stately 220-year-old fieldstone farmhouse. Surrounded by majestic trees, its grand porch beckons the weary visitor to enter and find rest. But this historic property is not a private residence. It is home to the OASIS Community Center, Pennsylvania's first recovery center devoted exclusively to nurturing families and helping them heal from the impact of a loved one's substance use.

I am the founder/director of OASIS, and Ben's mom. My husband and I raised our boys in a neighborhood just a few miles away. I visited this house many times throughout Ben's childhood; with Ben in tow as a youngster when it housed a candle shop and in later years, I would bring our boys to feed the geese on the creek bank after school. Life was good. Never would our family have imagined the meaning this house would hold for us in years to come.

Like many youth, Ben dabbled with substances during his high school years. But Ben's substance use accelerated into a severe opioid use disorder, rendering him unable to complete his high school education or even hold a job. We reached out to many medical and mental health providers for help, but were met with ill-informed professionals who failed to understand how to treat and support youth with substance use disorders. Exasperated, we struggled to find support and resources for Ben and for us. Ben was ultimately treated inpatient eleven times, but it was never enough. For eight long and arduous years, I fought for my child's life, and nearly lost my own in the process.

On August 1, 2016, one week before his 24th birthday, Ben tragically lost his life to fentanyl poisoning. His death sent me spiraling into depression. I lost my sense of purpose and, due to the stigma of overdose death, lost relationships with many family, friends, and neighbors. Ben's addiction and subsequent death resulted in the breakdown of my social supports. Sadly, my experience is not unique.

After attending a protest march at Purdue Pharmaceuticals in August 2018, I found my purpose. My son is no longer here to speak up, so I am now his voice. As a result, our family founded the nonprofit Speak Up for Ben, Inc. Interestingly, the name B-E-N forms the acronym Break the silence, End the stigma, Never forget—and this is essentially our mission. Soon afterwards I approached our county and expressed the critical need that families have for education and support. The idea of a Recovery Community Organization addressing an unmet need in our community was met with great enthusiasm from our SCA. As a result, five years ago this month, we were awarded a contract from Northampton County Drug and Alcohol to open a family recovery center the first of its kind in Pennsylvania, and likely the nation.



OASIS provides a plethora of resources, and a comprehensive menu of evidence-based education, therapist-led counseling groups, wellness programs, and social supports. In addition to weekly programs, we organize many special activities including annual retreats and remembrance events. Utilizing a trauma-informed approach to care, we serve families with loved ones in active addiction, in recovery, and families of loss to addiction. We understand that addiction is a family disease, and believe in a holistic approach to healing the entire family system. If any family member breaks out of isolation and ends the cycle by working on their own recovery, then the person living with a substance use condition has the best possible chance of sustained recovery. We invite you to stop in! To learn more, visit us at <https://oasisbethlehem.org>.