

Hanover Township's Very Own Oasis

Mike Prendeville, Vice Chairman Board of Supervisors



Nestled next to the Monocacy Creek in the southeast corner of Hanover Township exists a special place of hope, serenity and support. Opened in June 2019, the OASIS Community Center serves families and friends impacted by a loved one's substance use (opioids, alcohol, or other substances), as well as those who have experienced a substance-related loss. OASIS was founded by Rhonda Miller, a 27-year resident of the Township, after losing her 23-year-old son Ben to opioid use disorder in 2016. Located just south of the Route 22 overpass on the northbound side of Route 512, OASIS is headquartered in a stunning Georgian stone building that was erected in 1803 as part of the Shimer farm, a 279 acre tract of land adjacent to the Monocacy. The interior is impeccably furnished to provide a peaceful and serene environment that inspires calmness and self healing. In fact, I find myself so drawn to this place that I am writing this article on-site.

While interviewing Rhonda, I was immediately inspired by her sincere passion to transform her grief into action. She cites the difficult time she and her family faced after the passing of Ben. Their family felt ostracized by friends and extended family. She attributes that experience to the stigma that exists with substance use. The stigma attached to addiction is so strong that Nar-Anon Family Group dispels it using the concept of the Three C's. One of the best descriptions of an addiction stigma and the understanding OASIS provides comes from our very own, Jay Finnigan, who in July 2019 wrote:

"To steal a cliché from one of the 12-step programs – Nar-Anon - let me share the Three C's

- I Didn't Cause It
- I Can't Control It
- I Can't Cure It."

Unless you have experienced a loved one's or friend's addictive behavior, you will never appreciate that cliché. Parents, spouses, siblings, co-workers, etc. are often confronted with the Three C's. They blame themselves for the

addiction; they try everything in their power to control the individual's destructive behavior and they look for the magic formula to cure it. The key to the other side of the disease equation is the self-healing that parents, spouses, siblings, co-workers, etc. require when coping with someone else's addiction. When one looks up the definition of "Oasis" one of the definitions is: "a pleasant or peaceful area or period during a difficult, troubled, or hectic place or situation." OASIS will assist in the self-healing process needed by those affected by a loved one's substance use. OASIS will educate, provide processes for self-care of the body, mind and spirit, offer workshops, provide family and children's programs, and service projects --all of which will help individuals heal from the pain of an addicted family member, or worse case — their passing."

OASIS is operated by Speak Up for Ben, Inc., a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit. Ben, Rhonda's late son's name, also serves as an acronym for Break the silence, End the stigma, Never Forget. Rhonda gives credit to Northampton County's Drug and Alcohol Administrator Beth Miller and County Executive Lamont McClure for making OASIS a reality. OASIS is the first and only center devoted to supporting families affected by a loved one's substance use in the Commonwealth, perhaps the nation. They offer a wide range of programs such as walking groups, yoga, cooking and art classes, equine therapy, support groups, group counseling and much more.

The isolation of COVID-19 has exacerbated substance use, and there is an emergent need for this type of service. This incredibly special place simply exists to serve our community by providing free services and resources to families currently facing the agony of substance use of their loved ones, as well as for those who have tragically lost a loved one to this insidious disease. Judgement (stigma) has no place here-- just understanding, love and compassion. We are so fortunate to have OASIS call Hanover Township home. Come see for yourself — you will find a very warm and welcoming environment! To learn more, visit www.oasisbethlehem.org.

