

They were scholars and athletes. Good kids from good families. They were also addicts.

Updated: Nov. 19, 2022, 6:31 p.m. | Published: Nov. 19, 2022, 8:28 a.m.

By Rudy Miller | For lehighvalleylive.com



Brianna Boriosi, right, overcame heroin addiction. She is featured in the documentary, "This is My Son, This is My Daughter." She's pictured here with her mother, Brenda. Photo courtesy of Brianna Boriosi

Brianna Boriosi got good grades. She lettered in track and cross country at Nazareth Area High School. She had lots of friends.

But she had a secret.

She was addicted to drugs.

She got hooked when she was 13. She's one of five kids featured in a new documentary "This is My Son, This is My Daughter" produced through the Easton Opioid Awareness Task Force.

"It's so easy to have a double life," Boriosi said after the first screening of the documentary Wednesday, Nov. 16.

The documentary takes a close look at five Lehigh Valley young people and their struggle with addiction. It shows addiction cuts through all backgrounds, all ethnicities, all sorts of people.

- Boriosi grew up in Bushkill Township and managed to hide her heroin addiction from her family until she went to college. Her dad's struggle against cancer finally convinced her at 20 that she, too, wanted to fight for her life.
- Kainoa Huber was a football player and a wrestler at the former Pius X High School in Bangor. He was in ninth grade when he tried oxycodone from a friend's parent's medicine cabinet. He got hooked, overdosed, and died at age 23.
- Joe Starace grew up in Palmer Township and was on the football team at Notre Dame High School in Bethlehem Township. He got hooked on drugs at 13, sold his family's jewelry to feed his habit and went to prison twice before getting clean. He now holds a master's degree in political science from Lehigh University.
- Ben Miller played soccer at Liberty High School and taught himself how to play piano and guitar. His drug use spiked after he got hooked on Vicodin prescribed after his wisdom teeth were pulled. His roommate found him dead with a needle in his arm. He was 23.
- Ciara grew up in Allentown. (She didn't want her last name used for this story.) She used her scholarship money intended for Lehigh Carbon Community College to buy drugs. She finally kicked her habit after giving birth while she was addicted to heroin.

"Addiction doesn't discriminate," said Brian Kaye, the sixth person addicted to drugs who was featured in the documentary. He got addicted to opiates due to a back injury at age 30 but has been clean nine years. He worked at the Clean Slate rehab in Bethlehem and now lives and works in Bucks County.

"It doesn't care what color you are, how much money you have, or how much money your parents have. All it wants is your soul," Kaye said.

Bill Tonkin said he put together the documentary after children of three of his friends succumbed to addiction and died. He wants to warn children and parents about the dangers of drug usage and how easily that usage can escalate.

How bad can it get?

Boriosi recalled a harrowing story about trying to score heroin with a friend. She was 18. Her dealer referred her to a friend of a friend. She wound up at a dive hotel, locked in a bathroom for 10 hours forced to have sex with strangers.

"I've never been the same person since," she said.

Ciara went from being a college student to living on the street, doing unspeakable things to get high for six years. She tearfully recalled checking out of the hospital against medical advice after giving birth to her son. While her son struggled through withdrawal symptoms in the NICU, she went looking for drugs.

"I was willing to do everything and anything for a bag of dope," Ciara said.

The documentary's message isn't one of despair, though. It's one of hope.

Boriosi is now 32 years old. She eventually got her master's degree, was director of various inpatient clinics and now works as a clinical mental health counselor.

Ciara got clean three weeks after giving birth. She's been sober for two years, serves as an elder care worker and now has primary custody of her healthy son.

The Huber and Miller families have started programs to help young people battling addiction. All the participants in the film wanted to share their stories to show others the pain of addiction, its consequences, and the proof that addiction doesn't have to destroy your life.

It was gut-wrenching for Boriosi to see her interview for the first time.

"It made me feel very vulnerable," she admitted. "I hope that vulnerability is a catalyst for hope and help for somebody else."

"It's sort of surreal," Ciara said of seeing herself in the documentary. "I always dreamed of getting out of addiction. Getting out and seeing it now, it was just 'Wow.'"

The hundred spectators at the private screening at Easton Area Middle School were silent after the screen went dark. Tonkin took the microphone after the screening to encourage viewers to request the film for their school groups, athletic teams, boy and girl scout troops, church youth groups, or any other youth group.

He and filmmaker James Boburka plan to shorten the 70-minute documentary and edit the content for younger viewers.

The film was sponsored in part through proceeds from the Northampton County Drug Task Force. District Attorney Terry Houck attended the screening, as did Boys and Girls Club of Easton.

Every story except Kaye's concerns a Lehigh Valley youth, which Tonkin hopes will make an impression on other Lehigh Valley youths dabbling in drugs or in the throes of addiction.



Ciara, left, formerly of Allentown, overcame heroin addiction. She is featured in the documentary "This is My Son, This is my Daughter." At right is her 2-year-old son. Courtesy photo



“They went to school here. They played sports here. They got caught up in addiction here and in some cases they died here,” Tonkin said.

To learn more about Tonkin’s documentary or to schedule a screening for your youth group, email scheduletimsvideo@gmail.com.

Get help with addiction at the Northampton County Drug and Alcohol website or by calling 610-829-HELP. In Lehigh County, see the Lehigh County Drug and Alcohol website.

Documentary producer Bill Tonkin speaks before the premier screening of “This is My Son, This is My Daughter,” on Nov. 16, 2022, at Easton Area Middle School in Forks Township.

Downloaded 11/30/2022 from <https://www.lehighvalleylive.com/news/2022/11/they-were-scholars-and-athletes-good-kids-from-good-families-they-were-also-addicts.html>