

Don't Use Heroin - DUH!: Brighton-based couple making daily reminders for those suffering with addiction

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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Editorial note: Some of the topics discussed in this article are disturbing, especially for those suffering through the pains of addiction or know someone who is. Some of the last names in this article have not been included, because of the nature of the story.

BRIGHTON - **Candy Liley** has not seen her daughter, Megan, in three weeks. She has no idea if she is even alive.

Liley said Megan is addicted to heroin. She discovered that addiction on March 23, 2016, when Megan's fiancée called Liley and her husband, Scott, saying both he and Megan needed help. Liley said she suspected her daughter was using. She said Megan's fiancée went to rehab once, and she witnessed Megan vomiting as well as suffering other obvious symptoms of heroin withdrawal. Liley said she was in denial at first, but could no longer ignore her lingering gut feelings when she finally received that call.

Megan and her fiancée were living in **Carrollton** at the time, Liley said, and she was working in **St. Louis**. She sent her husband to the home, and he frantically searched for a place to take them. Their two young children were taken into Liley's home.

"Addicts need help outside the normal nine to five day," Scott said.

Eventually, Liley called someone she had known while working for a judge in St. Louis who ran a halfway house for women readjusting to society through the struggles of being released from prison and battling addiction, called **Women in Transitions House**. Liley called the woman who ran it - a recovering addict herself - and was told to take Megan and her fiancée to a St. Louis hospital with the message the pair were suicidal.

That hospital kept Megan and her fiancée until the following Monday and released them. They returned to her fiancée's mother's house and found the mother had "made some rule changes," Liley said.

At that point, Liley determined she wanted to not only help her daughter, but also her grandchildren, who Liley saw as innocent victims to their parents' shared sickness. She said the **Department of Child and Family Services** (DCFS) was called into the situation by an outside informant (Liley said she did not make that call herself).

In previous conversations with police officers, Liley said she was told police could walk into her daughter's home and find her "high as a kite," and not be able to do anything about it, as long as there is a responsible adult in the home. Liley said Megan could have a needle in her arm, and they could not take the children, assuming no drugs were left on the premises, which would require a judge-approved search warrant to find.

A representative from DCFS told Megan and her fiancée they could take a drug test. If they were clean, that would be wonderful. If they were not, the agent told them they could receive help for their addiction. If they would not comply, however, their children would be taken from them, Liley recounted.

Scott went to retrieve the children, who still live with Liley and him. Megan and her fiancée are now allowed only one-hour-a-week visits with their own children, according to a state mandate. Liley and Scott said the two may show up one weekend a month - maybe two if they are lucky.

"Those visits are the only time we know they're still alive," Liley said. "We haven't heard from them in three weeks. We have no idea where they are. Last we heard, they were living between cars and drug houses in St. Louis."

In St. Louis, Scott said, some dealers will respond to head nods and hand signals, before bringing a free button (unit of measurement for heroin dosages) and a phone number of where to get more. He said hardcore addicts like Megan and her fiancée actually seek dealers who may have sold to their friends before an overdose, because an overdose signals good quality to many addicts.

Since being outed as a heroin addict in March, Liley said her daughter has lost a significant amount of weight, believing she now could weigh as little as 75 pounds. Liley and her husband said they have to live every day trying to normalize their fears of phones ringing with unknown numbers - knowing each one could bring the news of their daughter's death.

"It's an inevitability," Liley said. "We have to get used to that reality."

With tears in her eyes, Liley recounted the January 2017 court date in which she had to face the grim reality of her daughter's addiction's progression. She asked her daughter if she was "on the needle," and her daughter revealed the track marks on her arm - a sight, which made Megan's addiction all-too tangible to Liley.

"I knew she was using before then, but actually seeing it hit home," Liley said.

Liley said her daughter may currently be injecting **Fentanyl**, an extremely powerful opiate used by heroin addicts who have built an incredible tolerance to heroin and still require a fix for their dopamine receptors. If Liley's assertion is true, Megan is now on a drug overtaking heroin's growing monopoly on opiate-overdose deaths in **Madison**

County. In 2016, Fentanyl overdoses killed 20 people in Madison County, compared to 14 deaths caused by heroin. Fentanyl combined with other dangerous drugs, such as methamphetamine, has claimed even more lives.

With so much pain leveled upon them with Megan's addiction, Liley and her husband decided to do something about it to help other people dealing with their own addictions, or the addictions of their friends and loved ones.



The Bracelets

Liley said she wanted to give people something acting as both a daily reminder and discussion piece, so she and Scott ordered as many as 200 rubber bracelets, and started donating them to people across the community, starting with a chili cook-off in Oct. 2016 hosted by **Amare**, a heroin addict recovery group featuring volunteerism at its core. Liley said she and Scott spoke with Amare Executive Director and local author **Ty Bechel**, who himself is a recovering heroin addict.

"Ty was amazing," Liley said. "We called him and asked if we could set up at his chili cook-off, and he said of course. Since then, he has helped us out a lot and worked with us to introduce us to so many people."

And thus, **Candy's Stop Heroin Foundation** was born. During a Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2017, interview, Liley revealed she had received tax papers allowing her to start a bank account as a 501(c)3 foundation. She said she was only awaiting official approval from the **State of Illinois** for it to be fully certified as such. She was excited to open an account at Liberty Bank to begin growing funds for her work.

Liley and Scott do a lot of work for the community, not only with those who have become addicts through **Narcotics Anonymous**, but also through preventing addiction through youth programs.

"I've decided, once you're on the stuff, it's impossible to get off of it, so the best thing to do is not start doing it to begin with," Scott said.

That sentiment is reflected by one of the sayings on the bracelets - **DUH: Don't Use Heroin**. At least one of those bracelets is given to each student graduating from several area **D.A.R.E. Programs**. Scott said the two have donated more than 4,000 bracelets over the course of the last year. He said they have gone all over the country, and even into Canada. They have a stockpile of as many as 20,000 in their home as well, all with different colors and designs.

"Now our goal is to have these bracelets on everyone!" Liley said in a message. "Starting awareness at a young age and while they're in school, we truly believe will help keep children from trying these nasty drugs! Our goal is to get into as many schools as possible and donate to all the schools in the area and then branch out as far as possible."

Besides schools, Liley and Scott go to **Nar-Anon** meetings across the area and join with groups such as Amare to attempt to get the awareness out to everybody.

Liley said the bracelets receive a lot of attention no matter where they go. She said a quick stop at Frank's Diner in Cottage Hills turned into waiting staff and other customers requesting the bracelets and sharing their own personal stories of addiction.

Not everyone is so ready to talk about such heavy topics, however.

"Sometimes, when I bring it up and nonchalantly say, 'hey my daughter is a heroin addict,' people get uncomfortable and try to find the first excuse to walk away from the situation," Scott said.

Facing the issue head-on is the only way to solve it, he said.

More information on the bracelets can be found on Facebook, by searching **Candy's Stop Heroin Bracelets**.

Besides bracelets, Liley said she is also now offering earrings she makes herself using her daughter's vinyl prints. Her daughter, **Kim Lackey**, started a craft shop called "**Happily Ever Crafter**." They make vinyl prints of different messages, including earrings for Liley, which say "DUH: Don't Use Heroin."

Those earrings are currently on sale for as cheap as \$3, with the money going toward a **Royal Kids Camp**, which is partially hosted by **Cornerstone Church** in Bethalto. That camp takes children who have "been forced to live crappy lives," as Scott said, to a camp near Greenville, Illinois.

They are taken by a luxury bus with comfortable seats and large-screened TVs to a camp where each child is celebrated for his or her existence. Liley said each child at the camp receives his or her own birthday party, a Christmas celebration, tea parties and even zip-lining.

With the donations of the earring funds to sponsor children for the camp (at a cost of \$600 a child), Liley and Scott hope they can influence young people to build from positive experiences and use their memories of good times to have the courage and confidence to say no to drugs such as heroin.

More information regarding that camp can be found at <http://royalfamilykids.org/>

More information regarding Amare can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/amarenfp/>

Liley would like anyone who is suffering through their own addictions or the addiction of a loved one to find their local Narcotics Anonymous and Nar-Anon programs. More information can be found at <http://www.nar-anon.org/>

The Madison County heroin epidemic may be waning, but opiate addiction is only getting more dangerous with substances like Fentanyl on the black market. A complete trend of overdose deaths since 2009 can be found [in this previous story](#) from Riverbender.com.