



character and leadership



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF OAKLAND AND MACOMB COUNTIES

Waterford-based

Group Makes Heroin Documentary (video)  
(Crystal A. Proxmire, Feb. 6, 2016)

Waterford, MI – “There is no average addict... It happens to all races, and sexes, and economic strata. It happens to good and bad families. There is no particular profile,” said Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard in a documentary about heroin addiction and death.

The documentary “The Heroin Epidemic” was made for Bryan’s HOPE (Heroin Opiate Prevention Education), a Waterford-based group tackling the problem of drug addiction in the community. The problem is bigger than people often realize. [According to the Oakland County](#)

[Medical Examiner](#) there were 18 heroin deaths in 2012. In 2014 there were 61. Because heroin does not stay in the system very long it is likely there are even more deaths than these. For opiates there were over 300 deaths each year.

One of those 2012 deaths was the son of Bryan’s HOPE founder Jeannie Richards. Richards lost her son Bryan on Jan. 27. Soon after she began to hear about more and more deaths. She began to fight for information, death statistics, prevention measures being taken, and better understanding of what took her son away from her.



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The Heroin Epidemic features recovering addicts as well as people who have watched their loved ones struggle with an addiction. Expert interviews also add to the 52-minute film.

Waterford 51st District Court Judge Jodi Debbrecht Switalski, who stepped down from the bench in January to become a partner in a law firm, shared her view from the bench. “By the time we



see individuals in the courtroom, whether it's for retail fraud or a more serious offense...we can often link that back to the addiction to prescription drugs or to heroin," she said.

Judge Debbrecht Switalski explained the roots of increased opiate usage. She said that in 1999 "Congress went ahead and made it permissible for pharmaceutical companies to begin advertising, and so that was when we started to see the constant 'there's a pill for everything. There's a pill to make your hair grow. There's a pill to make you thin.' There's a pill for everything so that really began to shift our societal norms. It made it okay to take a pill. And you get these pills from your doctor who's supposed to be a trusted individual as well... Also around 1995 as part of this perfect storm we began to see that there was some mismarketing. Pharmaceuticals actually mismarked one of the first big prescription pain drugs, OxyContin, as non addictive. So here everyone was led to believe it was okay to use OxyContin."

Sheriff Bouchard said that the age group of 17-24 "would be one of our biggest problem years."

Pam Hoffmaster lost her son a year before being part of the film. "I decided to speak up and speak out to try to remove some of the stigma of the disease of addiction."

Watch the documentary below and learn more about Bryan's HOPE at <http://www.bryanshope.org/>.



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