

This Drug Man is Out for Our Children

An Interview with Tim Ryan, a reformed user
by Robert Delwood



Tim Ryan believes in his Dope to Hope message.

We need to watch out for Tim Ryan. He's a convicted heroin addict, having served 13 months in an Illinois state prison, he knows how to work the legal system to his advantage, and he's wanting to meet with our children. And you want him to. He refers to his mission as "Dope to Hope," taking his anti-drug message to the streets, schools, and houses to stop others from going down his path. In 2014 he seemed to have it all. A six-figure income, a palatial house, a wife, and two children. But to a lifestyle of drinking and recreational drugs, he added heroin, and lost everything. At 44, he lost his job, his house to foreclosure, his wife to divorce, and six months after being released from prison, a son to heroin.

If his fall was specular, his rise is more so. The reformation didn't start with his son's death. "I had been helping others for a while," Ryan explained. "But I was using it to deflect responsibility. All users are very good at that. It wasn't until I got out of prison did I become serious. I was clean and sober for 13 months, the first time in a long time and realized something had to change." Two realizations were that kids were dying and that the current system wasn't working, at least not for the people he could reach. "Literally, within the last two days, two people I knew died from overdoses. Talking isn't enough."

So he attacks this from several fronts. For starters, he forms support group for addicts, but includes their family, too. He talks in a plain, blunt matter. People started contacting him for support and interventions. More importantly, he considers himself a "concierge of the industry." He knows how to get people into treatment. Although he lives in Naperville, IL, he is associated with treatment facilities in Florida and North Carolina. "I can get anyone into treatment. Insurance is good for only some, but it fails for most of my people. They just can't get the money they need. I know the system. I can help get money through any insurance they already have," Ryan explains, "but through other ways, too." This includes from a foundation he started, A Man in Recovery (<https://timryanspeaks.com/amir-foundation/>), donations, private scholarships, or even personal contacts. "We can get someone into treatment for as little as \$1200," implying rates can go much higher, into the tens of thousands.

Another aspect is to expose their habits and lifestyle to loved ones. "The clues are all around, if you know what to look for," Ryan explains. "The phone is the biggest clue you have. They make all their contacts through their phone, including texts." He'll teach you how to monitor their phone, what paraphernalia is laying around the house, perhaps hiding in plain sight, even subtle clues like

aluminum foil on the bottom of the car. If all this seems intrusive, “remember that every addict is only one dose away from dying,” he warns. “A mother’s intuition is usually right, so don’t ignore your gut feeling.” It works two ways, too. The children are taught to spot the same habits in their parents.

If his mission is clear, the message even more compelling. He’s written a book (*From Dope to Hope: A Man in Recovery*. Spiritus Communications; March, 2017), and in August 2017, debuted an A&E documentary series called *Dopeman*, chronicling his fall and rise. His blunt demeanor and no nonsense approach has gotten politician’s attention. During an awareness walk in 2015 he met and befriended Congressman Bill Foster (D-IL), even getting invited to Obama’s 2016 State of the Union address.



He partners with a police program called The Cop and The Convict. Ryan and Naperville policemen visit local schools, including talking to sixth graders. “I’ve seen heroin addicts as young as 12 and as old as 78. There is no limit,” Ryan clarifies his point and continues. “Weed is a gateway drug. All opioid users started with weed. That doesn’t mean all weed users end up at heroin, but why even start down that road?” implying few can truly control these drugs. “Addicts are dying faster and younger by the day,” and the message has to get to everybody.