

WisconsinEye: Discussion and showing of documentary 'Straight Forward, The Truth About Addiction'

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A free community showing of the award-winning addiction prevention documentary – *Straight Forward: The Truth About Addiction*– will be held **Tuesday, October 23 in the Aquinas High School Theater, La Crosse.** The 38-minute film begins at **5:30 PM**, followed by a community conversation led by a **panel of local experts** at the front lines of addiction prevention, treatment and recovery. Included are:

- **Austin Reinhart**, CEO and lead interventionist at Driftless Recovery Services, La Crosse
 - **Rita Von Hayden**, prevention specialist, Coulee Recovery Center
 - **Dr. Chris Eberlein**, emergency medical physician, Gundersen Health System and co-chair of the recently repurposed La Crosse County's Heroin & Other Illicit Drug Task Force
 - **State Rep. Jill Billings**, La Crosse, member of the State of Wisconsin Task Force on Opioid Abuse
- Parents of middle and high school students are especially encouraged to attend. One week ago, students at Aquinas Middle & High Schools gathered in separate assemblies to view and discuss the film. Students at Logan and Central high schools and Holmen middle school have also seen the film.

"The talk was real, the students were intently listening and the video tells it like it is," said Aquinas principal Denise Ring. Included in the film is an animation of the developing human brain to make the point that it really matters when a young person starts to use alcohol or drugs. Using at an early age results in the brain changing, stalling and growing at different rates than normal, negatively impacting normal decision-making and increasing the risk of addiction.

"One clear take-away at these events is that our panel of addiction experts powerfully capture and communicate the emotional aspects and real-life nature of addiction, in a way that connects with the students," said WisconsinEye president Jon Henkes. "We may never know the deep, lasting impacts of what is shared but important seeds are sown and we can claim victory in the effort to equip our young people with the truths of addiction."

The film follows several young Wisconsinites of diverse backgrounds and experiences, as they battle through addiction to opioids and other drugs, to reclaim their futures. They tell their stories of getting started using drugs, hitting rock bottom, the impacts on family, the cry for help, and the road to recovery.

Straight Forward is produced by WisconsinEye Public Affairs Network, Madison, and is being shown statewide in schools and evening community events. Other schools in the Coulee region are expected to participate in the coming weeks.

Among those instrumental in advising the creation of *Straight Forward* are: Austin Reinhart, CEO and lead interventionist at Driftless Recovery Services, La Crosse; Sergeant R.J. Lurquin, director of the Dane County Narcotics Task Force; Skye Tikkanen, drug poisoning prevention director at Safe Communities, Madison; Kevin Kirby, CEO, Face It Together, Sioux Falls, SD; Dr. Andy Anderson, former chief medical officer, Aurora Health Care; Attorney General Brad Schimel; former Governor Tommy Thompson.

The film received a 2018 bronze medal for excellence from the Milwaukee Press Club, and the 2018 *Spotlight Award* from the Marathon County Alcohol and Other Drug Partnership for "*raising awareness and driving the discussion on addiction.*"

Support for the film and school/community showings is made possible by: Ruehlw Family Foundation, Kwik Trip, SC Johnson, Skyward Education Software, WE Energies, Driftless Recovery Services, Rob & Diane Reinhart, John & Patty Noel, Aurora Health Care, Delta Dental of Wisconsin, UW-Madison Wisconsin Partnership Program, B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation, Ruth Schuette, Church Mutual Insurance.

WisconsinEye is grateful for the support the Coulee Council on Addictions, director Cheryl Hancock, and team specialists Rita Von Haden and Skyla Killilea.

[visit the Straight Forward website](#)