

Ohio program seeks to reunite families of addicts

October 22 2019

Emily McIntyre is eight-and-a-half months pregnant with her third child. Her other two were taken away by child services because of her drug use.

"Addiction is a full-time job," said the 26-year-old who lives in Ohio, a midwestern US state hard hit by the opioid epidemic. "It completely managed my life for six years."

When her baby daughter tested positive for cocaine, McIntyre lost custody of both her children.

McIntyre's 11-month-old daughter and five-year-old son are among the thousands of children who have been put into foster care because of their parents' [drug use](#).

In Ohio alone, social services have recorded a 27 percent increase over the past five years in the number of children separated from their parents.

"My kids needed to be taken from me for me to focus on myself and fix myself," said McIntyre, who is undergoing treatment for her addiction.

"They're not the reason I got sober, but they're my biggest motivation as to why I got sober," she said. "And I don't ever want my kids to see me in active addiction again."

McIntyre's path to drug dependency began when she was 18 years old, starting with OxyContin, the painkiller made by Purdue Pharma at the heart of the opioid crisis.

She later became hooked on heroin before turning to cocaine.

Settlements a boost for drug programs

McIntyre is currently enrolled in a court-ordered program called START/QIC designed to get her clean and eventually reunite her with her children.

She first underwent seven months of rehabilitation.

"She's accountable to report to us, report to the court how she's doing, report to treatment," said Lauren Wimer, a caseworker with the county court system.

"And we kind of follow up every single week," Wimer said. "We're in contact to make sure she's going to her groups, going to meetings, going to court, make sure she's on time for all of her appointments."

Angela Cochran, herself a former addict, is McIntyre's "recovery coach."

"I also have that experience with my kids being in foster care," Cochran said. "I help women like Emily navigate the child welfare system.

"I think it makes it more manageable, less fearful for the individual that has to put forth that effort, just having somebody who's went through that process," she said.

Programs such as the one McIntyre is enrolled in could get a boost nationwide following the court settlements of a series of lawsuits facing

the major drug companies.

Three leading American drug distributors and an Israeli company settled a [civil lawsuit](#) with two Ohio counties in Cleveland on Monday just hours before they were to go to trial.

The \$260 million deal set the basis for a broader potential multi-billion-dollar payout to some 2,700 addiction-ravaged communities nationwide who had signed on to the Cleveland lawsuit, the first in a federal court to address the causes of the opioid crisis.

As doctors prescribed opioids in huge quantities, drugmakers reaped tens of billions of dollars in profits while overdose deaths soared to over 70,000 in 2017 alone.

'A normal life'

In Trumbull County, where Warren is located, a total of 564 overdoses were reported in the first nine months of this year, and 60 fatalities.

At the height of the opioid crisis in 2017, there were months when more than 200 overdoses were reported.

"It has become a huge issue and a huge problem out here," McIntyre said. "A lot of my friends are gone. They didn't make it. I'm fortunate to have made it."

Kimberly Ruble, supervisor of child recovery services in Trumbull County, said the goal is to reunite families.

"We want a minimum of six months of sobriety," Ruble said. "But we also want to make sure that they have safe and stable housing, that they're in a safe relationship and that they're able to provide a [safe](#)

environment for the children."

Sober for the past seven months, McIntyre has recently moved into a new apartment and should be allowed to keep her baby—another daughter—when she is born in the next few days.

If all goes well, her son and baby daughter should join her by the end of the year.

"My future looks great to me," McIntyre said. "I see my kids coming back. Having a job, a vehicle, everything else again, a regular life, a normal life."

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Citation: Ohio program seeks to reunite families of addicts (2019, October 22) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-ohio-reunite-families-addicts.html>

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