

# HUGS helps families struggling with chemical dependency

By Kate Gluck  
Correspondent

When one hears of adolescent chemical dependency, it is easy to think in terms of frustration, hopelessness and despair. This is a story of addiction which focuses instead on Hope, Understanding, Gratitude and Serenity . . . on HUGS.

Last year, after years of dealing with her son's addiction and even more years working with families struggling with the same problem, Lakewood resident Dianne Vogt officially launched the HUGS Foundation, a nonprofit organization geared at helping families of chemically dependent adolescents.

The costs of addiction recovery programs can be staggering and are rarely fully covered by insurance. The HUGS Foundation aims to bridge the insurance gap by providing financial support to help families in northeast Ohio defray the costs of treatment. Funds can be used for treatment, travel and ancillary services not covered by insurance benefits.

The foundation offers monetary support with the expectation that families who receive funds will "pay it forward" and in some way give back.

"We do not expect financial repayment," said Vogt. "We only ask that families find a personal means of reaching out to others in need of addiction recovery."

Vogt's journey towards Hope, Understanding, Gratitude and Serenity began years ago at the Oakview Behavioral Health facility at Southwest General Hospital. Finally having come to terms with her son's addiction, and surrounded by a support group of people who were dealing with similar issues she said she and her husband began to "have hope for our son and understanding that drug addiction is a disease and that in order to survive, our whole family, not just our

son, would have to recover."

Oakview was the first of many steps of recovery for Vogt's son, who has now been sober for more than seven years and recently graduated magna cum laude from college.

While her son did not get better at Oakview, according to Vogt, she and her husband, David, did.

After her son left Oakview for residential treatment Vogt continued going sporadically to meetings at Oakview to offer support, fellowship and insight to other parents. When her son emerged from treatment a new person with a new lease on life Vogt decided that she needed to more formally lend her experience. "We saw him and what had happened to him," she said, "and I thought I really need to do this because this is a story of hope. He should be dead, but he wasn't. He was very alive. He knew who he was and he was very appreciative that David and I had stuck behind him."

She started volunteering weekly at Oakview, going every Monday night to talk to parents. "We all had the same story," she said, "It's like music... the same tune but different words. I could really help people and say 'this is what I did. I got better and when I got better, my son got better.'"

It was in one of these meetings about two years ago that the seed for the Foundation was planted. "I remember," Vogt said, "that this one woman said, 'my son needs more treatment, but I would have to sell my house for him to get it.' It just hit me. I thought something has to be done for these parents who are willing to do what they have to do to get their kid better, but their insurance company says no, you can't have any more treatment... I started thinking about something to bridge that gap and HUGS was born."

Vogt discussed her idea with Jo Toomey, a counselor at Oakview and Margaret Kotz, Chairman of Addiction Recovery Services at University Hospitals and found that there was no program in place to help families pay for additional treatment. Through the assistance of another friend, Kathleen Razi, Vogt connected with Sandra Gustavson, a professor at Kent State who taught at Ursuline College. Gustavson presented the idea to her students who then chose to do the HUGS business plan as a class project.

In October of 2007, business plan in hand, Vogt approached people that she hoped would volunteer to serve on the board of her fledgling foundation. "Everyone I asked said yes," she said.

Since the seed of the idea for HUGS was planted, it has been received enthusiastically by almost everyone. The reality is that teen drug use is everywhere, said Vogt. "It is not just in the city of Cleveland. It is in Bay Village, and Westlake and Lakewood... there are so many people out there who are struggling with this."

This fact seems to be recognized. The foundation has already surpassed its initial fundraising goals and Vogt recently found out that Powerhouse Services, Inc., the residential treatment center in Louisiana which her son attended years ago, will be donating two half scholarships for the foundation to distribute.

Initial plans are to help several families a year defray the cost of residential treatment and extended care for their chemically dependent adolescent. The more the foundation grows, the more lives they will be able to touch.

"HUGS," said Vogt, "is my way of paying back."

To learn more about the HUGS Foundation, visit their website at [www.hugs4families.org](http://www.hugs4families.org).

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*Since this article was printed, HUGS has also received tremendous support from Phil Bessler, Professor and Business Clinic Director and his students at Baldwin-Wallace College. We want to acknowledge his time, efforts and dedication to helping us with our cause.*

~ Dianne Vogt