

## Walk in <br />Our Shoes

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**Authors:** hjones@thelancasternews.com

**Byline:** By Haley Jones  
hjones@thelancasternews.com

## Content

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What's with all the shoes?

First, 55 pairs of shoes in clear boxes were scattered all around the county for the last two weeks. Then they were brought to the Lancaster County Historical Courthouse and placed on and around the steps.

The shoes were a visible effort to remember and honor the 55 lives lost to fatal overdoses in the county last year.

Counseling Services of Lancaster hosted the "Walk in Our Shoes" event Thursday, Aug. 31, on International Overdose Awareness Day.

The key message speakers asked attendees to take away from the event was to try to erase the stigma surrounding substance misuse. Multiple speakers shared personal experiences with grief, substance abuse and societal treatment toward those who struggle with these issues.

Kylie Starnes lost her fiance, Nick, in April due to a fatal overdose. Beth Ghent, who works at Counseling Services of Lancaster, lost her sister to a fatal overdose.

Both of their stories showed heartbreak and tragedy, but also commonality. Opioid addiction and drug misuse are common in today's world, as Lancaster Police Chief Don Roper highlighted in his remarks on the "opioid overdose epidemic in our country."

"This would have been his 24th time overdosing," Starnes said. "At this time, I felt something that I had never felt, I knew this was it. He was lifeless; his hands were cold; he was not gasping for air. His lips were blue and his face was already turning colors."

Starnes said the hardest part of losing a loved one, beyond just the grief, is having to go back to life, care for family and remain strong. She and her fiance shared four children, whom she now has to care for on her own.

“That’s the thing that we don’t realize when it comes to addiction, is that we become consumed in the care for our loved one and everything else fades into the background,” Starnes said. “It’s April 7 and I am literally looking at these four innocent babies in their face and telling them their daddy is gone. They look defeated, broken, hurt and have so many questions.”

Jessica Lee with Counseling Services of Lancaster said that according to Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as of 2020, about 2.7 million people ages 12 or older have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder problem.

“It’s our sisters or brothers or mothers, scholars, friends, neighbors, church members, coworkers, the person next in line to us at the grocery store, health-care workers, public officials and, unfortunately, our young children,” she said. “No one that developed a substance use disorder woke up one morning and said ‘thank you, I’m gonna ruin the rest of my life.’ ”

Speaker Patrick Tolbert said the last thing those who struggle with substance misuse want is pity; instead, they need better resources, support and people to fight for their sobriety.

“We should be be sick and tired of watching them be outcast,” Tolbert said. “Someone needs to be in the gutters with them, fighting with them and for them. There aren’t enough resources; there aren’t enough soldiers, if you will. The problem is so much bigger than just the current resources or lack thereof.”

“Let’s acknowledge and support these people around us that go unseen by starting a conversation like we’re doing today to raise awareness of the hidden impacts of overdose,” Roper said. “Let’s become educated about overdose response.”

Terri Lee with Counseling Services of Lancaster said the commission started the “Walk in Our Shoes” campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding substance misuse and highlight the importance and acceptance of it in the Lancaster community in an effort to spark change.

“We can be there for each other — a phone call, a text, just letting someone know that we care, that we can make more difference,” Lee said. “We can carry Narcan and be prepared. We can start hard conversations. We can listen and get a family group to learn more about substance use disorder.”

Counseling Services of Lancaster is a local resource for those struggling with substance misuse or those involved with someone who struggles. It is a local county commission on alcohol and other drug abuse services, located at 114 S. Main St., Lancaster. It is open 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday for a variety of support services. More information can be found at [www.counselingserviceslanaster.org/](http://www.counselingserviceslanaster.org/).

## **Child images**

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### **LANNWS-09-02-23 OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY 1**



**LANNWS-09-02-23 OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY 2**



**LANNWS-09-02-23 OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY 3**



