



Green Cross for Safety® Awards 2020 Finalist - Advocate

Save the Michaels of the World

The coronavirus pandemic has not eased the public health crisis of the opioid epidemic. If anything, it has exacerbated it.

In Western New York State, an 82% jump in overdose deaths have so far eclipsed coronavirus fatalities. The national government has acknowledged that “drug overdose deaths are surging amid the coronavirus pandemic, driven by increased substance use.”

Save The Michaels of the World (STM) is an organization fighting for those who are struggling with addiction, providing immediate placement to treatment and wrap around services, delivering intensive support to individuals and families in crisis and through their recovery.

STM was founded in 2011 by parents Avi and Julie Israel to make sure that people were no longer forced to wait for treatment they desperately need—or die waiting, after their only son Michael took his own life after suffering from addiction to prescribed painkillers.

From the beginning, they used a unique approach; offering the region’s first treatment for families and loved ones of those struggling with addiction—shifting the existing treatment standard and creating a new model where family recovery is a focus, alongside immediate treatment, after care, peer recovery and family support.

In just 9 years, STM saved many lives and dramatically improved recovery rates, through changing the laws for prescribing pain medication in New York State, enlisting concerned community members and other parents, as well as spearheading a campaign to create an online system to track prescription medication. Their first victory resulted in getting the I-Stop Bill passed in 2012, which tracks opioid prescriptions to avert duplications and “over prescribing.”

Since then, STM has removed barriers and provided access to immediate treatment, directly reducing overdose deaths by:

- Eliminating prior approval for treatment from insurance companies.
- Expanding the number of treatment beds in the region from 50 to 250.
- Expanding the length of stay in treatment from 14 to 28 days.
- Facilitating access to Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT), saving many lives and dramatically improving rates of recovery.



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- Initiating the COURTS program that transports individuals from 44 courts in the region from sentencing directly to one of 12 inpatient treatment centers in New York State—resulting in long term recovery and reduced recidivism.
- Creating the House of Hope Recovery Center in Niagara County where 600 people receive services each month, filling an unmet need.

In 2019, Save The Michaels helped 9,449 people. In the face of overwhelming challenges and unpredictable outcomes, Save the Michaels continues to inspire hope, reunite families and restore lives.

