

Executive Director of the Drug Overdose Task Force, **Tim Phillips** talked about how he came straight to the event from a funeral of someone that had passed away from a heroin overdose. With burdened expression, he stated, "I am tired of going to funerals." He shared with the audience that if he hadn't found faith back in 1988, he could have also ended up as a sad statistic. He is in long term recovery from addiction and is active in a 12-step fellowship. He was impressed by how many new and fresh faces he saw in the audience at the event and expressed his excitement at the number of people that are banning together in the battle against addiction.



**Mikayla Musgrove**, volunteer and spokesperson for Hope in a Bag, talked about how "One Little Girl, One Big Heart and Hope and Bag" got started. Mikayla, along with founder Renah, several other young girls and their families in the Elizabeth area, take the time to assemble bags with items donated by people across the state to give out to recovering addicts. Items include but are not limited to body wash, toothpaste, playing cards and a bible. In their short time as a non-profit organization, they have distributed 1,600 bags to recovering addicts across Pa, WV and Ohio. To learn more about their efforts you can find them on Facebook "Hope in a Bag, Operation Recovery Compassion."



**Michelle Schwartzmier** brought tears to the eyes of everyone in attendance as she shared her daughter's



sad battle with addiction. She began with a statement that her daughter is not just a statistic or a number, "My daughter wasn't a junkie or a troll under a bridge, she was loved." After losing her 20-year-old daughter nine months ago, Michelle started the non-profit "Another Chance for Casey." Casey Schwartzmier was the 12th overdose death in Allegheny County this year. Prior to her death, just weeks before she passed, Casey had a discussion with Michelle and explained that if heroin ever got the best of her, she wanted her mother to be honest when discussing her death and to not put "passed away suddenly" in her obituary. Casey requested, "Tell them my story." Not long after, Casey was planning to go back to rehab, though she never made it as she overdosed in her bedroom next to her packed suit case. Michelle kept her promise to Casey and wrote a beautiful and honest obituary of her daughter's story which immediately went viral, allowing Casey's story to impact the lives of people across the nation. Michelle now speaks to groups, spreading Casey's story and showing how a mother's love can move mountains.

**Dawn Hennessy**, founder of Faith Forward and Angel Arms Infant Recovery, shared her story about the organization's objective to raise community awareness in regards to the children effected by addiction. She said that 1 in 5 children are born into a family with addiction. She shared a personal story about a pregnant woman she met four years earlier with whom she developed a supportive relationship. When the baby was born, the woman asked Dawn to care for her baby until she got her life in order. Dawn has since adopted that child, a step which largely moved her to develop Angel Arms.



**Carmen Capozzi** approached the podium and said two words sternly as he lifted a photo of his son, "Sage Capozzi." Carmen shared that he nor anyone even knew his son was on drugs until he got in trouble at the age of 17. By that point he had been using heroin for three years since he initially snorted it at age 14. Prior to losing his son, he also lost a stepson to heroin. Carmen speaks regularly at events similar to this event in hopes that Sage's story could help others avoid the same fate. One of his greatest objectives is to eradicate the stigmas that prevent society from seeing the true national issue of opiate/opioid abuse and addiction.

Our Keynote Speaker **Jimmy Woods** brought hope and plenty of smiles to the crowd as he shared his story on stage. His story was so moving and unique that by the end, we all grew to admire his strength and mission. Jimmy is a recovering addict and owner of Mission Mahi Food Truck. Jimmy told how getting hit by a car going 25 mph in 2013 was the changing point in his life. Being in the hospital forced him to quit drinking but he then became addicted to pain medication. He shared how his life hit rock bottom while in rehab where he had a spiritual experience that saved him. While serving specialty fish tacos from his food truck, mostly in McCandless, he shares his story and employs recovering addicts to help each other.



If you would like to donate to one of these charities, please visit our website at [www.go2goalus.com/goal-drug-awareness-symposium](http://www.go2goalus.com/goal-drug-awareness-symposium)

As of November 30, 2017, with one month remaining until the end of year, Westmoreland County sets the drug overdose death record with 179 deaths, surpassing the previous record of 174 set in 2016. While the Drug Symposium event was a huge success producing waves of positive feedback, the struggle is far from over. The people who spoke at the GOAL event are committed soldiers in this war. We were honored to help give them a platform to not only raise awareness, but hopefully inspire others to join the charge and find a way to become a soldier in the war and make a difference. Our country, our communities, our neighborhoods and our homes will continue to suffer. This epidemic must no longer remain a problem that is whispered about behind closed doors. We are at war against the opioid epidemic and joining this war is the calling of our time. We must come together and fight so that all our lives and our children's lives can have a future free from the grips of this vicious force of evil. 🇺🇸