

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about recovery and the vital importance of sustained funding for mental health and addiction services. My name is Ellyn Schmiesing I have the absolute honor and joy of serving the community of Findlay, Ohio as a director of FOCUS: Recovery and Wellness Community. Our organization has been in existence since 2001 and our mission is to support purpose and wellness for all citizens in Hancock County through recovery support services, advocacy, and education. Our services are accessible to anyone in our county and are provided free of charge each and every day.

I say that I have the honor and privilege of working for FOCUS because to me, it is. I never thought I would live to be this old. When I was 13 years old my peers were making decisions about what sports they wanted to play; they were learning about how to apply make up for the first time; they were figuring out relationships and making best friends. However, when I was 13, I was in a fight for my life. I had experienced incredibly difficult circumstances that had shattered my spirit. In my rural upbringing I had not been taught the coping skills necessary to be able to heal. I did not feel that I had people or a place I could go to speak the truth of what I was going through. I was coping the best way that I knew how. At 13 years old I was making a decision between finding some way to ease the pain that I felt or I was going to take my life by suicide. I found relief through drugs. I thought that maybe, just maybe, if I could numb myself for the next 5 years until I could move out on my own, then I could make it. Because maybe then I could find the help I so desperately needed, maybe then I could survive. Over the next several years I learned to accept the fact that I was physically and psychologically addicted to substances. I was most likely going to be dead by the time I was 21 and I was OK with that. The substances I had been using stripped me of all hope.

I can stand before you today because I am in long-term recovery. I was supported in my recovery through a community just like the community you can find at FOCUS. I have the joy of standing here before you as a person in long-term recovery for almost 11 years now. But I also stand here as a wife, as a mother to a beautiful seven month old little girl, a homeowner, a partner in a family farm, a daughter, a sister, and a college graduate with four degrees-including a Master's Degree. This is recovery. My life is just one example of what a community of recovery can build.

The organization I work for is staffed by individuals in recovery. We serve so many people with stories like mine - unique stories of struggle but also of courage, resilience, strength, and recovery. Our organization is in a unique position in our community to enrich lives and promote the health of our entire community. The peer support services we provide protect your investment our treatment systems so that when a person no longer meets medical necessity to receive services, or has to close their episode of care, we are there to continue that support. On the other end of the continuum of care, we have expertise in engaging those who are struggling to begin their pathway to healing. By engaging them in a recovery lifestyle early we are able to prevent the disastrous physical, social, mental, and economic problems that come with a lifetime of addiction or psychological distress. We are there for the person that does not know where to start, for the person who is anxious about walking into a treatment agency for the first time, for the family who wants to know what they can do to help their loved one. We are there for each and every person seeking recovery.

I am here in support of Governor DeWine's proposed budget, particularly the allocation to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This initial investment into mental health and addiction services will be instrumental in helping our state out of our current crisis. However, we know that rising from this crisis is just the beginning. Without continued support, Ohioans will be at great risk for another health crisis. We will need your support for funding to be allocated to recovery supports and sustained funding to bolster our work of supporting recovery across the lifespan and thus exponentially increasing the return on investment for those funds that have been and continued to be dedicated to treatment for substance use and mental health disorders. An individual in recovery creates a family in recovery. Families in recovery create a community in recovery. Communities of recovery create a safe and healthy Ohio for everyone. Thank you for investing in recovery and the health of all Ohioans.