

Opioid Epidemic Documentary Theatre Project – Treatment

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This untitled documentary theatre project is about the heroin epidemic on the New Jersey Shore. The show will be based on interviews, testimonies, and stories from those affected including users, former users, family members, friends, activists, law enforcement and doctors. I will be exploring the roots of the epidemic as it pertains to the Jersey Shore in addition to the links between prescription drugs, heroin use, and capitalism. The testimonies and interviews I conduct will be weaved into a show developed over the course of fall 2019 through spring 2020.

I am from Elberon, a small township located on the northern New Jersey shore. Over the past five years, I have lost several members of my high school's graduating class and other community members to heroin overdoses. Most of their stories are connected to prescription opioid pain killers. According to NJTV, the heroin death rate in New Jersey is three times the national average. In five of the state's counties, the death rate from heroin overdose exceeds the number of treatment beds available per 100,000 people. Many of these counties are concentrated along the Jersey Shore.

This piece will be structured into four sections which address the problem (origins and history of the opioid crisis), the personal toll the opioid crisis is having on communities, the way in which the judicial and medical industries are addressing it (or not), and what should be done to combat this problem. By focusing specifically on the Jersey Shore, I hope to shed light on the much larger opioid crisis in the United States, the responsibility of “big pharma” and the failure of the “War on Drugs”. Currently, the United States is in the throes of an opioid epidemic. More than 130 people die every day from opioid-related drug overdoses (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The goal of this project is to use the theatre platform to address this public health crisis.