

Fighting the opioid epidemic

Recovery with music

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By Patricia Robayo - staff writer

SULLIVAN COUNTY — “Sullivan County will always be my home at heart,” said Paul Pellingner, a Sullivan County native from Woodbourne, who was able to break free from drug addiction in 1989. In doing so he has been able to turn around his life in order to help others with their struggle with drug addiction.

Pellingner uses music-based therapy as a way to help patients with their progress in drug and alcohol addiction recovery. He started Recovery Unplugged - a treatment organization that blends music into the fabric of its treatment programs. “We strive to help each patient gain self-awareness through the traditional treatment and music production processes,” he said.

During the October 11 opioid conference at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, Pellingner gave a presentation called “Music is

Medicine,” where he explained how he's used music in drug addiction recovery.

Pellingner hit rock bottom in the 80's and credits Frank and Helen Exner with saving him. “They helped me originally get into recovery in the 1980s by taking me into their home when I had burnt all other bridges.”

The process of helping others started during Pellingner's own road to recovery by accident. A counselor called out before a group therapy session and Pellingner was asked to step in. He was able to run the session and afterwards the director of the treatment center told Pellingner, “I think I found out why you went through your addiction, it was to help others.”

Soon afterward, Pellingner, started going through the certifications to become a counselor himself. During the training, he noticed the methods being used to treat addiction were not always working for everyone. He saw a trend of patients relapsing back into addiction. “What can be done in 30 days in treatment and can be undone in thirty minutes without an anchor for them,” said Pellingner.

He started to work on a system using music in treatment: “I created this method where we harness the power of music as a catalyst to engage the client, break down their defenses, change their distorted perceptions, change their behaviors as well as an anchor them so they can associate a particular song or lyric to what we are trying to change.”

Music for Pellingner was a big influence early on in his life before addiction. His love for music is credited towards his parents. After watching his parents, Jack and Selma, come home from working all day at the family's business, Malman's Luncheonette in Woodbourne, he saw first hand how the power of music could change a person's mood. His parents when they got home would put on the record player and dance and sing. He soon realized that taking all that he has learned in his schooling for being a counselor and combining it with the love of music, can really make a difference in someone's life while in recovery.

When a client is being referred to the center in Florida, a staff member meets them at the airport or home with a song queued up in the car radio specifically for that person. This already sets the stage for their musical road to recovery. It creates a trigger in them; it starts to remind them why they want to get better or helps create a reminder to not give in to the desire of drugs.

Pellingner has been able to create a great team around him to be able to see his vision a reality. One of those people is Richie Supa, who is an award winning singer/songwriter and now Director of Creative at the Recovery Unplugged Center.

One of the songs that Supa wrote was “Amazing” with Steven Tyler of Aerosmith. Tyler was invited down to the center to speak to residents and share his story of drug addiction recovery.

While at the center, Tyler sang the song he co-wrote with Supa. During the performance you can see Tyler crying and wiping tears away as he sings the lyrics to the song about hitting rock bottom and climbing back to the top. The event was filmed and the song Amazing has garnered four million views on Youtube.

The program is opened to all musical backgrounds and it is open to anyone in the country seeking help for drug addiction. Please contact Recovery Unplugged at 1-800-55-Rehab(73422) or

support@recoveryunplugged.com

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Paul Pellingner with Steven Tyler during a visit of the Recovery Unplugged center in Florida.