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For those of you who don't know me, my name is Carol Rostucher and I am the founder of AIM, Angels In Motion. I would like to thank Bev Haberle and the Department of Drug and Alcohol for inviting me to share my perspective on what is happening with those living on the streets of Philadelphia with substance use disorder and in the communities with the opioid/heroin epidemic.

I would like to tell you briefly a little about AIM. Our mission is to change the way those suffering with the disease of addiction are treated one life at a time. I founded AIM due to my personal experiences with addiction. My son, Drew, was living on the streets of Kensington on and off for 5 years. I would go to Kensington looking for him, and in the mist of looking for my son I saw many hopeless lost souls. One in particular stood out. He held a cup and a sign, never looked up, and never looked at a soul. No one looked at him either; it was like he was invisible. I remember thinking this could be my son, this is someone's son. In that moment everything changed for me. I stopped, pulled myself together, and brought him some fast food. The whole time I was thinking, how can I change this? How can I make a difference?

I kept going to Kensington looking for my son, seeing more and more lost souls. I would take them blessing bags, talk with them, and share a hug and a smile. I saw it was making a difference, especially with the young man who never looked up. He now started having conversations with me. I asked my son to talk to him; he did and they became friends. I could see how isolation was feeding their disease. I could see they all needed understanding, a listening ear, and help navigating the system.

That's how AIM came to be. AIM goes out into the streets to offer love, support, education and resources to those with SUD. We assist them in getting State ID's for detox/treatment. AIM expedites detox, treatment, insurance and recovery services when possible. When asked, we send care packages, which consist of clothes and toiletries, to those who have entered treatment with nothing but the clothes on their back. AIM accepts everyone where they are. We build relationships and trust. Our goal is to guide each person towards recovery.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. We are losing 129 beautiful, talented, caring individuals daily in this country. The majority of these individuals are not happy; they are ashamed, guilt ridden, lost, lonely, and don't know how to stop. So many have tried shaming them, but it doesn't work! There is nothing any of us can do to make them feel much worse about themselves, trust me I know. I have clients out there that cannot look me in the eyes. I hold their face in my hands and look them straight in the eyes and tell them they are good people who have made some bad decisions. I let them know I love them and I accept them where they are with the hopes that one day they will reach out to me and ask me to

help them get into treatment. I have been honored to guide many into treatment, stand with them through their recovery, and watch them grow and flourish.

There are some who have to overcome many obstacles. I can think of one gentleman who entered detox/treatment after being on the streets for 5 years. He received BHSI funding for 21 days. His CBH insurance did not get turned on in time; the 21 days were up and the treatment facility placed him in a shelter. He wasn't accepting that; he called me and together with the many amazing contacts I have made in and around the city of Philadelphia we got him on a methadone clinic and contacted the Office of Addiction Specialists (OAS) who funded him in a recovery house for 3 months. He is doing so well; he just received a scholarship for 6 months in the program's step down house!

Many are distraught at entering recovery then being released to a shelter. I have seen this happen to others. When it is time to be released from detox, if there is not a rehab bed, many individuals are released to the shelter system. This, in no means, is a warm hand off; these individuals feel as though they are being rejected by the same system that is supposed to help them.

This feeling of abandonment happens quite often. I took a young lady to get assessed after she had an extremely traumatic event happen to her. She was told, "Go back to the suboxone clinic you are on, there is nothing we can do for you." She explained with my assistance that she wasn't taking her suboxone, was back on heroin, and needed help. She spoke about what had happened to her and again she was told to go back to her clinic. She cried and said, "I guess I have to go live on the streets again." I took her by the hand drove her to another assessment center; together we spoke to the doctor. He decided she needed drug and alcohol and mental health assessments. She was admitted, sent to a 30 day rehab, then a 90 day program where she is still at, over 9 months later!

They do not all end positive. I took a young girl to an assessment center, she did not have insurance, and she waited 6 hours to be told she had to leave because they did not get her insurance yet, and to come back tomorrow. She called me; I was supposed to meet her in an hour to take her somewhere else. She never showed and I drove around looking for her for a couple hours. Three days later I received a call she overdosed. She left behind 2 beautiful children, a mom and dad, and a sister and a brother. Who knows what could have been if she had gotten insurance that day.

We need to be prepared to help each individual when they are ready. Too many get turned away due to lack of beds, insurance issues, or an admittance attendant not doing his/her job properly. I am out there on the streets; I am taking them to detox, treatment and crisis centers, and I see firsthand the wrongs being done. There needs to be a mandatory training for all of those in this field, whether just starting out or those who have been working in the field for years. Respect and empathy need to be a part of treatment. They need to be given respect and empathy, and trust me they will give it in return.

There is no one solution; this disease has snowballed out of control. We need to come together. Law makers need to ask those in recovery, family members and grass roots organizations for help in writing new legislation. Those in recovery need to stand tall and proud; family members need to stand up and speak out, and lawmakers need to help us find ways to get those in need of treatment in a facility and

keep them there for as long as they need to be there. We all need to join together to end the stigma for medically assisted treatment and addiction. Remember words matter!