

'THOUSANDS LIKE ME'

Wabash Mayor Endures Daughters' Addictions

By Charlee Beasor

Opposite page: Danielle (left) and Brianne Long as young girls and years later at their mother’s funeral. Wabash Mayor Scott Long has been telling the story of his daughters’ struggles with substance use disorder and addiction over the past 12 years.

Wabash Mayor Scott Long has a collection of images on his phone that depict everyday life for the 54-year-old community leader and former police officer of over 20 years.

There’s Long, his wife and grandson Brenden at a Fort Wayne TinCaps ballgame on a summer day. A swipe of a finger and there’s video of a different grandson, Landon (who just turned 2 years old), playing the drums (loudly) and singing behind a pacifier.

“He’s singing. The only word I can pick out is ‘Jesus,’ which I’m thankful for. I don’t know what song he’s singing,” Long says with a chuckle.

He also has photos of both grandsons splashing and playing in the same creek years apart.

But in stark contrast – represented in other images – are the harsh realities of the past 12 years for Long and his family. Those same grandsons pictured playing in the water have both lived with Long and his wife while their mothers were incarcerated or in recovery for substance use disorders. The Longs have raised Landon since he was several weeks old.

One image shows Long with his son and two daughters at their mother’s (his ex-wife’s) funeral (see photo on opposite page). Except, he points out, he later learned that one of his daughters had shot up with methamphetamine at the cemetery. Another image is more shocking.



Long and his wife have helped raise two grandsons while his daughters work through substance use disorder and addiction. He says Brenden (top photos) had a dramatically different look just a few weeks after he was placed with the Longs at 18 months old. Landon (bottom photos) went to live with the Longs when he was just over two weeks old. He was a frequent visitor at City Hall and loves playing the drums.



It depicts his other daughter, lying on the floor of her grandmother’s bathroom, face turning purple during an overdose. It was snapped by a police officer on the scene as Long’s daughter was eventually, *finally* revived. (A nasal dose of Narcan did “nothing,” he emphasizes. It took inserting an intravenous stream of the lifesaving drug into her neck to bring her back.)

Even though that photo is hard to look at, Long keeps it on his phone. He shows it to

his daughter occasionally, to remind her of where they’ve been and where they never want to return.

“A lot of my daughter’s friends, I’ve attended their funerals because they overdosed and died. I’m fortunate that I haven’t had to face that situation, although I was very close.”

Back to the beginning

Long’s daughters – Brianne, 28, and Danielle, 26 – both became addicted to



Indiana Workforce Recovery is the Indiana Chamber and Wellness Council of Indiana initiative to help combat the opioid epidemic in the workplace.

Learn more at www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery.

This is the first in a yearlong series on the drug and addiction issues facing Indiana, as well as efforts to combat the crisis.



Long was elected mayor of Wabash in 2016 after serving as a police officer for over 20 years. He was also a member of the Wabash City Council for 16 years.

heroin while in high school. As a law enforcement officer, he'd quickly picked up on signs of problems. Things started to go missing around the house. The girls began asking for small amounts of money, mostly for things like personal hygiene items.

Long learned that Brianne's addiction began when she was 16. Immediately, he got her into an outpatient treatment program in nearby Huntington.

"Shortly after that, my youngest daughter ... she was a cheerleader at the high school and as a freshman, one of the senior cheerleaders introduced her to heroin also."

Danielle went to a Fairbanks facility in Indianapolis for her treatment and recovery. There was a relapse shortly after she got out, then another stay at Fairbanks while on probation. She attended and graduated from Hope Academy, a high school created for students in recovery.

But at the same time her younger sister was recovering, Brianne and a boyfriend were trafficking drugs from Chicago. Long called the drug task force and the pair were arrested. Brianne served two and a half years in prison. She had two young children at home at the time.

"It was either (make the call to get her arrested) or watch her die. And worry about my grandchildren. I've got two grandchildren in that home. Mommy ODs and there's a needle there or there's a bag there. You see those stories occasionally," Long explains.

"I went to (Brianne and the boyfriend) and said 'I'll get you both in treatment' a month before I made that call. 'No, we're fine,' they said."

It was around that time that Danielle "got mixed up with an older guy who was cooking meth within 1,000 feet of a park," Long relays.

"He got busted, she got arrested and charged with aiding and manufacturing meth within 1,000 feet of a park. First criminal offense. Got a sentence of 13 years, suspend eight with probation, do five. So she ends up going to prison."

Things improved – for a while. Danielle's son Landon was born in 2016.

Long was surprised to get a call from the Department of Child Services (DCS) just over two weeks after the baby was born.

"I thought everything was fine. Unbeknownst to me, she tested positive for meth when he was born, and he tested positive."

And there's that phone again, ringing early one morning in March

2017. It was the captain of Long's police force.

"He told me that (Brianne) had overdosed at her grandmother's house, where she was living. Had her grandmother not gotten up to go to the bathroom, she probably wouldn't have found her in time," he says. "He told me at the hospital that when they got (to the home), she was taking a breath about every 15 seconds."

The dose of Narcan directly into her neck revived her and she recovered. Long took his daughter back home and later that day his phone rang. It was DCS telling him he would need to collect Brianne's son, Brenden, who was 18 months old at the time.

"All of a sudden, we're dealing with Landon, who would have been four months old and an 18 month old. I'd already gotten Landon into daycare locally. My wife had to take three weeks off work because he couldn't get into daycare until he was six weeks old and we didn't have anybody else to watch him," Long conveys.

"He spent some time here at City Hall. I've got a good staff and they loved having a baby around. We ended up with Brenden and we had him for six to eight months. And I think that last incident really scared my older daughter. She realized how close she was to dying."

Brianne went to drug court and was a model of what professionals wish people in that situation would do – she went to classes, did everything she needed to do and was employed.

"She was able to start rebuilding and is doing a good job. She's struggling like any single mother," Long offers.

When Long's ex-wife passed away from cancer in 2017, he paid the bond for Danielle to be able to go to the funeral.

"I'd never bonded either of the girls out. I bonded her out the day of the funeral, her boyfriend came down from South Bend and I later found out she injected methamphetamine at the cemetery that day. ... She got sentenced to serve the remainder of her probationary period."

Danielle was released from prison on October 1, 2018. She is employed and working full time. Long allows Landon (he's got guardianship of his grandson) to see his mother now twice a week. She's attending church with the family, he adds.

Grandparent-slash-parent

Long mentions that his pension check helps cover daycare costs. Who expects to be nearing 55 years old and trying to figure out

how to pay for daycare, diapers and formula?

It's not an uncommon situation. Long emphasizes, "There are thousands of people like me in this state and probably hundreds of thousands throughout this country. Locally, I know a lot of people are raising their grandkids."

But for Long and his wife, there is no question of the "honor" they feel in taking care of Landon and any of their grandchildren who need it. He and his wife never had children together – each had three previously, two boys and a girl for her. Their version of *The Brady Bunch*, he says with a laugh.

As part of the Fairbanks in-patient recovery process that Danielle went through initially, Long and his wife took part in weekly parent support group meetings to help them learn how to help their children. Later, he brought the idea to the community of Wabash and hosted similar meetings for parents in the area.

"It got into making them realize how they were enabling their children. Because as a parent of an addict, you can love them to death," Long articulates. "Literally, because you keep feeding them money."

Some of those families, despite their best efforts, have since lost their children to overdoses.

The stigma of addiction, Long says, extends to not just the people going through the struggle, but parents, siblings and extended family. Long says his son, who has never struggled like his sisters, endured comments about their addictions through school and the cumulative experiences most likely influenced some of the depression the younger Long has dealt with.

"You raise your kids to make good decisions. But once they hit a certain age, the decisions are theirs to be made and parents need to understand that. They need not be guilty about it," Long maintains.

"The guilt needs to go away from the parents. It's not anything they've done wrong. You raise them to make good decisions and you encourage that, but you can't be with them 24/7. ... You hear, 'Oh, we come from such a good family.' It doesn't matter if you're a good family or a bad family."

'Develop an understanding'

This is not the first time Long has told of his family's struggles with addiction, recovery, relapse, overdoses, guardianship and pain. It won't be the last.

What does he hope people take away from hearing his story?

"There's a lot of people who are dealing with addicts who, because of guilt or shame, won't speak publicly about it. I've always

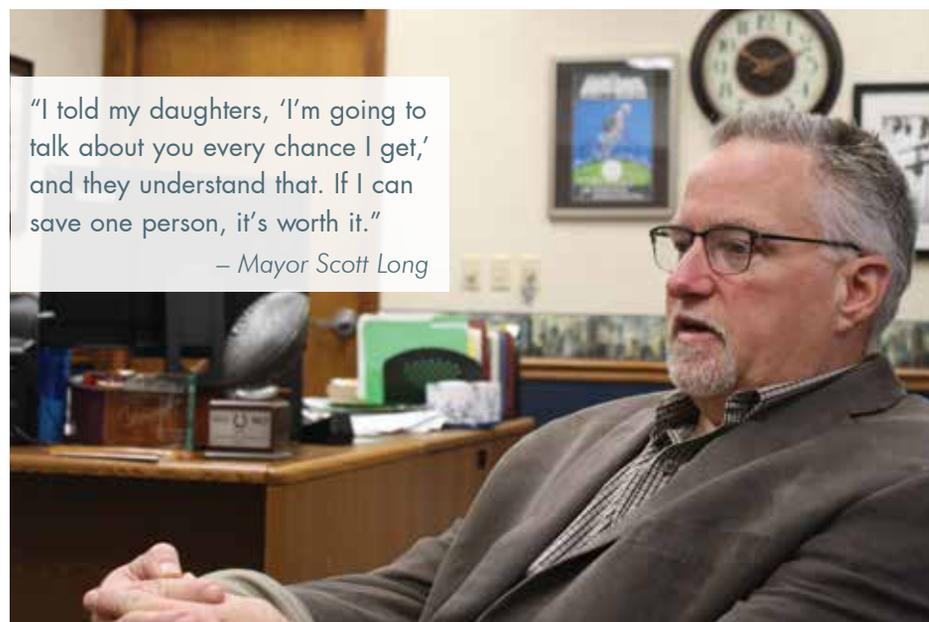
been open about it, I've done numerous articles in the paper about it, going back to when the youngest daughter went to Fairbanks; they did a piece in the local paper about it.

"Through sharing my story, I'm letting people know you're not alone. It's going to take all of us together to make a difference."

Other things he hopes people take away: understanding and compassion.

"I wish people who have never dealt with an addict were a little less opinionated about those of us who have dealt with it," Long expresses.

"It can be hard to comprehend until it 'smacks you in the face,' he says. "It's tough, as a police officer ... you use words like 'junkie' and things like that and I'll admit I was one of those guys. I hated drugs. But



then I tried to develop an understanding.

"The state's pushing really hard now on the terminology and phrases you use when you talk about the situation. Hopefully people are paying attention. I think our police department's getting better. They're starting to understand these people aren't POS's (pieces of sh**). They're humans."

Long was invited to join the advisory board for the Indiana University Grand Challenge on addiction. He's also given some input about grandparent and family caregiving to the new director of DCS.

Wabash efforts include creating a community drug steering committee that's been at work for over a year and a half. Another keen area of interest is workforce issues, particularly the idea of employers hiring convicted felons.

It's also not just an opioid crisis.

"We need to quit calling, at the state level, this an opioid crisis. Because if we zero in on that, methamphetamine is going to turn around and kick us in the butt. ... Let's call it an addiction crisis; let's not call it an opioid crisis."

Nobody said life was easy

What does Long hope for his children? The standard stuff: for them to grow into good, productive members of society and be good parents for their children.

"Nobody said life was easy and nobody said life was fair," he contends.

"I've witnessed pain and suffering. There are things I saw on the police department to cause the average person to want to drink heavily or use a drug to escape it. Until we get to the point where our kids can talk about

their problems openly and freely with family and friends, they're going to seek alternative means to escape those problems."

Finding outlets for people to decompress – whether that's attending church, becoming involved in the community or just getting out into nature – is one aspect of stemming some of these issues.

"That's why it's important to me as mayor to make sure our parks are up to par ... more amenities. We've got a fantastic Riverwalk that we're working on; a private group that's building a trail right now."

And he's going to continue beating the drums and using his family's personal experiences.

"I told my daughters, 'I'm going to talk about you every chance I get' and they understand that. If I can save one person, it's worth it."