The evolving message of NCADA’s Super Bowl ads

There’s a time for shouting, and a time for conversation.

Howard Weissman

You may be one of the 1.3 million people who saw our most recent Super Bowl commercial (though if you missed the opportunity to view it live, you can see it on any of our social media channels, or on our website). But before we talk about our 2018 ad, it’s important to revisit our previous commercials, and understand how far we’ve come in raising awareness—and hopefully creating meaningful change—in our region.

The imagery and tone of our 2018 ad differed greatly from those of years past. It’s easy to forget that the St. Louis area was not talking much about heroin and overdose deaths when we ran our very first Super Bowl commercial back in 2015. That very provocative commercial showed a young man in a suburban home overdosing in his bedroom, while his mother was downstairs in the kitchen, wholly unaware of the tragedy awaiting her upstairs. The visuals were accompanied by happy-sounding music which told a terrible story. This imagery, while unsettling and difficult to watch, was intended to be a wake-up call for our community—the heroin and opioid crisis was spiraling out of control, and no one, regardless of age, race, gender, or socioeconomic status, was immune.

In 2017, we were fortunate to produce not one, but two PSAs. Highlighting the dangers of unsecured prescription medications, these ads encouraged St. Louisans to safely store their painkillers, and dispose of them when they’re no longer needed.

Survey data indicated that these PSAs (and accompanying anti-drug campaign effort) were effective in raising awareness of the heroin/opioid epidemic, and have actually increased the likelihood that individuals will take steps to protect their families.

But year after year, the death toll continues to climb. And when the forest is in flames, nobody’s thinking about how to prevent forest fires.

Which brings us to our 2018 PSA. Leaders in law enforcement know that it’s impossible to “arrest our way out” of this opioid problem. And substance use treatment providers all agree that there is no way to “treat our way out” of it. Once addiction sets in, it is terribly difficult—and terribly expensive—for sufferers to find long-term recovery.

The best solution to addiction is to prevent it before it starts. Family conversations are an important part of the prevention process.

When we cannot “arrest our way out” or “treat our way out,” it becomes clear that the way forward must include a greater effort to prevent addiction before it starts.

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A Liminal State

As many of you know, some nine months ago I announced that I would be retiring as NCADA’s executive director in June of this year. The long advance notice gave our board of directors plenty of time to initiate and execute a thorough regional search.

The selection committee screened a large number of qualified candidates and gradually winnowed the applicant pool down to three exceptional people. Of those, one person in particular distinguished herself from the others by coming to the selection process replete with strengths that included the confidence and trust of nearly the entire staff and board, and strong, positive relationships with our four largest funders; a heartfelt passion for both our mission and our people; and an indefatigable will to succeed.

So I am utterly thrilled to report that after a rigorous selection process, the board of directors named Nichole Dawsey—who has excelled here for a decade and is currently our Director of Prevention Education—to become NCADA’s next executive director.

Nichole and I have had a strong collegial and complementary working relationship since my first day here, so we expect the transition to be smooth and enjoyable, and so far, it has been exactly that. Though on a personal level, it’s also a little unsettling, and I think I know why.

Announcing my retirement and now knowing that Nichole will be my successor has, for both of us, been an experience fraught with liminality. How one handles the in-between state—phase or condition; an in-between state—liminality (a word that comes from the field of anthropology) refers to the in-between phase of a tribal rite of passage, where the participant is, for example, no longer a boy, but not quite a man.

I remember the anxiety I felt on my first day at college. My parents had just driven away and I sat on the side of my bottom bunk bed amidst a sea of boxes, with a wildly ungroomed stranger who would be my roommate holding a bong to his face as if it was a trumpet and he was Dizzy Gillespie. I felt lost. Classes wouldn’t begin for another day or two, so I was not yet a college freshman but I was no longer a high school senior.

The day Nichole was selected to be NCADA’s next executive director, we both entered a similar state. Nichole was no longer just the director of Prevention Education, but she wasn’t yet executive director. I was no longer just executive director, but I wasn’t retired yet either.

Liminal states contain a great deal of uncertainty because the old rules don’t quite apply and the new rules haven’t been established. Nothing feels familiar. In liminal states, there is no script, no road map. During liminal periods we must find a way to navigate heightened ambiguity and anxiety.

Everyone—not just me and Nichole—wonders what’s next. When change is announced but not made manifest to everyone here, whether consciously or not, starts imagining what the future will bring. The old organizational structure isn’t dissolved, of course, but it’s momentarily familiar. In liminal states, there is no script, no road map. During liminal periods we must find a way to navigate heightened ambiguity and anxiety.

While this is exciting for some, it makes others uncomfortable and they immediately pine for "the way it used to be," even though nothing’s actually changed yet! The good news is that liminal states are rich with opportunity. Because during liminal periods we are not trapped by the way things used to be and we can begin to identify things that are broken, or things that can be improved. There can be a lot of positive change during a liminal state, even though it almost always engenders a certain amount of unease. But if people are open about their fears, and if we pay close attention and listen to each other (which we do), then we maintain the unity and morale that we worked so hard to build.

Nichole Dawsey

Liminal describes an intermediate state, phase or condition; an in-between state.

As importantly, we find ways of erasing old limits and making NCADA bigger and better. The self-doubt and fear I felt that first day at college evaporated as I met new friends and developed a new routine with new teachers, new classmates, new distractions, new goals, and, thankfully, a new roommate. Before long, I had detached from what was, and immersed myself in life’s next chapter. The liminal state didn’t last long. It never does.

Our board and staff are overjoyed that NCADA’s next leader is someone they already know and trust. The transition to Nichole will be seamless, and once she can inhabit the job fully—without me in the building—she will be spectacular.

I love the job and the people so much that I’m in no hurry to leave, but I’m so excited for what’s next for this amazing organization that I can’t wait to see it take flight into even higher orbits. And that is the very definition of what it’s like to be in a liminal state.

So during these final four months you likely will see and hear less from me. But you will see and hear more from NCADA and Nichole because we are taking advantage of this liminal period to push boundaries. There is no better time to be rolling out “Talk About It,” our broad public education campaign; there is no better time to deepen our existing partnerships and forge new ones; and there is no better time to reject the status quo and try new things. We need only remind ourselves, our friends, neighbors, donors, and funders, that when we all work together, it doesn’t matter who’s filling the rectangles near the top of the NCADA org chart.

As long as we remember why we’re here—and that there’s still a lot left to do—we can take advantage of this unique and fleeting period to make both the organization and our community healthier and stronger. ✱

David Weissman, Executive Director

CALENDAR

For event information and registration visit ncada-stl.org/events, email Jeanne Cordingley at jcordingley@ncada-stl.org, or call (314) 962-3456 x304 (unless otherwise noted on the event listing).

FOR PROFESSIONALS

April 27: Spring Awards Luncheon 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm. Norwood Hills Country Club, 1 Country Club Drive, St. Louis, MO 63121 (See story p. 5)


FOR STUDENTS

March 29: Speak Hard The Speak Hard Youth Conference, sponsored by ACT Missouri, is held annually in Jefferson City, MO, at the Capitol Plaza Hotel. Teens will unite at the state Capitol, attend workshops, and network with youth from across Missouri.

June 5-8: Teen Institute Squirel Retreat Center, 83510 Highway 10, Dittmer, MO 63023 (See story p. 5)

FOR EVERYONE

March 19: Panera Fundraiser 4:00 pm – 8:00 pm, 10550 Old Olive Street Rd, Cave Colter, MO 63141 (See feature p. 7)

GO! ST. LOUIS MARATHON April 7 & 8 – Join Team NCADA Visit ncada-stl.org/events or contact sroberts@ncada-stl.org

Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainings (YMHFA) YMHFA trainings are free, one-day events that teach participants how to provide initial help to young people experiencing mental health crises.

April 27: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm, Calvary Church, 3998 Mid Rivers Mall Dr, St. Peters, MO 63376

St. Louis Coalition on Addictions UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS

Mar. 14 – Safe Connections: Challenging LGBTQ Stereotypes Dan Pearson

Apr. 11 – Art Therapy to Address Prevention & Treatment of Substance Disorder Dana Sebastian-Duncan

May 9 – Alcohol: The Forgotten Epidemic David Patterson Silver Wolf and Sage Breaker Stern

June 13 – Prescription Opioid Use and The Transition to Heroin Dr. Theodore Cicero

The Coalition on Addictions (COA) meets the second Wednesday of each month from noon – 1:00 at NCADA, 1000 Olive Blvd in Downtown St. Louis. No RSVP is required. Lunch is provided free of charge, courtesy of Alkermes, Inc. A CEU list one contact hour is $5.00. COA is a service of NCADA and the Community Academic Partnership on Addictions (CAPA) an an Affiliate organization of Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.
In a hopeful tone, our 2018 PSA asks viewers to take a different kind of action and to remember that we are not helpless in the face of a terrible epidemic. We see images of families participating in everyday preventative activities that have become second-nature: a mother checking that her son is secure in his car seat, a father reminding his daughter to wear her helmet as she gets on her bike, and a mother taking her young child to the pediatrician to receive vaccinations. And finally, the commercial ends by directing viewers to the website, TalkAboutItSTL.com.

We know that caregivers who have conversations about alcohol and other drugs is more than a single, heavy, sit-down conversation—rather, conversations can take place as early as pre-K, and continue throughout adolescence. It is the ongoing nature of these conversations that serve as a protective factor for our kids. We encourage you to visit the Talk About It website to learn more about the campaign, view or download the age-specific talking kits, and find out how you can get more involved. We also encourage you to share this resource with your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers—anyone who could benefit from these potentially life-saving conversations. And don’t forget to follow us on social media, or perhaps share your own thoughts on the importance of talking early and often with your kids by using #talkaboutitstl.

The Talk About It campaign is made possible through the generous support of DEA 360 Strategy, the Missouri Dept. of Economic Development, and Express Scripts.

NCADA Spring Awards Luncheon
FRIDAY, APRIL 27
• Norwood Hills Country Club
  1 Norwood Hills Country Club Dr, St. Louis, MO 63121
• Doors open 11:30; lunch at noon
• For reservations visit ncada-stl.org

Each year the Awards Luncheon celebrates “unsung heroes” for their important work in substance misuse prevention in our region. The Luncheon is open to the public. The cost is $35 per person or $315 for a table of ten.

Seating is limited, so early reservations are strongly advised. For information, contact Stacie Zellin at szellin@ncada-stl.org, or (314) 962-3456 ext. 344.

Keynote Speaker,
Sen. Jill Schupp

The deadline for applications is April 1, 2018.

If you had asked me three days ago, I would have said it was a “lame” camp about drug prevention. But truthfully, this has been a great experience and I will not regret one moment I have spent here.

-TI Graduate
A special thank you to Terri Harris and Elle Management

Through discussions with NCADA, Terri was made aware of a gap in funding for NCADA’s prevention education program in St. Charles County. On the anniversary of Tracey and Craig’s birthdays and their anniversaries of passing, Terri and Elle Management have agreed to donate 100% of the proceeds from their DMV license offices to fund prevention education initiatives in St. Charles, as well as ensure teens are able to attend NCADA’s Teens Institute leadership camp.

We thank Terri and Elle Management for their leadership in making it possible for such much needed funds that will allow for securing much needed funds that will allow for securing much needed funds that will allow for underserved kids in St. Charles.

Tributes & Contributions
November 2017 – January 2018

Michael Fitzwater
Shannon Stokes
Ralph Flesch
Ted and Caroline Marrs
Caleb Miller
Cheryl and Mark Carrier
Cory Hecht
Sara and Chad Gibbs
Vinnie Lobuesso
Cindy Banta
Steve and Judy Merritt
Christopher Maca
Ted and Caroline Marrs
Heather Miller
Robert Otto
Elle Management
Brandi Jordan
Greg and Jane Schulte
Dick Jordan
John and Sandy Brady
Craig Fagan
Andy and Stan Shunker
Terri has been an active member of NCADA’s conference, and we are thrilled to say that we have found one of these missing pieces that can transform their investment into meaningful change in their communities.

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Congratulations to Jenny Armbruster and Danna Squires on their work anniversaries! Jenny, our Director of Community Services, celebrated her 10th year with NCADA, and Danna, our Prevention Support Specialist, celebrated her 5th. Both Jenny and Danna work in our Prevention Resource Center.

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