Press Kit

Dying in Vein, the Opiate Generation
A feature length documentary film about opiate and heroin addiction
Directed by
Jenny Mackenzie

For more information please contact
Jenny Mackenzie 801.554.6489
jennymackenziefilms@gmail.com
www.dyinginveinmovie.org

Presented by Artemis Rising Foundation
50 Word Synopsis: *Dying in Vein* is a deeply personal exploration of opiate and heroin addiction that drops you directly into the lives of a 22-year-old recovery, a young couple trying to get clean, a family grieving the loss of their son and an ER Physician trying to save one patient at a time.

Full Synopsis and Treatment: *Dying in Vein* is an intimate and deeply personal exploration of opiate and heroin addiction. The film follows two young women trying to get clean, a 22-year-old in recovery, a family grieving the loss of their son, and a team of ER doctors trying to save their patients. Through these four stories, the film explores the pill to heroin pipeline and the shame and blame that surround the disease of addiction. The film looks at the aftermath of death on loved ones, the daily commitment of sobriety, the reality of considering treatment after multiple relapses, and the culpability of our medical communities in the opiate crisis.

Maddy and Page have been using heroin since they were teenagers. We see the impact it’s had on their lives, and feel their pain and suffering. After much deliberation and emotional anguish, they enter a detox facility. Four days later, they check out, against medical advice. With the guidance of a therapeutic counselor, Maddy’s parents cut all financial ties except for a harm reduction program in the hopes that Maddy will get clean.

We meet Chase through intimate journal entries that focus on his addiction demons and his desire to get help. As we transition to 3 days after Chase’s accidental heroin overdose, we see his family grieving and planning for his funeral. At the funeral his father and younger sister read their eulogies, and we experience the family’s pain and sorrow.

Matt, one of Chase’s close friends has been clean and sober for two years when he hears about Chase’s overdose. As 6th graders at an elite private school, Matt and Chase were both described as the “cool kids”: skateboarding, snowboarding, playing the guitar, and wearing skinny jeans. In high school, their drug use went from pot smoking during their freshman, sophomore, and junior years to ecstasy, acid, cocaine, and Oxycontin within a six-month period during their senior year. During their freshman year in college, both Matt and Chase started using heroin. A year later, after being arrested and hitting his “rock bottom” in jail, Matt is released.

After attending Chase’s funeral and realizing that “could have been me,” Matt talks about what saved him, why he got “lucky,” and what he continues to do to keep himself sober. We see the reality of the daily challenges of living sober, as well as what it means for Matt to work in addiction services with others in recovery.

As a child, Maddy played soccer, danced, and loved art. Maddy began using Oxycontin at the age of 15, and as a junior in high school was introduced to heroin. She smoked heroin for two years before shooting up for the first time at 18. Over her five-year history of using heroin, Maddy has been in 7 different detox programs. Maddy’s family hires Sarah Finney, LPC, a private consultant, to see if she can save their daughter. Sarah helps families navigate our complicated and broken treatment system by helping kids get clean and find treatment that works.
Page experimented with drugs at a young age after losing her father, moving schools, and watching her mother and stepfather divorce. She spent the majority of her teenage years and young adulthood in and out of treatment and jail. Having met Maddy in California in treatment, the two relapse and become inseparable. Now faced with the prospect of losing her insurance, Page feels that she has one last chance to get clean.

Jennifer Plumb, M.D., lost her brother Andy 20 years ago to an accidental heroin overdose. She is now a pediatric ER physician who started Utah Naloxone in honor of her brother, Andy. Dr. Plumb leads a team of concerned healthcare professionals through grassroots activism by getting Naloxone into the hands of anyone who may be in need. This opiate overdose reversal drug is one of the first steps towards saving lives.

Critical, compassionate and informative expert interviews grounded in current addiction research add to the intimate verite style footage and allow us to understand the complicated brain disease of addiction. The footage reveals that kids like Maddy, Chase, Page, and Matt all struggled with something that is like stage 4 cancer. It’s deadly when it’s not treated, and it spreads like a wildfire if not addressed. It’s often not IF they are going to die, but rather WHEN they will die.

Dying in Vein is a film about ALL of our children and the future of the next generation. Because the film is told from the POV of our characters who are living it, it will give high school and university students an opportunity to learn the reality of opiate and heroin abuse. Dramatic, honest and real verite footage brings this story of addiction, loss, and recovery to the screen in an intimate and honest way.

Creative Team Bios:

Jenny Mackenzie/Producer

Jenny Mackenzie, Ph.D. is an award winning documentary filmmaker whose mission is to produce films that promote social change. Her films include KICK LIKE A GIRL, WHERE’S HERBIE? SUGAR BABIES, LEAD WITH LOVE & DYING IN VEIN, THE OPIATE GENERATION. Her films have aired on top broadcast channels such as HBO, won numerous awards at various international film festivals, and are currently being used by the US State Department to discuss public
health and social justice issues around the globe. She has worked collaboratively with the Utah Film Center for over 12 years, under the leadership of her friend, mentor and producer Geralyn White Dreyfous. Jenny received a B.A. from Brown University and a Ph.D. from the University of Utah.

Geralyn Dreyfous/Executive Producer

Geralyn White Dreyfous's independent executive producing and producing credits include the Academy Award winning Born Into Brothels; Emmy nominated The Day My God Died; and multiple film festivals winners such as Kick Like a Girl, In A Dream, Dhamma Brothers, Project Kashmir, Miss Representation, Connected, The Invisible War, The Crash Reel and The Square. Her works in production include: Wait for Me, All Eyes and Ears, One In A Billion, In Football We Trust, Barney Frank's Last Year, and Sugar Babies. The Square was nominated for the 2014 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Geralyn was honored by the International Documentary Association with the Amicus Award in 2013 for her significant contribution to documentary filmmaking.

Regina Scully/Executive Producer

Regina K. Scully is the Founder and CEO of Artemis Rising Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to developing and
promoting Media, Education and the Arts that transform our culture. Ms. Scully is a three-time Emmy Award-winning and Academy-nominated producer. She has produced upwards of one hundred documentary films, shining a light on some of the most challenging social issues of our time.

Torben Bernhard/Editor & Cinematographer

Torben is an award-winning editor, cinematographer, and director. He has directed and produced several critically acclaimed short and feature documentaries that have been featured in The New York Times, The Atlantic, Upworthy, People Magazine, The Huffington Post, and more.

Tracy McKnight/Music Supervisor

Tracy McKnight has earned a place in the entertainment industry as a highly sought after music supervisor and creative executive. While she spends most of her time working on big productions like The Hunger Games and Bad Santa 2, she also finds time for her “passion projects” like Dying in Vein.

The Making of Dying in Vein

A Personal Message from Director, Jenny Mackenzie:
Addiction is a deeply personal issue. We have several people in our family who struggle with addiction. We are fortunate; no one in our family has died of an overdose. I have a brother who has been sober for 9 years, a stepmother who has been sober for over 40 years, and a daughter who is happy and successful in her life after experiencing drug misuse in high school and college. I wondered every day if our daughter, Anna would get through it, if she would relapse, and how our family could help her to get well. I knew then that I wanted to make a film about addiction, and the devastating impact it has on families.

After treatment, Anna went to college. She hit some bumps in the road, but overall she did well. In February of her sophomore year, she called sobbing because a boy she knew from high school had died from a heroin overdose. Anna sent me his obituary. I was struck by how open and brave the family was about his addiction. That night (3 days after they had lost their son), I emailed the parents. I shared my deepest sympathies, said that Anna knew Chase in high school, and that she had been in treatment. I said that if they felt like sharing their son’s story, I believed it could impact many other families. There is nothing more powerful than witnessing a loving family bury a child. This disease kills people. It robs families of a lifetime with a loved one. Chase’s family responded that evening. The next day we met and talked about the potential filming process. Four days before his funeral, we started filming, and that was the beginning of Dying in Vein.

At Chase’s funeral, I met his good friend Matt, who, at the time had been clean for over 2 years. A few weeks after Chase’s funeral, Matt and I did our first interview. Matt talked about his life, getting into heroin, his friendship with Chase and his concern about two other friends who were still actively using heroin. We realized that both Matt and Chase were important characters: similar backgrounds, getting into drugs together, one clean & sober, and one dead from an accidental overdose. What would happen to their friends who were still using? Would they live or would they die? That question guided our work.

Two months later we were finishing a successful Kickstarter fundraising campaign, and received a private message on our Dying in Vein Facebook from a 22-year-old who was still using:

Hello my name is Madeline, my mom told me about your documentary and if there is any way I can help or if you’d like to look into the life of a using addict feel free to contact me. I am not clean right now, but I don’t wish this life on anyone and would love to share my experience if it would just stop one person from going down the same road as me.

After responding to Maddy’s message, and talking at length with her and her girlfriend Page, I realized we had found our final subjects. These two young women were in the throes of addiction, wanting to get clean, but not yet able to navigate their way out. We all learn by connecting with another human being’s experience, and I am deeply grateful to each of our brave subjects for opening their hearts and sharing their stories so that others may learn and grow. It isn’t easy to tell such a personal story on film, and it is especially difficult to tell a story about heroin addiction, because judgment, shame and stigma continue to exist. Matt has been sober for over five years, Maddy for almost two, and the Saxton family thinks about Chase everyday. Page has recently relapsed and is going back into detox and treatment, understanding that relapse is part of recovery.
Dying in Vein took three years to complete, and now, as it reaches communities, schools, festivals, and health care organizations, we hope it will be a catalyst for conversations about addiction. We want to bring this disease out of the closet, and take away the shame and blame, so that struggling individuals, families, and communities can heal and grow. It is my hope that this film will help us to talk about addiction. It’s a disease.

**The Current Crisis:** The death rate from heroin overdoses in the United States tripled between 2010 and 2013, and younger white males replaced middle-aged and older black men as the most common victims of the epidemic, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Unlike the heroin scourge of the late 1960s to early 1980s, which was concentrated in urban centers, today’s epidemic is ravaging suburbs and rural areas as well, where it is used predominantly by young adults between the ages of 18 and 30. At a National Institute on Drug Abuse meeting in 2014, 17 of 20 researchers from across the country reported that heroin was their top emerging issue. Heroin-related deaths are at an all time high nationally, and Utah, a conservative state known for its family values, is ranked #4 in the nation for opiate-related deaths.

Authorities say a number of factors are fueling the drug’s use, including relatively low prices, a less demonized image than it once had, and a generation of kids who are anesthetizing stress, depression, and other coming-of-age anxieties. Rather than seeing heroin as a point-of-no-return drug used primarily by “street junkies,” many users now see it as an inexpensive alternative to prescription opiates. Many heroin addicts initially get hooked on prescription painkillers, mistakenly perceiving them as “safe.” When prescription opiates become cost-prohibitive or too difficult to obtain, they turn to heroin, Gil Kerlikowske, White House Drug Czar, has explained: Heroin is cheaper, yet part of the same family of drugs as Oxycodone and other opioids, whose illegal non-prescription use has been subject to a crackdown by law enforcement.

The sale of prescribed opiates like Oxycodone has increased by 300% over the past decade, paralleled by a 20% increase in abuse and a 124% increase in fatal overdoses. About 80% of people trying heroin for the first time previously used prescription pain drugs, according to a report in 2013 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, part of the Department of Health and Human Services. New users typically start off smoking or snorting heroin powder, and then move on to injecting it, which causes the quickest and most intense high. The number of heroin users in the U.S. jumped almost 80% to an estimated 669,000 in 2012 from 373,000 in 2007, according to surveys by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "Heroin doesn't have any sort of geographic or demographic boundaries," said Rusty Payne, a spokesman for the Drug Enforcement Administration. "It touches pretty much every segment of society."

There are more than 38,000 drug overdose deaths per year in the United States, 75% of which are opioid-related. We are not the only ones experiencing tragedy; Europeans are suffering as well. Opioid overdose accounts for about 6,500 deaths per year in the European Union and was recently cited as the number one cause of preventable death among young men in Spain.
We have been struggling with this silent assassin for decades. Year after year, our children fall prey to deadly heroin. Children who are trying to safely get through their teenage years get addicted to opiates as they try to numb pain from depression, peer pressure, and family challenges. States all across the country are reporting rising rates of heroin usage, overdoses, and deaths. Nora Volkow, M.D., Director for the National Institute on Drug Abuse, has written that “Addiction is a developmental disease; that is, it usually starts in adolescence or even childhood and can last a lifetime if untreated. It is a complex brain disease characterized by compulsive, at times uncontrollable, drug craving, seeking, and use that persist despite potentially devastating consequences.”

**Community Outreach:** Because of her social work roots, filmmaker Jenny Mackenzie has created successful outreach and education campaigns for her other films including, *Sugar Babies, Kick Like a Girl, Invisible Disabilities, and Lead with Love*. Dying in Vein, has a 38-page discussion guide that is a companion to the film and provides additional information, resources, and discussion questions to engage audiences, and create a community call-to-action. As a previous PH.D level social worker, Jenny’s primary focus is promoting social change through compelling documentary films that are used as a tool to create community conversations.

**VOD/Broadcast Distribution:** Through representation by Virgil Films & Entertainment, LLC, Dying in Vein is available on Hulu. Viewers can also rent or buy the film on various sites like Amazon, Google Play, ITunes, and Vudu. A DVD can be purchased directly from dyinginveinmovie.org

**TRT:** 68 minutes 36 seconds

**Praise/Quotes:**

“An extraordinarily intimate and beautiful film about one of America’s biggest public health tragedies.” – James Redford, award-winning filmmaker

“Every college and university should screen this compelling film – it is the perfect vehicle for initiating campus discussions about the opiate epidemic.” – David M Huebner, PHD, MPH, George Washington University, Department of Prevention and Community Health

“There are 23 million people in this country who are addiction, and yet it’s a problem that we don’t talk about.” David Sheff, Author & Journalist
“Utah has the seventh highest drug overdose rate in the country. The film takes great care to portray the subjects as individuals so that we can see the faces and lives behind the terrible statistics.” – Alex Springer, SLUG Magazine

“Mackenzie’s narrative style pulls no punches when it comes to capturing the harrowing consequences of addiction and overdose in Utah families and communities.” - Alex Springer, SLUG Magazine

“It’s a well-documented film that manages to cut through the unfortunate stereotypes that get applied to those who suffer from substance addiction, and it’s all the more poignant because these stories are happening in our own backyard.” – Alex Springer, SLUG Magazine

"It's very rare that you meet someone who doesn't know someone personally — or know someone who knows someone — that's been affected by opiates. I feel as though it’s not talked about enough. Having the (film) here was meaningful to a lot of students and I hope it sparked a discussion." – Sydney Oraskovich, Park City High School Student

2017 Festivals and Film Society Screenings

Buffalo Niagara Film Festival, Official Selection
Block Film Festival, Official Selection
Martha's Vineyard Film Society, Official Selection
Film Columbia, Official Selection
The Brain Storm Film Festival, Official Selection
George Washington University, Public Health Week
DOCUTAH, International Film Festival, Official Selection
Utah Public Radio “A State of Addiction: Utah’s Opioid Epidemic” Statewide tour

News/media clips & links:

Radio:
http://kuer.org/post/new-film-utah-portrait-heroin-abuse#stream/0
http://www.krcl.org/blog/radioactive-may-17-2017/
Television:
FOX 13 Utah May 15, 2017
KSL 5, Utah May 11, 2017, June 12, 2017

Internet:
KSL – 'Dying in Vein': Documentary shows no one is immune to opioid addiction. [https://www.ksl.com/?sid=44615439&nid=148](https://www.ksl.com/?sid=44615439&nid=148)


Production stills:
Please download images from dyinginveinmovie.org