

Happy Valley

Shedding light on drug addiction and possibly saving lives

Utah independent filmmakers: Ron Williams

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Ron Williams didn't set out to make a documentary about drug addiction. The subject was "pretty close to home," he said.

"When you're affected with drug addiction in your home, and you're trying to keep it quiet and keep it contained, . . . to live with that is to die with that," said Williams, CEO of the Orem-based health-products firm ForeverGreen.

As he was helping someone close to him get into rehab, Williams thought, "I'm just going to videotape this process."

The resulting documentary, "Happy Valley," which Williams directed and bankrolled, discusses the disturbing statistics of drug addiction in Utah - such as the high incidence of prescription-drug abuse in the state. But Williams also shows the human cost of addiction.

"I decided to do the movie to create conversations around the subject matter," he said, "so that we can begin to acknowledge where we're at and, hence, take responsibility."

One of the film's central stories is of 18-year-old Amelia Sorich, who died in 2005 at her friend's house in Draper from an overdose of heroin and cocaine. Williams interviews Sorich's parents, her then-boyfriend Jason Calacino, and Macall Petersen, the friend who gave Sorich the "speedball" that killed her.

(Petersen and Calacino later reached agreements to plead guilty to desecrating a dead human body, a third-degree felony, after dumping Sorich in the hills above Bountiful. Petersen also pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of negligent homicide and is now serving a 3-to-5-year

prison sentence. Calacino was sentenced in October to a year in jail.)

To fish for subjects for his film and to offer to help them, Williams paid for a billboard on I-15 seen by thousands of motorists every day. "We got 12 calls and three appointments - and we were offering to pay for the rehab," Williams said. One of those three, Danny, became a major character in the movie.

Williams finished the film early this year and started submitting to festivals. "Happy Valley" screened at the Breckenridge Festival of Film in Colorado this June.

"Instead of [showing] once, they decided to [screen] it another and another, based on the response it was getting," Williams said. The movie won the Audience Choice award at Breckenridge and gained some famous friends - Colorado residents Jon and Kim Biel, the parents of actress Jessica Biel, who are now participating in the film's launch with their Make the Difference Network, Williams said.

"Every time we've [shown] this movie for a private screening, it's gotten a standing ovation with people literally in tears," he said.

Williams aims to get national and international theatrical distribution for "Happy Valley." But beyond its theatrical life, he said, "what I really hope is that it creates change."