

## A new life for the New Day Campaign

Event that tackles mental illness through art seeks long-term status

BY DANIEL LEADERMAN

Dan.Leaderman@TheDailyRecord.com

After the death of his daughter, local artist Peter Bruun put together a series of art exhibitions and events known as the New Day Campaign that sought to tackle the stigmas associated with addiction and mental illness.

Though originally conceived as a one-off, he now says the project isn't finished, and he's assembling a team to carry it forward indefinitely.

"It was really clear there was a tremendous appetite for this," Bruun said. "Over 3,000 people came to the events. People were desperate for it to continue." The phrase "I've never said this publicly, but—" became a familiar refrain at events over the course of the campaign, he said.

The campaign, which ran from October through December, included panel discussions, reading groups, film and conversations series, and workshops about the therapeutic power of art; some featured practicing artists who have used their work to address their own struggles, some giving members of the public a chance to share their own stories.

Bruun's daughter, Elisif, died of a heroin overdose in February 2014 at age 24. Her death – about a week after the fatal overdose of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman – came at a time with the opioid epidemic was starting to get more attention, he said.

"I felt filled with a sense of mission to do something about the stigma," Bruun said. "I couldn't stand the idea of rumor and judgment around her."

Fear of talking about these issues is a major obstacle to treatment, said Dr. Leana Wen, Baltimore City's health commissioner, who was a keynote speaker at one of the campaign's events in October. "There is a huge stigma around addiction and mental illness, [which] discourages treatment and, quite frankly, kills people," Wen said.

Efforts like the New Day Campaign can also fill a role that provider of mental illness and addiction services can't due to a scarcity of resources, said Kathleen Westcoat, president and CEO of the nonprofit Behavioral Health System Baltimore.

"Most of our funding is for treatment," Westcoat said. "Nationally, there's just not enough money to break through stigma and to work on prevention. We welcome any effort to break down those barriers."

### Scope of the problem

More than 53,000 individuals received public mental health services in Baltimore in 2015, and about 19,000 people use heroin in the city each year; those addicted to heroin likely use other drugs as well, according to Behavioral Health System Baltimore.

Nearly 60 percent of people struggling with mental illness and addiction get no help at all, said Jeff Richardson, executive director of Mosaic Community Services, a community-based mental health provider that's part of the Sheppard Pratt Health System.



PHOTOS BY MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Peter Bruun, an artist and founder of the New Day Campaign, shows some of the submitted art work that will be on display at the kickoff Founder's Circle event at The Institute of Integrative Health Thursday night.

“

I felt filled with a sense of mission to do something about the stigma. I couldn't stand the idea of rumor and judgment around her.

PETER BRUUN

ARTIST AND FOUNDER OF THE NEW DAY CAMPAIGN

Richardson said research as well as his own experience have shown there's a benefit to patients of using art and creative therapy to share their stories. "It gives other people hope that recovery is possible," he said. "You can't undervalue the importance of hope."

Mental illness and addiction are still too often considered to be separate problems, despite the frequent correlation between the two, meaning patients often aren't adequately treated for both problems, said Stephen J. Heishman, an addiction researcher and New Day Campaign Board member.

Hopefully, the ongoing campaign can serve as a platform for greater communication and to help bridge that gap, he said.

Once the demand for a more permanent New Day Campaign became clear, Bruun began assembling an advisory board. The team is now "incubating" with the metropolitan Baltimore branch of the National Alliance on Mental Illness – meaning it works out of the NAMI Metro Baltimore office and can receive tax-deductible donations through that organization.

Sherry Welch, NAMI Metro Baltimore's executive director, praised Bruun's focus on the power of art. "We know some of the greatest artists in the world lived with mental illness,"



Photo of a mixed-media art piece by Michelle Labonte, "No Wonder I Can't Fly," that will be on display at tomorrow's event.

Welch said. "It just means your brain works a little differently."

The next season's programming is yet to be decided, but the campaign is launching a \$200,000 fiscal 2016 fundraising campaign with an art show at the The Institute of Integrative Health in Baltimore Thursday evening.

Both Wen and Bruun say the city is also still fighting its public image as the heroin capital of HBO's "The Wire," and that the New Day Campaign could help that effort.

"We have the potential to be a [positive] force in that same area where Baltimore has such a negative reputation," he said.

While Bruun is helping with the launch, he says doesn't plan to be the campaign's executive director going forward: He's among the people the project has helped.

"In 2015, I needed the New Day Campaign for my own healing," he said, "I don't need it anymore for myself."