

YOUR GOOD HEALTH

ACUPUNCTURE

helping addicts with recovery

By Holly Zachariah

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CIRCLEVILLE, Ohio — As the man with the handful of tiny needles moved closer, Sarah Downs' nervousness grew with his every step. She rocked back and forth in her plastic chair. She fidgeted. She bounced a leg.

She was there in the meeting room of the Pickaway Area Recovery Services (PARS) voluntarily, yet she still was unsure about what her friends had told her: that the acupuncture she was about to experience would ease the anxiety and fear that consumes her mind as she journeys through recovery from heroin and methamphetamine addictions.

Kenneth "Jimmy" Laux, a chiropractor and certified acupuncturist, knelt beside Downs and pierced each of her ears with five needles. As he did so, he explained what specific spot the needle stick was hitting and how it would help. Certain spots calm nerves and control anger, others deal with sadness and depression. Still more affect a person's "fight or flight" response and will power.

Downs, 38, hoped the treatment worked. Celebrating three months sober this time around, she still is trying to get control of her feelings without using drugs.

"You feel really anxious all the time, just nervous. It's a scary time," she said. "This time, I'm trying anything possible to stay clean."

She was one of eight women who sat for 30 minutes with the needles poking from their ears at this session, all part of a new

Additional resources

In 2014, an estimated 1.9 million people had an opioid use disorder related to prescription pain relievers and an estimated 586,000 had an opioid use disorder related to heroin use.

If you or someone you know is struggling with opioid addiction, they can find help via the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

It is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing substance use disorders.

Source: SAMHSA.

program that includes Laux and his acupuncture as one of the weapons in the fight to beat addiction.

It came about because Pickaway County Common Pleas Judge P. Randall Knece had earlier this year heard about auricular acupuncture (utilizing only external ear points) from a recovery home where he sometimes sends defendants from his court. He asked Laux if it was true that this practice could help those overcoming addictions. Laux said yes. He is certified by the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association and uses its method.

Knece said that after nearly a quarter-century on the bench, he never thought he would be talking about using acupuncture to help drug users who came before him. But nothing stays the same, and he said he now sees it as a challenge to find new ways to balance justice and fix society.



Judge Randall Knece said the prick from the needle felt similar to a bee sting.

[JOSHUA A. BICKEL/DISPATCH]

"You can't just lock people up and expect them to change. You have to do something," he said. "We just can't do it like we always did."

Knece has pledged almost \$13,000 to help cover the \$55 cost per treatment for those in recovery who don't have Medicaid or private insurance.

Knece underwent acupuncture himself because he wanted see how it felt. He winced a little as the first two needles went in, and laughed as he told the eight women gathered around the tables — some of whom he had earlier sent to prison or county jail — that they lied to him when they said it didn't hurt.

Since mid-April, Laux visits PARS twice a week and has given 35 treatments to 15 people.

Tiera Rapp, 43, is in recovery from pain pill and heroin addictions. She has had four treatments and is among those who told Downs how much they helped.

"I'm way more mellow," Rapp said about the effects of the acupuncture. "It helps me get out of my own head."

It isn't intended to be a solo treatment, just one part of a continuum of care that includes cognitive-behavioral therapy, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, counseling sessions and all things that go along with successful sobriety.

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