



Changing the Conversation about Drug Addiction

Art for Social Change



Daura Museum of Art, University of Lynchburg, November 2021

How INTO LIGHT Project was born

Motivated by the death of her son, Devin, to an overdose of fentanyl, founder Theresa Clower took up portrait work as a way of working through her grief. After completing Devin's portrait, she was inspired to find others who lived and died like her son and to show the extent of the drug epidemic through exhibits involving each State. She aspired to draw their portraits, tell their stories, and start a dialogue around the disease.

*INTO LIGHT Project, a national non-profit, creates public exhibitions of original portraits and individual stories of people who have died from the disease of drug addiction in locations around the country. Our mission is to change the conversation about drug addiction through the power of original art and story. We recognize the powerful influence of museums to promote social innovation and are looking for partnerships that inspire social change, through art. **INTO LIGHT Project selects one public or academic museum or gallery in each state** based on their ability to engage the community by building meaningful educational programming around the exhibit that addresses issues about the disease of addiction.*

Each INTO LIGHT Project exhibition consists of 41 original graphite portraits of people who have died from drug addiction in the state where the exhibit is held. Each portrait is accompanied by a professionally written narrative about the lives of the individuals in the exhibit. The original, professionally framed portrait and a catalog of the narratives of each of the individuals in the exhibit is gifted to the family of the deceased at the end of the exhibition.

***The importance of the INTO LIGHT Project** exhibit cannot be overstated. Overdose deaths in 2021 were 15% more than in 2020, and over 50% more than in 2019. In 2021, the United States lost an estimated 107,622 individuals from drug overdose, fentanyl poisoning or drug induced homicide- that's more than gun violence deaths (45,037) and auto accidents (42,915) from the same year combined. This staggering loss of life is rooted in misinformation, health inequities and marginalization of those with substance use disorders (SUD) and extends to their families. **It is critical to change public perception** around this brain disorder by dispelling deeply entrenched stereotypes, changing stigmatizing language, and stimulating discussion. Research has confirmed that museums and galleries, as trusted sources of information, are uniquely poised to do this.*

A link to a four-minute interview with Theresa Clower about the project is below.

<https://www.facebook.com/GrowingBolder/videos/748622426182114/>



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