



Butterfly Backpacks

Tina Mills knows just how devastating the heroin epidemic that's plaguing Kentucky can be. Her 22-year-old daughter Maegan overdosed in February 2014.

Maegan had sought help at The Healing Place several times; her longest stay two and a half months in 2013. During that time, Tina took Maegan and a few others girls in the early portion of the program shopping. Maegan wanted a backpack, flip flops for the shower, school supplies, and toiletries. After Maegan died, Tina says she and her husband were trying to figure out what to do with money they had set aside for her Christmas gift. "We were shopping and looking for items that we could take to The Healing Place and we found backpacks that were on clearance. We said we'd fill these backpacks! It just all came together and felt like this is what we're supposed to be doing," says Tina. Why call it Butterfly Backpacks? "Maegan loved butterflies. She had a butterfly tattoo, she had these butterfly sayings; they were her thing."

Maegan was a nursing student at the University of Louisville. Tina says Maegan turned to alcohol to help her cope and one night while she was drinking, a boyfriend introduced her to heroin. "She felt so bad about that that she drank an entire bottle of vodka. We came home and found her in a coma," Tina remembers. "After that coma, she went to The Healing Place and was there for two months." Tina says before the coma, Maegan had used heroin only once, but "within nine months of trying heroin for the first time, it killed her."

Inside each backpack are the things that Tina remembers Maegan needing, along with letters written by Tina and Maegan's 13-year-old brother Ethan. "When you're in the middle of this, you feel lonely and you feel judged," says Tina. "I want some girl to know that somebody cares, that somebody put love into this. Maegan would have wanted to personally touch these girls and I think through this, I can personally touch the girls here."

The Butterfly Backpacks are making a big difference in the lives of the women who receive them. Renae was given one when she left detox and went into The Healing Place's long-term recovery program. She arrived in detox in February addicted to heroin, meth, and Xanax.



"Receiving that backpack, I had a lot of gratitude," Renae says. "I feel like it helped me start being able to trust God, that He was going to provide for me. When I got the backpack, it showed me that God is going to make sure I get what I need."

Tina says Maegan had sought help at The Healing Place a number of times and wonders what could have motivated her daughter to stay in the program instead of leaving a couple of months in. She says she hopes the Butterfly Backpacks can encourage the women seeking help to keep going. "I just know that those girls need something, a little bright bit of hope. You never know what little bit will inspire someone, and that could save a life."

Renae says reading the letters from the Mills family "really made me want to do this program. It really made me want to try harder and to stay clean to be able to give back to other girls. No one needs to die from the horrors of addiction."

