



# The High School View

The High School View is staffed and prepared entirely by students from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and published on their behalf by The Martha's Vineyard Times, with the generous assistance of the sponsors whose names appear below.

## 'On Island' explores substance use and recovery

BY CHLOE COMBRA, BROOKE CROCKER AND HARDY EVILLE

On Feb. 12th, "On Island," a documentary film that follows members of the Martha's Vineyard community as they struggle with Substance Use Disorder (SUD), will premiere after being in production since late 2019.

The film, created by the public health nonprofit Public Goods Project with support from the Martha's Vineyard Substance Use Disorder Coalition and the Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation, aims to shift the permissive culture around substance use on-Island, while also highlighting the journey to recovery and the many people and programs that assist along the way.

Brian Morris, who moved to Martha's Vineyard from New York City nine years ago to get clean from an addiction to drugs and alcohol, makes an appearance at the end of the film. He now works as a rehabilitation counselor at Island Health Care and as a recovery coach.

"Most of all I'm just somebody who wants to help people, just like I was helped, so that they have a fighting chance against this horrible disease," he said. "I was staying sober by helping other people do the same."

As a member of both the Martha's Vineyard Substance Use Disorder Coalition (MV SUD) and the organization's subcommittee on public health campaigns, Mr. Morris was involved in the creation of "On Island." The MV SUD Coalition was founded in 2016 by members from Island health and social services organizations and concerned citizens, and has a mission to "raise awareness, bridge services gaps, and decrease stigma of substance use disorder through education, preven-

tion, treatment, and recovery efforts."

Mr. Morris stressed that the movie is only the first step toward raising awareness about substance use and that there is more work to be done.

"I think "On Island" might do a really good job of starting a conversation," he said. "So I think the movie as a jumping off point might go a long way for teenagers, parents, community members, everyone talking about what is the real problem here on the island."

Local coordinator for the "On Island" initiative, Mary Korba, also feels that the documentary is just the beginning. "It's more than a film. We really want the film to be the catalyst that will elevate awareness of the Island's problem with substance use within the community and beyond."

Before the pandemic, Mr. Morris would also visit the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) and the Charter School to talk with students struggling with substance use. He believes that if he had been able to talk to someone like him when he was in high school, his struggles with substance abuse could have been avoided.

"I'm not a clinician, I'm not a counselor. It's peer to peer. Though I'm older than highschoolers, I look them in the eye non-judgmentally, open-minded, inclusive," he said. "I've been in the trenches. I think people want to talk to someone who's been in the trenches. Rather than talking down to folks, I'm talking with them. Not at them, not to them. With them."

At MVRHS, school adjustment counselors Amy Lilavois and Matt Malowski, who go by Amy and Matt, provide short term counseling to students struggling

with substance use and the social-emotional issues that often accompany it.

Amy is concerned about the prevalence of substance use at the high school.

"Kids aren't just sitting around having a glass of wine together, there's binge-drinking, cocaine seems to be back, prescription medication use, and the marijuana kids are smoking is incredibly potent," said Amy.

The 2018 Martha's Vineyard Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the MV Youth Task Force found that 33.5% of MVRHS students used alcohol and 28.3% used marijuana within the last 30 days.

Senior Ava Maggi has witnessed this substance use while growing up on-Island. "There is a very big drug and alcohol problem on the Island and I've just seen it wreck people's lives. I have multiple people in my family and friends who deal with drug abuse."

When counseling with students, Matt sees himself as someone who is supposed to guide the student and allow them to think about their situation.

"I believe in an adolescent's ability to critically evaluate their life in a way that benefits them. To look at their life and what is going well and what's not and how to make it better," he said. "For the most part I think it works, because I get kids that come back and say, 'Hey I might have a bit of a problem here and need some help figuring this out.'"

In addition to short-term counseling, Matt and Amy also help students gain access to a recovery coach pilot program, a community therapist, and the resources of the Island Wide Youth Collaborative.

Before coming to MVRHS, Amy worked at the

community services with high schoolers. "I heard a lot more from kids about their use [at the community center] than I do in this building," she said. "I believe that [students] are more honest with somebody that isn't connected to the school."

Junior Keissila Cecilio, who has witnessed family and friends struggling with SUD and has seen how it affects their lives, agreed with Amy.

"Even though we do have programs to help, I think the majority of students are unaware of them or are uncomfortable going to them for help."

Mary Korba hopes to dispel myths about drug use.



MAX POTTER

Amy Lilavois discusses drug use both at MVRHS and in the local community.

"Substance Use Disorder is a disease. It is not a moral failing. It is not a choice. That's what 'On Island' is about."

"On Island" is avail-

able to stream for free at [www.onislandmv.org](http://www.onislandmv.org). The documentary may not be suitable for children under thirteen. **HSV**

## Student Spotlight: Katie Ogden

BY CLARE MONE AND JACKSON WOJNOWSKI

Freshman Katie Ogden's photo "Phantom Field" was awarded a Gold Key nomination and recognized as a regional winner in the 2021 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and will now go on to the national competition.

Her photo was inspired by a trend on the social media platform TikTok in which people dressed up as ghosts and took pictures. "I do appreciate social media as a source of inspiration for shoots," she said.

To take the photo, Katie went to Veteran's Park in Vineyard Haven, covered her friend, Angelina-Rose Smith, in a bed sheet and sunglasses, and posed her model in various spots near the large reeds there.

"I used my phone to take the picture," she said. "For editing, I changed it to black and white, adjusted the [lighting and colors]

levels, and slightly burned the edges."

When she got word that she had won a Gold Key, she was shocked. Winning this award means Katie's piece will be considered for recognition on the national level.

"You never know what other people will think about what you do. Whatever picture you take some people will think is great when you're like, 'Oh, this is kind of OK,'" she said.

For Katie, taking pictures of a human subject was a new challenge. "A landscape is fairly easy to take since it's mainly about what angle you want to take it from and where you place yourself," she said. "With a person as a subject, you have to think



KATIE OGDEN

about that, as well as what position they're in."

Though "Phantom Field" was the only picture she chose to submit, Katie has taken other photographs in her introduction to photography course, taught by Christopher Baer.

"She has done a bunch of silhouettes, some false color work, playing around with projections on faces — she definitely has the eye of an artist," said Mr. Baer. **HSV**

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