



KINGDOM COUNTY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



# the **HUNGRY HEART**



A new documentary film  
on prescription drug addiction  
and recovery

**DIRECTED BY BESS O'BRIEN**





KINGDOM COUNTY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

# **the** **HUNGRY** **HEART**



Prescription drugs • Addiction • Recovery • Vermont

[WWW.HUNGRYHEARTFILM.ORG](http://WWW.HUNGRYHEARTFILM.ORG)

93 minutes • 2013

**CANADIAN DISTRIBUTOR**

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## SYNOPSIS



**LOG LINE:** In the northern town of St. Albans, Vermont a country pediatrician valiantly takes on the challenge of working with patients struggling with prescription drug addiction.

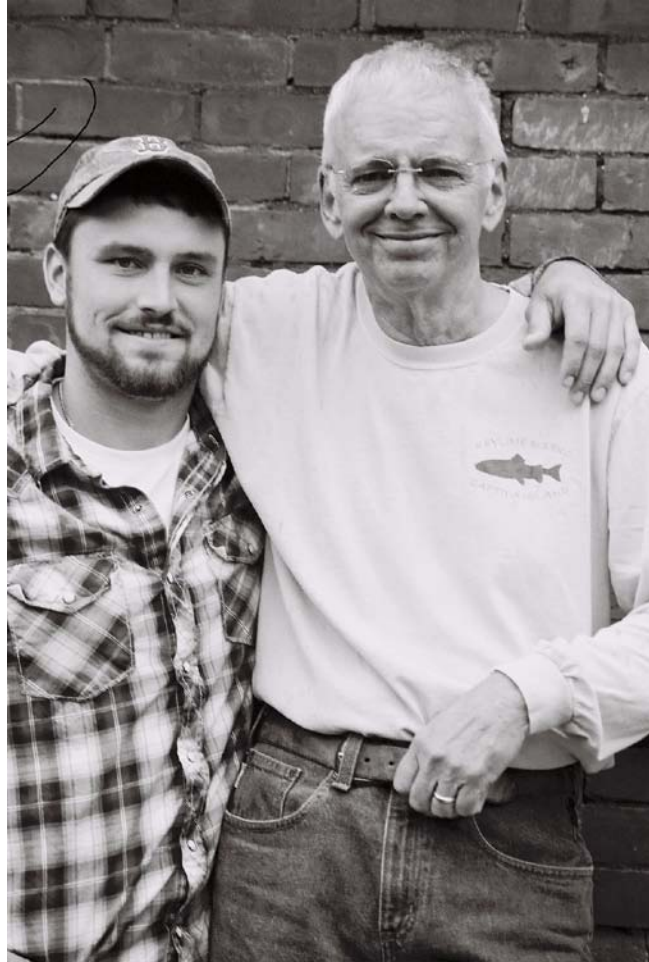
**SYNOPSIS:** *The Hungry Heart* provides an intimate look at the often hidden world of prescription drug addiction through the world of Vermont Pediatrician Fred Holmes who works with patients struggling with this disease.

Dr. Holmes prescribes Suboxone (buprenorphine), a tool used to help addicts stop their cravings for opiates. Through the film we see that the Suboxone program that Fred runs has its pros and cons —for some taking Suboxone is a crucial stepping stone to long term recovery, for others it is a crutch, for others Suboxone is abused and diverted onto the street. Through the film we see Dr. Holmes struggling with these challenges and trying to make sense and keep the faith in the midst of many contradictions.

Most importantly however, as the film progresses we begin to see the simple but profound connection that Dr. Holmes creates with each patient. The film shines a light on the healing power of conversation and the need for connection that many of these young addicts yearn for but do not have in their lives.

In addition, the film interviews a number of older addicts who talk about their recovery process juxtaposed against Fred's patients. The road to recovery is paved with both success stories and strewn with relapses, downfalls and tragic losses. However, through the movie we see the many faces and diverse populations of addiction, and their continued search for a life of recovery.

## THE STORY



“The Hungry Heart” is an intimate look into the often hidden world of prescription drug addiction. The film breaks open the discreet doctor/patient confidentiality clause and lets the audience into the world of Pediatrician Fred Holmes and his work with recovering addicts.

Fred Holmes is the quintessential country doctor, beloved by his patients and community, often known to make house calls, a jokester, an avid fan of the Red Socks and an old fashioned guy who tends to use phrases that date back to the 1950’s—including calling ornery teenagers “squirrely youngsters.”

After 35 years of taking care of kids with coughs, colds and appendicitis, Fred discovers that a number of his patients struggle with addiction to pain

At age 65 he decides that he needs to step up and help these desperate kids with this debilitating disease. Fred gets his license to prescribe Suboxone (buprenorphine) a tool used to help addicts stop their cravings for opiates.

The film starts 7 years into Dr. Holmes work with addicts and one year before he plans to retire. The documentary focuses on the intimate relationships Fred has with his patients (between the ages of 18-25), many of whom are homeless, poor, lost and fragile.

As the film progresses we begin to see the simple but profound connection that Dr. Holmes creates with each patient. For many of the young people in the movie, coming to Dr. Holmes is less about getting a prescription for their addiction and more about connecting with a mentor who listens to them—if only for ten minutes a week. The film shines a light on the healing power of conversation and the need for connection that many of these young addicts yearn for but do not have in their lives.

The road to recovery is paved with both success stories and strewn with relapses, downfalls and tragic losses. We see Kyle, one of Dr. Holmes patients who is on parole “slip up” and go back to jail, we see Stevie, a street kid continue to be homeless, we see Jessica a long time patient die of an overdose and throw Fred’s perception of what he is doing off base. Other patients thrive and lead new and healthy lives including Dustin, a charismatic farm kid who after years of hard drug addiction is today running the family farm and is married to the girl next door. In addition, the film interviews a number of older addicts in town who talk about their recovery process juxtaposed against Fred’s patients.

## HISTORY & TOURING

***The Hungry Heart*** had its premiere in the heart of Franklin County, Vermont on September 21, 2013 to a packed crowd of 500 people. The following week on Friday Sept 27<sup>th</sup> the film had a grand premiere at the Flynn Theater in Burlington, Vermont for an audience of 1500 people. From there Kingdom County Productions launched a 34 town tour across Vermont.



In January of 2014 ***The Hungry Heart*** was honored by Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin during his State of the State in which he devoted his entire speech to the opiate epidemic in Vermont. Since the Governor's ambitious initiative to deal with the rising prescription drug and heroin addiction in the state ***The Hungry Heart*** has been featured in numerous national press and media outlets including *ABC Evening News*, *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera television*, *The Boston Globe*, *NPR's On Point*, *WBUR's Radio Boston* and *MSNBC*.

***The Hungry Heart*** has toured across New England and into the rest of the United States. The film has screened more than 150 times in cities and towns across Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and upstate New York. In addition the film was presented by Senator Patrick Leahy in Washington, DC to legislators and policy makers. The film has played at many national conferences including the Arkansas Attorney General's Opiate Summit in Littlerock, the American Academy of Pediatrics conference in Boston, Mass and the Rural Health Care Conference in Westford, Mass.



The film has also played many middle and high schools across New England and beyond as part of an Educational Package with an extensive study guide. Praise and quotes from school administrators, faculty and students who have shown the film are included in this packet.

In addition to public screenings, ***The Hungry Heart*** has been booked by hospitals, universities, libraries, police departments, social service agencies, treatment centers, health care agencies, medical schools, community action groups and policy makers.

The film has been lauded by many professionals and writers including best-selling author David Sheff who wrote the book ***Beautiful Boy*** about his own son's addiction. Sheff wrote "***The Hungry Heart*** is a brilliant and beautiful film that captures the true lives of people in recovery."



Geoff Kane, MD and Chief of Addiction Services at Brattleboro Retreat raves, "***The Hungry Heart*** displays the unflinching honesty necessary for addiction recovery. Dr. Fred Holmes displays the unwavering respect, hope, and accountability that people need to get there."

In November of 2014, ***The Hungry Heart*** was awarded the American Society of Addiction Medicine's 2015 Media Award.

The film has great potential for continued success in many new territories and venues across the country and into Canada. The issue of opiate addiction is unfortunately everywhere and communities and cities are searching for ways to create dialogue, open up discussion and create change around this pressing issue. ***The Hungry Heart*** provides a perfect jumping off point for discussion and action steps that many of our communities need.

See how ***The Hungry Heart*** can impact your town, city, school or organization!

For more information please go to [www.thehungryheartmovie.org](http://www.thehungryheartmovie.org)



## THE FILMAKER

Bess O'Brien is the director/producer of numerous award-winning documentary films including ***The Hungry Heart***, focused on the epidemic of prescription drug addiction in Vermont, ***Ask Us Who We Are***, about youth in foster care, ***Journey into Courage***, which chronicles the lives of six female survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, ***Where is Stephanie***, based on the life and murder of a Vermont teenager, and ***Here Today***, which looks at Heroin addiction in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. She is also the director/producer of the highly acclaimed feature film ***Shout it Out*** based on the lives of Vermont teens, and the original ***Voices Project*** live musical. Bess O'Brien co-founded Kingdom County Productions with her husband Jay Craven in 1990.

O'Brien co-produced the feature films ***Where the Rivers Flow North*** starring Rip Torn, Tantoo Cardinal, and Michael J. Fox, and ***A Stranger in the Kingdom*** starring Ernie Hudson and Martin Sheen.

For more information about Bess, see her page on the Kingdom County Productions website.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Prescription drug addiction in the United States has sky-rocked in the last several years. Vermont it is no exception. This film came to me by way of Pediatrician Fred Holmes who was frustrated with the judgment and stigma that surrounded his patients who were struggling with prescription drug addiction. I met Fred and immediately knew that he would make a powerful and charismatic center-piece for a documentary film.

The film is an intimate look into the world of one doctor and his practice. Through this lens the bigger issue of prescription drug addiction is addressed.

Dr. Holmes prescribes Suboxone to his patients struggling with prescription drug addiction. Much like methadone, Suboxone helps many addicts in their recovery process-- for some taking Suboxone is a crucial stepping-stone to long term recovery, for others it is a crutch, for others Suboxone is abused and diverted onto the street. Through the film we see Dr. Holmes struggling with these challenges and trying to make sense and keep the faith in the midst of many contradictions.

Suboxone plays a major role in the film because it hovers over everything and makes us question, is it a good thing, a bad thing that doctors are prescribing a medication to help get people off prescription drugs? Isn't this just replacing one drug for another? Other controversial issues arise such as when does one kick a patient off the program, and how many dirty urines and you're out? There are no national standards to guide doctors on these issues, so each doctor sets his own rules. Dr. Holmes, a man who leans towards the side of compassion, tends to give his kids a second chance. He trusts that even though they might have "slipped up" it is better to keep them coming back to his office, then kicking them onto the street where they will start stealing and using again. Fred believes that through the power of conversation there is a connection that occurs, that is a powerful force for change.

This film contains footage from hours of time spent in Dr. Holmes Pediatric practice. The camera is in the room while Fred checks in with each patient; it catches Fred's whimsical, nurturing and respectful manner with the addicts, and reveals the many issues that arise. Sometimes we see patients doing well, thriving and moving on with their lives, other times we see them faltering, probably lying to Fred, or admitting that they have relapsed. We see Fred grappling with how to deal with these challenges.

The title of the film "The Hungry Heart" is a metaphor for much of the movie. Through the interaction between patients and doctor, through the in-depth interviews with addicts in the film we see that one of the systemic issues around addiction is a lack of connection, an emptiness, a hunger for acceptance and love. The film also includes older addicts from the community who bring diversity and a more adult perspective to the movie.

"The Hungry Heart" is a film that the public at large should see because it reveals the complexities of one doctor valiantly trying to deal with an issue that is much bigger than himself – and yet not giving up hope as he continues forward. The film humanizes addicts and the multifaceted challenges of their disease. The documentary is also very beneficial for doctors and medical providers to see.

-Bess O'Brien

## QUOTES & ACCLAIM

***“A brilliant and beautiful film that captures the true lives of people in recovery—it should be seen by everyone.”***

- David Sheff, New York Times best-selling author of *Beautiful Boy*

***“The Hungry Heart documentary seeks to de-stigmatize the struggles young people have with prescription drug abuse so that they can find solutions to the problem.”***

- Recovery Now Newspaper

***“The Hungry Heart documentary is deeply moving.”***

- MSNBC

***“The Hungry Heart helps us get a grasp by offering compassionate portraits of lives affected by the chronic, life-threatening disease of opioid addiction.”***

- Andrew Kolodny, Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing

***“The Hungry Heart is heartbreakingly intimate. But it drives home a bigger point: Addiction is a disease; it alters the brain and body. Stigma is cruel, criminal punishment counterproductive, and treatment is desperately needed.”***

- Seven Days Newspaper

***“Once the credits rolled and the lights were switched on, the audience remained speechless.”***

- The Brattleboro Reformer

***“While the subject is unnerving, the film itself is often stunningly beautiful.”***

- The Barton Chronicle

***“The Hungry Heart documentary seeks to de-stigmatize those who struggle with prescription drug abuse so that they can find solutions to the problem. The center of the film is the human connection that a local doctor establishes with his patients. Some-times human compassion and conversation can yield a great amount of healing for those who feel alone.”***

- Transylvania Times

***“The Hungry Heart, like only a film can, delves deeply into the human tragedy, the price paid by family when there is a family, and the struggles addicts face as they try to quit.”***

- VT Digger

***“Last week, Gov. Peter Shumlin chose to focus his State of the State address on one issue, opiate abuse. He drew heavily on the documentary film that explores the topic by Bess O’Brien, called The Hungry Heart.”***

- Vermont Public Radio

***“In his address, Governor Shumlin praised the work of Vermont filmmaker Bess O’Brien whose film The Hungry Heart chronicles a Vermont community's struggle with opiate addiction. He announced that the state would fund an initiative for O'Brien and her film's subjects to tour schools across the state to speak to students about avoiding and overcoming addiction.”***

- Al Jazeera

***“Governor Peter Shumlin from VT highlighted the documentary film The Hungry Heart in his state-of-the-state ... His honoring of the film drew standing ovations. He said that the film will be shown in every high school in the state.”***

-The New York Times

***“I was tremendously moved by The Hungry Heart, and its ability to capture the reality of this crisis. Director Bess O’Brien has been a leader on this issue of prescription drug addiction, and is one of the most talented documentary filmmakers working today. Every state should be so lucky to have Bess working for them in highlighting the important stories of children and families.”***

- Governor Peter Shumlin

***“The success of The Hungry Heart has brought necessary attention to the serious issue of substance and prescription drug abuse. I am proud of the work the film has done to address this difficult issue.”***

- Senator Patrick Leahy

***“Nearly a year and a half ago, Director Bess O’Brien released The Hungry Heart to a packed auditorium in St. Albans. Since then, the movie has taken the state by storm.”***

- The Bridge Newspaper

## TESTIMONIES FROM EDUCATORS

“Showing Bess O'Brien's film, *The Hungry Heart* brought together students, staff, parent, and community members for the first time. Together we contemplated and discussed a pressing, all-too-local issue.

The presence of the filmmaker and those featured in the movie brought out a new vision for understanding and collaboration in the West River Valley.

*The Hungry Heart* opened our minds, and many asked questions and shared stories. For the first time, a common experience brought language and openness to an otherwise hidden, shameful topic. Leland and Gray owes a tremendous debt to all those who brought *The Hungry Heart* into being, since dialogue and collaboration are the first steps towards problem-solving. Students in particular crossed a bridge with their teachers and administration, learning that their school was here to help and not punish. The words “*hungry heart* now represents a common meaning among all in our school community.”

**-Dorinne Dorfman- Principal, Leland and Gray School**

After showing *The Hungry Heart* I continue to realize how vitally important it is to do so. Yes, we turn our school "inside out" to ensure all students watch the film ---yes, we take some heat from those who wonder why we feel it should be done in school but this is how I know we have done the right thing:

I knew the kids were fully engrossed in the film by their "rapt attention and their complete silence" during the viewing; however, it was the hugs and the time that folks from the film offered the kids following the movie that 'sealed the deal.'

Many of our students are living "The Hungry Heart" at home with family members or even themselves. When Raina from the film spoke after the movie and so many students went up to speak with her afterwards and shared their stories it was completely worth any pushback we had gotten from some school staff. By seeing the film these kids knew their journey was real!

Within one week of our school-wide viewing, one of our students approached our staff and said that after seeing *The Hungry Heart* he was worried he was an addict and asked us to help him get into rehab.

**- Scott Farnsworth – Director of Guidance and Counseling at Hartford HighSchool**

“The feedback from both students and adults was extremely positive after the showing of ***The Hungry Heart*** in our high school. The movie had a powerful effect and precipitated ongoing discussion around addiction and recovery. Several students came forward asking for support related to their own or family members' opiate use after viewing the film. Taking the time to share this film with students, teachers, and community members can be a powerful step toward having honest and open conversations about prevention and recovery. The caring and respectful treatment of even the most difficult life stories gave a message of hopefulness to our community.”

- Sharon Koller, SAP Counselor Mt. Abraham Union High School

“***The Hungry Heart*** film was shown to our 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> graders. The film told powerful stories that our students needed to hear. It helped them understand that getting involved and working for solutions to problems is an important step for change. The panelists were awesome.”

- Karen Budde, Virtual learning and Pathway Coordinator

### **Middle School & High School Student Feedback**

- I didn't know this was a problem so close to home
- This movie was good and sad but powerful
- Their stories are amazing.
- The Hungry Heart was powerful and not cheesy!
- The movie was heartbreaking and heartwarming.
- The movie brought to light how serious of a problem this sort of thing is in Vermont
- This movie makes me think a lot about life and friends
- This video changed my perspective on opiate addicts.
- The film shows the entire reality of addiction
- It was comforting to know that whoever you are and what your background is there are people out there that want to help you be happy and you are never alone, you just need to find your people
- This film definitely opened my eyes even more. I think everyone should see it.
- Addiction hits home: alcohol instead of opiates. This film is what happens at my house, minus treatment.
- The film opened my eyes to how families are affected.
- SO IMPORTANT FOR OUR SCHOOL TO SEE!
- Teens need to hear these stories—this film tells the truth—it doesn't talk down to kids.

## CREDITS

KINGDOM COUNTY PRODUCTIONS  
Presents



**Producer/Director**  
**Bess O'Brien**

**Editor**  
**Scott Esmond**

**Cinematographer**  
**Patrick Kennedy**

**Still Photographer**  
**Carley Stevens-McLaughlin**

**Sound Mixer**  
**Egan Media**

**DVD Designer**  
**Jean Cousins**

**Web Designer**  
**Joseph Andriano**