

Editor's note: Bobby Ringle represented Ohio as its third Recovery Delegate to the national event held this year in Philadelphia to raise awareness that addiction to alcohol and other drugs has become an enormous public health problem in this country and that recovery from addiction is possible. [The Recovery Project](#) was begun in 2008 by A&E Network. The following story is Bobby's account of the experience. To read more about Bobby, and see more photos from the event, visit Ohio Citizen Advocates' [website](#).



“Congratulations Robert! On behalf of A&E Network, your state’s nominating committee and our partners, we applaud you on being selected as the 2010 A&E Recovery Project Delegate from the state of Ohio. As you may know, we received hundreds of applications from across the country. Without question, the review and selection process was very challenging given the pool of strong candidates.” That’s the email message I received on July 6, 2010 that led to a wonderful experience in Philadelphia on September 25th for the national Rally for Recovery and walk.

This was also the beginning of a trail of paperwork that involves an affidavit of eligibility, the liability/publicity release, a media questionnaire, and a travel request form, just to name a few. My main contact was with Courtney Moore who works for the A&E Network and she was very helpful in answering my many questions as well as a variety of concerns from arranging for interpreters during my stay in Philadelphia to making accommodations for my wife during the trip.

We finally met Courtney at the delegate meeting Friday night and hope to continue our friendship with her long after the recovery rally weekend. She is a very sweet young lady with a tremendous responsibility on her shoulders, taking care of communicating with the 52 delegates as well as coordinating all the travel arrangements, the planning and preparations for the weekend. She impressed us very much and I would often stop her every once in a while to give her encouragement, support and a suggestion to rest every now and then. She even stayed at the hotel on Sunday, making sure that each and every delegate as well as their travel companion travel plans was met. She even missed her own train ride back to New York in order to take care of us. The last we saw of her was her big smile and the waving of her arms, good-bye.

After several months of anticipation and preparations for the trip to the Recovery Project Rally in Philadelphia, the day finally arrived and we found ourselves heading to the airport for a day of traveling. Every chance we had, we would tell people where we are going and why. Many people were surprised and supportive giving their congratulations to being selected to represent the state of Ohio at the rally.

We arrived at our hotel 10 minutes before the delegate meeting so we rushed to our room, showered and dressed before heading back down to the Grand Ballroom where approximately 100 people were gathered, talking and greeting each other, in the same way as if we were at a twelve-step meeting. We got our food and sat at a table near the front, fellowshipping with others at the table until it was time for the meeting to start. We received instructions and information on how to communicate with the media. A few delegates were selected to do some “role-playing” and I volunteered to be involved. After introducing myself, where I was from and how long in recovery, I shared a little about what being in recovery has done for me. I handled the “media” question just as we were instructed to do so.

I met with Robert Lindsey, President of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence located in New York, NY. The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence fights the stigma and the disease of alcoholism and other drug addictions. He knew my name because he was a part of the delegate selection

committee and when my application came up, he told me I was instantly selected to represent the state of Ohio. I shared with him the concerns about recovery and treatment problems that the Deaf communities were having. Many in our communities are unaware that help is available when asked. The facts have shown that 99% of all the recovery and treatment programs are geared toward the Hearing population. Deaf clients continue to struggle in their recovery even when receiving treatment only because of the lack of communications and/or cultural understanding, just to name a few of the issues.

I then met with Carol McDaid, a co-founder and Principal of Capitol Decisions Inc. With nearly 25 years of Federal legislative experience in Washington, Ms. McDaid provides her clients with legislative and public affairs consulting on issues that span the breadth of health care, including Medicare, Medicaid, private sector reimbursement issues, and comparative effectiveness research. A special focus of Capitol Decisions is the national alcohol and drug treatment policy. For over 15 years, Ms. McDaid has worked with leading non-profit drug and alcohol treatment centers, addiction physicians, and other prevention and consumer organizations to refine public policy addressing alcohol and other drug addictions. We talked about the needs of the deaf community and how we can improve educating and bringing awareness to those needs. Ms. McDaid also knew my name as well. (Guess my name is being passed around a lot)

Carol directed me to Pat Taylor, Executive Director of Faces & Voices of Recovery, a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to organizing and mobilizing the millions of Americans in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, our families, friends, and allies to speak with one voice. She too knew my name and after sharing the same concerns and needs that I shared with Mr. Lindsey and Ms. McDaid, she too agreed that there is a great need to reach out into the Deaf communities as well as friends and families. It was suggested that a link to DODA's website be established onto Faces & Voices of Recovery's website.

We headed back to our room to rest and relax before going to bed, however, my wife Missy convinced me to go swimming in the pool, which was surprisingly warm for an indoor pool. After a couple of laps, we decided to head back to the room and get ready for bed as breakfast was being served from 6:30 am to 7:15 am. After a restless sleep, we got up and dressed for the day. All the delegates received their special shirt to wear during the rally. Mine was labeled, "OH 2010 Delegate" to identify me as the representative from the state of Ohio. The only drawback was that the shirt was long-sleeved and it turned out to be a very warm day. We met up with the rest of the delegates along with their friends and/or family members. We all quickly ate and had some fellowship time before heading to the stage and the VIP tent.

A quick 5-minute walk and we were in front of the stage and into the VIP tent where we stood around waiting for the next "orders of the day". Within a few minutes, all the delegates were gathered and we had our first group pictures taken. Some of the pictures were full of smiles while others were full of "clowns", shouts and hand waving! Soon after, we met in front of the stage where several speakers raised our level of excitement even more before we began the walk.

While hanging around the VIP tent, I met the A&E Network's Senior Vice-President, a very nice lady with whom I took my time talking with her to help ease the communication barriers little knowing that she would later introduce me to an important person in the recovery circle. I understood why she was there because A&E was a major sponsor of the Rally, so I made sure that she was able to communicate with me and at the same time was able to offer thanks for what A&E has and is doing for people in recovery.

At first it looked like there were just the delegates plus a couple hundred people. After walking less than a mile, we reached the turn-around point and when we turned around, I saw a long line of people stretching all the way back to the beginning, thousands of people who were walking behind us, supporting one another, giving each other high-fives, that was a definite high point of my trip to Philly! Just seeing the whole throng of people, the true mix of Americans showing support, love and encouragements for those in recovery and their families and friends - made the whole trip and the whole weekend worth it!

One of the guest speakers was R. Gil Kerlikowske the White House Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, who announced the proclamation from the President of the United States, then joined us on the walk.

Another high point of the walk was when I passed the senior VP lady; she quickly pulled me aside and introduced me to Director Kerlikowske. I made my “pitch” to him the same as I did with Mr. Lindsey, Ms. McDaid and Ms. Taylor. Wow – four major powerful political players in less than 24 hours! We can say that I made some contacts in favor and support for deaf people in recovery.

We returned back to the VIP tent for water and snacks before the next scheduled event. We rested for about a half hour and people were still walking the walk, wow! Then I was interviewed by the A&E Network which will be posted later on their website. Several delegates were also interviewed so we do not know if all or some will be posted online.

The mayor of the city came and spoke, giving support to recovery groups and applauding each and every one of us. He talked about raising awareness and bringing people together through recovery. Some of the delegates, including myself, had a small group picture with the mayor.

We met eight local deaf people and exchanged ideas and recovery information. Each one expressed frustrations in not being able to get the same quality of treatment and/or recovery as many hearing people were receiving. They talked about relapsing over and over because they were not getting enough information, or didn't understand what it means to be in recovery the way they should have, in ASL, American Sign Language. Some also said that it was also the lack of support as well as the lack of Deaf sponsored meetings, resources and related materials.

The rest of our time in Philadelphia was spent taking in the city views, walking on the waterfront, taking pictures and relaxing until it was time to return home, which we did!

This rally affected me more than I ever thought was possible. I realized that I am not alone in my recovery, that people who are not in recovery are very supportive and encouraging in our own recovery process. I also realized that there is work to do, reaching out into the deaf communities, helping deaf people with their recovery. There is still a lot of education and awareness to share about the needs of not just deaf people but disabled and handicapped people who are also in recovery. I believe that people left the rally feeling inspired and confident in the recovery process. It was neat to see and meet people who have only been in recovery a week, a month or two and many others with ten years or more in recovery. It all comes down to two simple, but powerful words: “Recovery works!”