

Empire State Opioid Epidemic Innovation Challenge

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Columbia University Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science



Avi Israel is a retired electrician, turned full-time advocate. Avi has 30 years industry experience, and most recently was a General Forman working for Frey Electric Construction Company Inc. Avi is the father of Michael David Israel, and with his wife Julie Israel, is co-founder and President of Save The Michaels of the World, Inc. Avi is the recipient of multiple recognitions for his activism, including the 2012 WNY Chemical Dependency Consortium Community Award, the 2014 Public Citizen of the Year Award (National Assoc. of Social Workers, NYS chapter,) and the 2016 Community Crusaders Award from the Foundation for a Drug Free World. He was also just awarded with the NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner's Award in 2017. One of Avi's greatest accomplishments is creating and assisting to pass the 2013 I-STOP Legislation and the Michael David Israel Laws. Avi testified before the US Senate on the dangers of prescription drug abuse, and provided testimony in front of several FDA panels on the dangers of prescription drug abuse. Avi strives to maintain consistent communication and collaboration with local and federal legislators on advocating for a full range of addiction and mental health services for the WNY community. He was an initiator of local CME Classes for the 8 Counties of WNY.

Avi founded the Save the Michaels House of Hope and Community Resources in January 2017. Their location in the medical corridor of downtown Buffalo is beneficial to all residents of Erie County. The House of Hope provides training for Peer Recovery Coaches and sends them out into the community to work with family members of addicted individuals. The House of Hope also engages the public by providing free classes on understanding the complex nature of addiction, and by assisting to place and transport addicted individuals into treatment facilities all over NYS, through the NYS 8th Judicial Court System, and through individual requests for help. Avi also serves on the NYS Suicide Prevention Board in Albany and speaks out about suicide prevention all over NYS. Avi's mission is altruistic in nature; he never wants another parent to experience the loss of a child as he and Julie did. Avi resides in North Buffalo, with his wife Julie and their daughter, Rachel.