

New film on addiction asks, 'What About the Kids?'

On Dec. 1, 2018, Pope Francis spoke at the International Congress on Drugs and Addiction, a three-day conference held at the Vatican [that explored the plague of drug abuse](#) as “an obstacle to integral human development.”

How to watch
You can watch “What About the Kids” online here . Discussion resources are available.

In his speech to more than 450 participants of the conference, the Holy Father said that in the “Gospel of Mercy ... disciples of Jesus find the inspiration for a pastoral action that can prove truly effective in alleviating, caring for and healing the immense suffering associated with different kinds of addiction present in our world. The Church ... is concretely engaged in every part of the world in combating the spread of addictions, devoting her resources to prevention, care, rehabilitation and reinsertion, in order to restore dignity to those who have lost it.”

He closed his speech by saying: “I encourage all of you, in your various sectors, to pursue your commitment to increasing awareness and offering support to those who have emerged from the tunnel of drug addiction and various addictions. They need our help and accompaniment, so that they in turn will be able to ease the pain of so many of our brothers and sisters in difficulty.”

Maybe it was coincidence – perhaps it was providence – that less than two months later, Jim Wahlberg stood in front of a

crowded conference room at OSV headquarters in Huntington, Indiana, and told the story not only of his own addiction but his son's as well. Squeezed together sitting in rows of folding chairs, with others standing shoulder to shoulder on the edges of the room, my colleagues and I sat at rapt attention for more than an hour listening to Wahlberg talk about [overcoming an addiction to drugs and alcohol](#) that began when he was in elementary school. His addiction landed him in prison twice before the age of 22. He tells the whole story in his new book, ["The Big Hustle"](#) (OSV, \$27.95).

Having lived a life of addiction and recovery – he has his sobriety date (5-9-88) tattooed on his right bicep – Wahlberg has made it his life's work to shine a light on the human toll of drug addiction as a writer, director and producer. On Sept. 8 [in a Facebook Live event](#), Wahlberg will premiere his new short film ["What About the Kids?"](#), which explores the effects of opioid addiction through the lens of a child and the role that family and faith play in the journey toward recovery. OSV Films – a new division of the [OSV Institute](#) – has partnered with Wahlberg's Wahl St. Productions to produce the film.

Eight-year-old Chloe (portrayed exceptionally by young actress Layla Scalisi) tries to navigate life after her mother overdoses on heroin. Living with her grandparents while her father, Seth (played by Caleb Scott) receives treatment in a halfway house, Chloe begins to see the role that faith plays in her own life and in the lives of those around her. Chloe's grandmother, Debbie (Patti D'Arbanville), is the family's spiritual center, and throughout the film her devotion to God provides a witness to her family of the power of faith.

While endorsing the belief system of no particular faith tradition, the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous – which Wahlberg credits with his own recovery – leans heavily on the submission to God. And for good reason. For most, addiction is something that can't be conquered alone, which, ultimately, is the message of "What About the Kids?"

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 770,000 Americans have died from drug overdoses since 1999, and the total number of deaths jumped from 16,849 in 1999 to a high mark of 70,237 in 2017. As Pope Francis said, the Church – all of us – is called to help restore the dignity of all those suffering from addiction.

We at Our Sunday Visitor hope this film helps to spark important conversations – in families, in parishes and elsewhere – on the effects addiction has on our society and the role that faith can play in recovery. For more information on how to watch the film or to screen it at your parish, visit whataboutthekidsfilm.com.

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