

Survey of Drug Use in Greenwich

The town has partnered with Liberation Programs to measure how widespread the problem is, what causes it and how to treat it.

Greenwich, CT

By BARBARA HEINS (Patch Staff) - March 8, 2016



Photo: from left, Alan Mathis, CEO of Liberation Programs, Greenwich First Selectman Peter Tesei and Greenwich Social Services Director Dr. Alan Barry. Credit: Barbara Heins.

GREENWICH, CT - Greenwich officials aren't shy about acknowledging there is an issue with heroin use by town residents — while not of epidemic proportions, it has been attributed to the cause of death of five residents in the past year.

In addition to the five deaths in 2015, the town's Social Services Director Dr. Alan Barry says there were 44 additional emergency calls related to heroin and opioid drug overdoses in 2014. In 2015, heroin was involved in 415 deaths in Connecticut compared to 327 in 2014. And the powerful painkiller Fentanyl was involved in 186 deaths for 2015 compared to 75 in 2014 and only 14 in 2012.

While Greenwich first responders are equipped with Narcan, the injectable drug that can reverse the effects of heroin and save overdose victims, the town is seeking to determine the root of the problem.

To that end, the town's social services department has partnered with Liberation Programs and have established a team of professionals who began surveying school, emergency officials as well as residents as to what drives the desire to ingest the highly addictive drug. And Liberation Programs has set up a hotline for residents who are seeking interventional assistance for themselves or their friends or relatives.

The six-week survey by the team of Liberation Programs professionals and consultants aims to include information garnered from all segments of life — from students, parents, EMS and hospital personnel to educators, according to Barry and Liberation Programs CEO Alan Mathis.

"This is the first time a town in America is looking to peel back the layers of the onion to question that what others bury. If you save one life, it's worth the effort," Mathis said at a Greenwich Town Hall gathering last week.

"Our goal is to get (First Selectman) Peter Tesei a goal in six weeks for developing a plan" to reduce drug abuse, Mathis said.

Tesei said, "It is a global problem but we can try to solve it locally. People need to lock up prescriptions to prevent teens from experimenting ... It is not to presume it can't start in our own homes.

Tesei said that the heroin and opiod addition among town residents, "crosses all socio-economic, racial or ethnic boundaries."

In an attempt to determine why teens are turning to drugs and to provide necessary counseling and intervention services, Liberation Programs opened an office at Greenwich High School in January 2015, according to Mathis.

Dr. Patti Juliana said she is available around-the-clock to any resident who needs services for themselves or a friend or relative and they contact her at 203-354-6901.

According to Mathis, Liberation Programs will present their findings to Tesei and Barry in six weeks and then assist in implementing a proactive program to treat and prevent drug abuse.