

Curing heroin addiction is very difficult

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Local officials and residents say there are no success stories when it comes to heroin.

And the drug is here in Norwalk.

"We need to be on alert because it happens to the best of families," Norwalk Mayor Sue Lesch said.

"Many people in Norwalk are living in denial," the mayor added. "We need to recognize there is a problem."

Norwalk police Chief Kevin Cashen said heroin use in Norwalk has been on the rise since 1999.

"It's cheap," the chief said. "Maybe \$10 or \$15 a bag and more addictive," he added when compared to most other drugs.

"Prevention is the key," Norwalk City Law Director Jim Conway added. "Because curing a person is very difficult."

Conway said curing a heroin addict is in fact so difficult many judges now send addicts to prison instead of treatment facilities because rehabilitation success rates with the drug are so low.

Conway added many treatment facilities won't take heroin addicts because of the difficulty of curing the user, which would lower the apparent success rate of the facility.

"Addicts will steal from their family and friends and then commit crimes that keep getting worse and worse," the law director added.

Crimes like petty theft and bad check writing are often associated with heroin addiction.

Marci Rinner, whose brother Pete died of a heroin overdose in 1999, founded the For Pete's Sake Foundation.

Rinner said nationally, there is only a 1 to 3 percent success rate for recovering addicts.

Officials said in Huron County, they do not know of one person who has successfully kicked the habit completely.

"You just don't know what you're getting into," she said. "My brother Pete got pure heroin and it stopped his heart."

Rinner said heroin is addicting from the very first try and the user might not know they've been subjected to the drug.

"Marijuana is often a gateway drug," she said. "Maybe a joint was dipped in liquid heroin."

Parents need to get involved.

"People need to be ready and have that first-refusal ready," Rinner said. "We need to talk to our loved ones about drugs."

"If parents let this go, they will walk down the same path with their children," Rinner said, adding she has an acquaintance whose daughter has used for the past six years, making the mother's life pure hell.

"I know a woman whose first priority in life is not to do drugs," Rinner said. "That's before taking care of her kids."

"Parents need to work harder," Lesch said. "You see your child is going to a party and it's a good family and then there's heroin there."

Lesch had a nephew die recently from drug use.

"Adults said it would go away and adults didn't intervene," the mayor said. "It's awful hard to turn your child in as a parent, but you'd rather have the child in jail than dead."

"But we chose to fight the system," Lesch said. "We fought the very people that could help."

"We have to live with a lot of if-onlys and my kids live with a lot of if-onlys," Lesch said.

"As a community, we need to take ownership of this problem. We need to encourage people to do something today."

Cashen agreed with Lesch, saying families of drug users often view law enforcement as the enemy. "Sometimes you have to fight the fight and you may get nicked up as you go."

Mackenzie Byrd compiled a list of seven or eight people she knows who have died directly or indirectly from heroin use, including her best friend Erin Leedy.

"I felt powerless to help," Byrd said. "The addiction is so powerful. People need to realize there are no weekend users. It's eventually going to catch up with them."

"The parent has to decide do I want the child mad at me or dead?" said Dale Sheppard, safety-service director.

For more information, log on to www.forpetessake.org.