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Addiction: Listening To Those Who Live It



FROM
THE EDITOR

JOHN
OWENS

In recent weeks, I have been writing about addiction and the heroin epidemic that has washed over Long Island like a narcotic tsunami, killing more than 240 people in Nassau and Suffolk counties over the last two years.

There is much to be sad about. Much to be frustrated about. And, despite everything, much to be positive and optimistic about.

Reader emails about the topic also could be categorized under those three headings. While the sad ones certainly are the most moving, there is plenty of pain already.

Instead, I thought you might get more out of hearing from the "frustrated" and "optimistic" camps.

First, the frustration. This note is from someone who works in the addiction field and asked to remain anonymous:

As a professional in the field of addiction for over 18 years, I have seen the ravages of this disease. However, the recent epidemic of heroin use among our young adults has me stymied, flummoxed and bewildered as to a solution.

A societal issue? A treatment issue? An insurance issue? I can wax poetic on how we need all systems to pull together to assist in creating a response to treatment that is without concern for monetary gain, without concern for rigid beliefs and NIMBY (not in my backyard) restrictions; to focus on the human aspect of this insidious dilemma, creating care that mobilizes and rehabilitates. Thinking outside the box for solutions as a society and as a government. Allotting proper monies for long-term treatment, working with schools, families and governmental agencies to educate, inspire and assist, to let go of antiquated beliefs in what constitutes "proper levels of care" and open our hearts to the human side of this disease.

Self-help groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and others) are miraculous in their ability to assist the addict; they have helped countless individuals find peace and serenity.



More than 240 Long Islanders have died from heroin in the past two years.

*We are too quick to dispense drugs to numb the pain of abstinence; the pain of emotions is what relapse can be about sometimes, so why not learn to deal with it in an appropriate fashion? Learn positive coping skills, learn to feel the feelings, sit in "your sh*t" and identify your needs.*

All this, plus more I can expound on exponentially; however, I am not writing a book, I am simply responding to your column.

Bottom line: We need to rethink how we are working to assist families and addicts.... 'Cause what we got now ain't workin'!

A local man who asked to be identified only as "Living Clean," knows this topic from the inside in a way that's more visceral than most of us can even imagine. Yet his letter is surprising positive, even upbeat:

I, too, have had my struggles with addiction, and I'm here to tell you it's not a death sentence.

Yes, we do have a stigma that goes along with this disease, but it's how you learn from it that makes you stronger. I believe I was born with this disease, because of my father and his addiction.

I recently opened a sober house so that I can give back to my fellow addicts, and so that addicts out there know that there is life after we recover.

Thank you, Living Clean. You are right — all isn't lost. But many would say that when it comes to heroin, it increasingly appears that way.

Anyone else with a story to tell — or thoughts on ways to curb this epidemic — please send me an email.

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