

Think tank tackles addiction solutions



Barrett Lawlis, Reporter

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(Photo: Barrett Lawlis/The Advocate)

NEWARK - With the help of the Newark Police Department and the Newark Think Tank on Poverty, a new solution to drug addiction could be coming to town.

Newark Police Chief Barry Connell spoke to the think tank Saturday, introducing addiction recovery initiatives law enforcement agencies have used with varying success.

He said he's been working with Patricia Perry and Colleen Richards, two representatives from Addicts' Parents United, a support group for families dealing with a relative's addiction, to bring some of those initiatives to Newark.

"Everybody knows someone who is an addict," Richards said. "I'm not giving up this fight until I'm done. Until I die, I will not give up."

Connell outlined a program that would allow people with addiction to seek help through the police department, similar to an initiative started in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

"For anyone with an addiction seeking help, they could come to the police station and ask for it, turning over any paraphernalia and substances they still have," he said. "The Gloucester Police Department started program started last June, and has had pretty decent success."

There are recovering addicts who do relapse into drug use, Connell said, but there has only been one overdose death reported. Those numbers just point to a crucial snag in the current system: timeliness.

"Between the time anyone seeks treatment and actually receives that treatment, it is a very narrow window," Perry said. "The longer it takes to get someone into rehab, the better chance there is that person might relapse."

The new model would ask members of the think tank and other community-driven organizations to volunteer to process any incoming addicts seeking treatment.

Another issue Connell said the drug initiative would face is legal concerns.

"It's still new to Ohio, so there are still things that need to be ironed out," he said.

First, an addict has to actually want to accept help. They also have to turn in any remaining part of their stash, which is another complication.

"Moving any significant amount of drugs is still a crime, so we're trying to find a solution to that problem," Connell said, adding that this is still early in the process, so research is ongoing.

He's also working on getting it approved through the various avenues that the initiative requires, which presents its own challenges.

"I have to have my bosses' approval for this program, but I also need backing from the Licking County Prosecutor and the newly elected prosecutor this fall," Connell said. "However, from the feedback I've received so far, Newark could see a program like this soon."

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