

situation critical

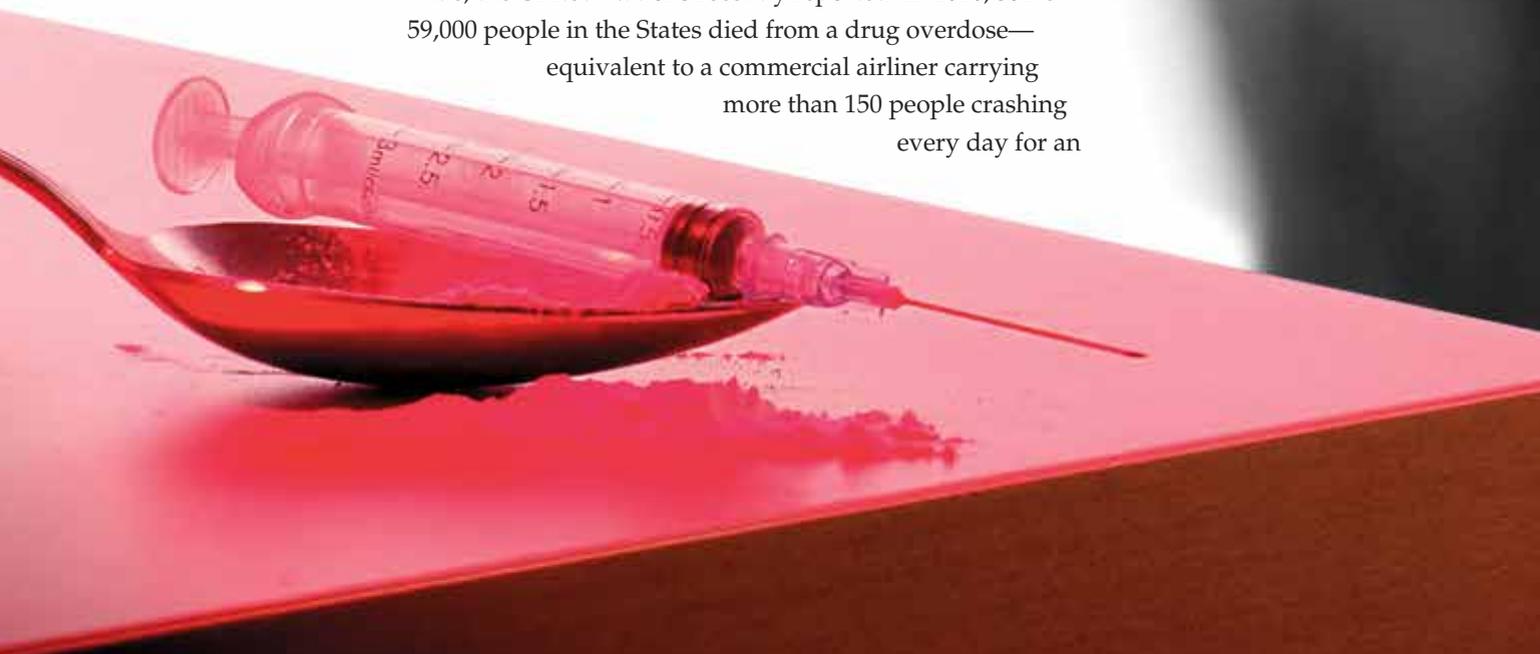
UNDERSTANDING THE OPIOID CRISIS AND WHAT YOUR CLUB CAN DO TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY. STORY BY JULIE SAETRE

Between 2014 and 2016, an Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed more than 11,000 people, drawing intense media attention and generating fear worldwide, despite the disease's limited reach. Today's heroin crisis gets plenty of press too, yet many people remain nonplussed—despite the fact that this epidemic impacts far too many lives.

"The growth of this crisis," says Carlton Hall of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), "has impacted every segment, every corner of our society."

Nowhere is this more evident than in the United States, which accounts for 25 percent of drug-related deaths worldwide, the United Nations recently reported. In 2016, some 59,000 people in the States died from a drug overdose—

equivalent to a commercial airliner carrying more than 150 people crashing every day for an





entire year. Drug overdoses are a key reason why life expectancy in the U.S. is declining for the first time since 1993.

The crisis is so widespread that it's likely nearly every

“A history of familial substance misuse is one of the greatest factors for substance misuse by a child.”

Kiwanis community has experienced a heroin-related death.

Drug-related epidemics aren't new to the U.S. The 1960s saw Vietnam war veterans using heroin to cope; in the 1980s, crack cocaine swept through the nation. But today's opioid resurgence reaches a whole new level.

“This crisis totally eclipses the other two,” says Hall, the deputy director of CADCA's National Coalition Institute. “It has a feeder system that is unlike anything we've ever experienced before: the misuse and the abuse of prescription drugs.”

In 2015, U.S. physicians prescribed some 300 million prescriptions for opioids, enough to give everyone in the country a one-month supply. Some of those recipients become addicted, and when refills run out, they'll turn to the streets to buy pills. Soon, though, they discover that heroin is readily available and much less expensive to purchase. At least 80 percent of heroin addicts were first exposed to opioids through prescription painkillers, according to the (U.S.) National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Sadly, youth aren't immune.

“Many of those impacted are children who have either been prescribed opioids for a sports injury or a dental procedure or have been introduced to pain pills by a friend or family

member for recreational use,” says Pat Aussem, parent partner with the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.

Other youth must deal with an addicted family member; some have witnessed overdoses by family and friends.

“A history of familial substance misuse is one of the greatest factors for substance misuse by a child,” Aussem says. “Then there are the youngest among us, children born with neonatal abstinence syndrome as a result of their mother's opioid use disorder. In 2012, over 21,000 babies were diagnosed with this condition.”

The numbers are daunting, but they don't have to be destiny. Kiwanis clubs can make a difference.

“The beautiful thing about Kiwanis clubs is that you are everywhere,” Hall says. “You have the opportunity to engage in solution-making, problem-solving, at a very local level. And we believe a community response at the local level is the best way of addressing these issues.”



Here are 11 ways Kiwanis clubs can help:

- 1. Join your community's anti-drug coalition.** Visit cadca.org to find one near you. No coalition close by? Start your own; advice can be found on the same website. CADCA works in more than 20 nations.
- 2. Educate your members.** Over a period of four or five meetings, schedule a series of speakers who can provide key perspectives on the crisis. Hear insights from a law enforcement officer, paramedic, social worker, recovering addict, prosecutor, etc.
- 3. Educate the public.** For adults, host a screening of "Out of Reach," a teen-made documentary spotlighting prescription drug abuse among youth. For high school students and young adults, show "Chasing the Dragon: The Life of an Opioid Addict." Contact the Partnership for Drug Free Kids (drugfree.org) or the FBI (fbi.gov), respectively, for more information. The Partnership also offers links to community education presentations that can be localized (drugfree.org/heroin).
- 4. Partner with your Key Club or CKI club to host an opioid prevention and education session.** "Often, younger people can help adults understand what's really going on and reasons why kids choose to use—or not use—alcohol and drugs," says Kevin Collins, director of Parent and Community Support Services for the Partnership.
- 5. Sponsor an evidence-based prevention program for at-risk youth.** The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (rcmp-grc.gc.ca) offers lesson plans that teach students how to recognize risks and develop personal strategies. In the U.S., established curricula—such as the Strengthening Families Program (strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org) for elementary and middle school children or Project Towards No Drug Abuse (tnd.usc.edu) for high school students—focus on decision-making abilities, coping mechanisms, self-esteem building, leadership skills and more.
- 6. Donate to a youth recovery center.** Such facilities provide in- or out-patient services and tools to teens fighting substance abuse and addiction.
- 7. Help children of addicts.** "If other family members use opioids, children can be at risk of being removed from the home by child protective services," says Partnership for Drug-Free Kids' Pat Aussem. Contact your community's child welfare agency to see how your members can help, whether it's with money, meals or mentoring.
- 8. Help first responders save lives.** Donate funds that law enforcement officers, firefighters and others can use to purchase Narcan kits. Narcan—or Naloxone—blocks or reverses the effects of opioids, literally bringing overdose victims back from the brink of death.
- 9. Sponsor a Narcan training class.** In some locations, Narcan can be purchased without a prescription by those concerned about a family member or friend's addiction. Work with your health department to teach people how to properly administer this lifesaving medicine.
- 10. Join a takeback event.** Keep opioid medications out of youths' hands by providing or promoting a safe place to dispose of unwanted/unused/expired prescriptions. Contact your law enforcement agency to host a community event.
- 11. Let families know help is available.** The Partnership's toll-free hotline (1-800-DRUGFREE) and chat service (drugfree.org/helpline) walk parents through their concerns. "That can be anything," Collins says, "from 'How do I keep my kid from starting to use' to 'How do I find treatment' to 'How do I support my kid's recovery?'" The Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (cclt.ca) lists provincial helpline numbers.

CRISIS SITUATION

THANKS TO A MASSAPEQUA CLUB, PARENTS CAN SEEK CONFIDENTIAL HELP FOR KIDS WHO MISUSE OR ABUSE OPIOIDS.

STORY BY JULIE SAETRE

For the Kiwanis Club of Massapequa, New York, the opioid-addiction crisis hit close to home two years ago. A club member had a young family member struggling with the issue and asked fellow members to somehow address the growing epidemic. Robert Thompson, the club's president at the time, jumped at the chance to spearhead what became the Massapequa Kiwanis Drug Initiative.

The eight-step program—now the club's signature project—includes a comprehensive information booklet for parents/guardians, a related phone app and a crisis hotline staffed 24/7 by trained counselors.

Thompson made these

anonymous, reach-out-from-anywhere resources a priority to access those adults too timid or ashamed to ask for help in person.

"There's such a stigma, such a denial, almost, about this issue," he says. "Not in society, really, but in individual families. Because people don't want to say, 'Oh, my daughter is having this issue.' They don't want anybody to know."

The club found a detailed booklet called "A Parent's Guide for the Prevention of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use," created by the nonprofit Community of Concern, and printed copies. Working with Massapequa Public Schools, members attended key school functions

to distribute the booklets to parents of students from elementary grades through high school.

The Partnership for Drug Free Kids, another nonprofit, had created a Drug Guide for Parents mobile-phone app with similar information, so the Kiwanians included a link on their newly revamped website. An electronic version of the Community of Concern booklet also is available there (massapequakiwanis.org/drug-initiative).

Thompson next wanted to include a link to an all-day, everyday drug-specific counseling hotline that would be staffed locally.

"I personally called 18 different hotlines that were supposedly 24/7," he recalls. "None of them were."

So the club worked with the Long Island Crisis Center to create one.

Other components of the initiative include a poster contest, a role model program, community education efforts and a speaker program.

Response was immediate and continues to grow, Thompson reports, with website use up and calls coming into the crisis line.

"I've gotten thank-you emails, and we've gotten some new members on board because of the initiative ... if we can just help any family, any one kid, that's our goal."

Poster Program



Winners of the Massapequa Schools Anti-Drug Poster Contest



A ray of hope

HOW ONE KIWANIS CLUB IS TACKLING OPIOID ABUSE.

Words **JULIE SAETRE**

Fostoria, Ohio, is a city of connections. Located at the conversion point of three counties, Fostoria is crossed by five state roads and one United States highway, and more than 100 trains travel through the city each day. But its latest connection might be one of its most crucial. This past year, the Fostoria Kiwanis Club sparked the development of H.O.P.E. in Fostoria, a task force of diverse representatives united in addressing the opioid crisis.

Ohio has the second-highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, and the Ohio Department of Health reports that more than 86 percent of unintentional overdose deaths in 2016 involved opioids. It's not just well-known prescription drugs and heroin that are doing the damage. Synthetic opioids fentanyl (up to 100 times stronger than heroin) and carfentanil (5,000 times stronger than heroin) are responsible for an increasing number of the state's overdose deaths.

Kiwanian Amie Hathaway, a former president of United Way of Fostoria, decided it was time for her city to become proactive in addressing the epidemic. She approached the United Way office with an offer to join forces.

"We have the bodies (for volunteering). United Way has connections that we might not have otherwise," she explains.

Thus began the H.O.P.E. (Heroin/Opioid Prevention/Education) initiative. Comprised of 13 volunteers from law enforce-

ment, health care, the faith-based community, Fostoria City Schools, addiction/recovery centers and families impacted by opioid abuse, H.O.P.E. strives to serve as a resource for educating the community and steering those who need help to appropriate organizations.

Mircea Handru, the executive director of the Mental Health Services Board of Seneca, Sandusky and Wyandot Counties, is a H.O.P.E. volunteer. The Mental Health Services Board contracts with various agencies that provide help for those seeking prevention, treatment and recovery support, so Handru sees the opioid impact daily.

"Heroin is an extremely hard addiction (to break)," he says. "I have personally experienced so many (clients) that I work with who have relapsed — or who relapsed and are not here anymore."

This year, H.O.P.E. will hold a total of six educational sessions, focusing on key aspects of the crisis, from the role played by prescription drugs and signs of addiction to barriers to treatment and recovery. In the future, Handru says, task force members hope to implement long-term support services.

With opioid-related deaths surging across the United States, H.O.P.E. members know the task they face

won't be an easy one. But they refuse to be daunted.

"We realize that we may never be able to measure our impact," says Hathaway. "But we're all satisfied that if somebody hears the message and one life is saved, we're golden. It will be worth every minute we put into it."

