

HEROIN'S POPULARITY GROWS - EASIER TO GET, LESS EXPENSIVE

Cincinnati Post, The (OH) - April 26, 2003

• Author/Byline: David Wecker, Post staff reporter

• Edition: Final

• Section: News

• Page: A12

When one of Stacey's close friends died last fall of a drug overdose, "I had to go out and get high to numb the pain," she said.

So when the heroin use killed another close friend in the winter, friends and family hid the fact from her for two months. By that time, Stacey was in rehab herself, and they didn't want anything to divert her from the program.

"It was devastating," said Stacey, 17, about finally finding out last month about her 18-year-old friend's death. "But right away, I stood up in group and talked about it. And that night when I went home, I hugged my dad for the longest time. I never would have done that before."

Stacey, so far at least, is considered one of the success stories in a community's efforts to fight an outbreak of heroin use.

Heroin, once considered a "dirty" inner-city drug used primarily by hard-core junkies in dark alleys, has gradually become more popular among a younger crowd, with dangerous results. Coroners concluded earlier this year that heroin overdoses killed as many as eight people in Campbell and Kenton counties in a year's time.

In many ways, it's just a national trend: The extremely addictive drug has become cheaper to buy, easier to find and more pure. Its use is way up, especially among youth.

But in rural Campbell County, the concern -- and use -- is especially great.

About 450 people attended a public meeting Feb. 5 to talk about heroin and its hold on the community. The uproar has died down, but a core group of a dozen parents have formed a local chapter of the national group Residents Attacking Drugs as a way to define, understand and solve the problem.

Some drug treatment agencies have also stepped up publicity efforts to make sure the community is aware of their services.

One of those is North Key, which operates one of a small group of drug and alcohol rehab programs for adolescents in Greater Cincinnati. North Key opened a Falmouth office nine months ago as a pilot program and is primarily aimed at serving teens in rural Pendleton and Grant counties.

Thirteen teens are enrolled in the program, generally referrals either from their schools or the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice.

Another is Kids Helping Kids, a Milford, Ohio-based long-term drug and alcohol rehab for younger users.

More than 1,100 kids have been through the program since it began in 1981.

The commitment required is considerable, both on the part of clients and their families; the treatment costs \$19,500 and takes 11 to 12 months to complete.

But the success rate is impressive. Kids Helping Kids says studies of its graduates -- done by independent market research firms -- in 24-month increments show that 70 percent maintain a drug-free lifestyle, report improved relationships with parents and peers and, overall, lead productive lives.

• Caption: PhotoMELVIN GRIER Kids Helping Kids, a long term drug treatment center for adolescents ages 13-21, holds group sessions regularly. Leading this session were Ben [REDACTED], Mike [REDACTED], Jayme [REDACTED] and Laura [REDACTED]

• Record: 0304280191

• Copyright: Copyright (c) 2003 The Cincinnati Post