

Look back: Auburn neighborhood group discusses heroin issue



Members of the community and the Orchard Street Neighborhood Association talk during their regular meeting. This month the group brought up the topic of heroin and its effects in the community.

The topic of heroin addiction has surged rapidly across the U.S. as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has labeled it an "epidemic."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdoses now surpass car accidents as the leading cause of injury-related deaths for people

between the ages of 25 and 64.

The issue has grown to such high importance in Auburn that even smaller neighborhood organizations have brought it to the forefront of their agendas.

A few members of the Orchard Street Area Association gathered Wednesday evening for their regular meeting and the topic of heroin was on the agenda.

Arlene Ryan, the head of the association, said she had an interest in bringing the issue up for discussion because of the increased number of deaths related to heroin use specifically in the Auburn community.

Ryan reached out to a number of New York state senators and Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office for resources and information to share with the group. She also invited people in the community who work with the issue on a daily basis, including Cayuga County Director of Community Services Ray Bizzari.

Bizzari highlighted a local heroin awareness group that formed in the community. He said the work they are starting to do is the kind of things that need to be done to bring attention to the issue.

"That grassroots sort of noise will be helpful in this situation," he said.

Kim Telvock, one member of the group, said there were at least 40 people at the first meeting last week. The group was formed by family members of those who lost their children to heroin overdose and drug abuse.

Organizers have their second meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Center for Wellness, 1 Hoffman St., Auburn.

Telvock, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood, said her nephew died of a heroin overdose in July.

"There is no support out there for these families," she said. "There's very little support out there for the addicts. There needs to be a lot more aggression on how we treat them, where we treat them."

Bizzari said the healthcare and treatment community is nowhere near prepared for the number of people who are beginning to use and become addicted to the drug.

"The treatment system is woefully unprepared for this," he said, adding an estimated 60 percent of people in treatment are being treated for opiate addiction.

Bizzari said it's important to recognize any type of addiction as a disease, and to treat it as such, and that it's crucial to get rid of the stigma associated with drug use and addiction.

"The first time they use it is the only time they had a choice," Bizzari said. "After that, it's an addiction."