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EDITOR'S PICK TOP STORY URGENT

Drug crisis affects Northwest Indiana families

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Giles Bruce, The Times

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From left, substance abuse survivor Lloyd Rock; David Lee, founder of Heartland Recovery Center; Porter County Sheriff David Reynolds; Deb Warner, of Advocates for Human Potential; and Jena Bellezza, of Indiana Parenting Institute, talk at a drug abuse forum last Friday in Merrillville.



The human toll of opioid addiction: Lives lost, families broken in NWI

MERRILLVILLE — When Lloyd Rock was active in his addiction, he said, he wasn't a good parent or son. Some of his children went on to copy his bad behaviors as adults.

Now a recovering addict, he continues to lead by example, but this time in a positive way.

"For me to stay clean is the best thing I can do," he said. "Things I wasn't able to do with my kids I do with my grandkids today."





An unmet need: Drug treatment often hard to come by in Northwest Indiana



NWI addiction expert: To treat the addict, treat the family

"On May 1 (the anniversary of his sobriety), nobody's going to call my mom, the one who tried 10 times harder to get me clean than I ever did. My story's cool, but my family are the real heroes, they're the real survivors." — David Lee, a former drug user who now operates Heartland Recovery Center in Lowell



Musial new director of LaPorte County substance abuse group



Rock, of Gary, was one of the speakers at a forum last Friday in Merrillville about how addiction affects the whole family, and the important role family plays in recovery. The event came as the Region — and the country as a whole — is in the midst of an epidemic of opioid overdose deaths.

"We had five (overdoses) last week. LaPorte (County) had eight last week," said Porter County Sheriff David Reynolds. Northwest Indiana has been seeing a spike in overdoses so far this year, largely because opioid addicts are, knowingly or not, ingesting fentanyl, a synthetic opiate 50 to 100 times stronger than heroin.

Ninety-five percent of the men and all of the women in the Porter County Jail have problems with substance abuse, Reynolds noted. Many of those come from dysfunctional families or are inept parents themselves, he said.

"The answer (to the drug crisis) is not law enforcement, it's not treatment," he said. "It's prevention and education. But it's not teachers' responsibility to raise our kids. It's families'. It's parents'."

The Porter County Jail recently started a trial program that teaches men involved in domestic violence how to be better fathers.

David Lee, a former drug user who now operates Heartland Recovery Center in Lowell, said he gets all the credit for his recovery when most of it should go to his family.

"On May 1 (the anniversary of his sobriety), nobody's going to call my mom, the one who tried 10 times harder to get me clean than I ever did," he said. "My story's cool, but my family are the real heroes, they're the real survivors."

Deb Warner, senior program manager with Sudbury, Massachusetts-based Advocates for Human Potential, where she works with families impacted by addiction, said children often veer into addiction because of a lack of communication in the household.

"Recovery teaches communication better than our schools, better than anywhere in our life," Warner said. "If you want to help the child you have to help the whole family."

Cherita Adams, of East Chicago, credits the state of Indiana with helping her get her life in order. In the throes of addiction, she had her kids taken away. To get them back, the state required her to go to parenting and recovery meetings.

Opioid treatment, group therapy program comes to New Albany

"I thought I was a good mother, even with all I was doing," she said. "I had to come to a 12-step program to really learn."

The meeting was hosted by the Gary-based Indiana Parenting Institute, which is part of a new coalition called the Greater Gary Wellness Partnership.

That group, backed by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is bringing together community groups working on addiction in order to improve access to treatment and bring more federal funding for treatment to Northwest Indiana.

Giles Bruce

Giles is the health reporter for The Times, covering the business of health care as well as consumer and public health. He previously covered health for the Lawrence (Kan.) Journal-World. He is a graduate of Northern Illinois University.

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