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EDITOR'S PICK URGENT

State drug task force hears about NWI treatment programs

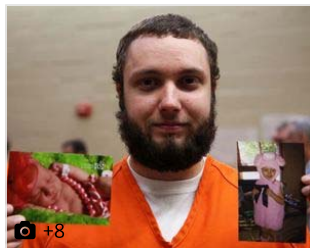
Giles Bruce giles.bruce@nwi.com, (219) 853-2584 Aug 29, 2016



John J. Watkins, The Times

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Jená Bellezza, of the Indiana Parenting Institute, addresses the Governor's Task Force on Drug Enforcement, Treatment and Prevention on Monday at Indiana University Northwest in Gary. Bellezza said that drug abuse is generational, a negative coping mechanism children learn from their parents.



Drug-addicted NWI inmates 'pioneer' new approach to treatment

GARY — A task force set up by the governor to address the state's drug abuse epidemic heard from Northwest Indiana agencies Monday at Indiana University Northwest about what's working here.

Officials from local law enforcement, social service and drug treatment agencies talked about potential solutions that might be used on a statewide level, and pointed to the gaps that exist within the Region.

Gov. Mike Pence established the task force a year ago to find solutions for a scourge of opioid abuse that is plaguing the state and the nation as a whole. Indiana has the 17th highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the U.S., according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, while the Pew Charitable Trusts reported last year that the state has the fourth largest shortage of substance abuse specialists in the



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nation.

Northwest Indiana is no outlier. Both the Lake and Porter county coroners have reported an increase in heroin overdose deaths this year. The treatment options locally are limited as well.

Wayne Isailovich, of Addiction and Behavioral Counseling Services in Merrillville, said when he first went into business, in 1999, he averaged about one to two calls about heroin abuse a year. Now he gets about a dozen a week.

But there are few places for these addicts to go for treatment. Public insurance in Indiana only pays for drug detox and short-term rehab. Lake County has only two inpatient drug treatment facilities.

"Indiana severely lacks in 90- to 180-day inpatient treatment centers," he said. "We've got to find a better way to address this problem."

A possible solution brought up at the meeting would be to convert empty hospital beds across the state into makeshift treatment centers.

Jena Bellezza, of the Gary-based Indiana Parenting Institute, said substance abuse is a negative coping mechanism often learned in childhood and passed down through the generations. "You can't just treat the user," she said. "You must treat his or her family as well."

That's why her organization teaches mothers and fathers proper parenting techniques: to try to break that generational chain that is a big reason the country has so many drug abusers, she said.

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In Starke County, the local jail hosts prison inmates for a drug treatment pilot program, endorsed by the task force, to determine whether addicted prisoners can be better treated in jail settings. The program, which started in February, has already graduated six men back into their home communities and treated 37 more.

The initiative, called therapeutic community, has before only been offered in state prisons, and the jail-based program has

housing

many fewer inmates. "The intimacy makes it easier to build a community," said Gary Travis, director of the Starke County therapeutic community program. The inmates at Starke County recently started growing produce in a garden and doing welding training.


Porter County Sheriff David Reynolds said his department has taken a proactive approach to treating that county's heroin epidemic. It formed a Heroin Overdose Response Team that investigates every overdose as a crime, trying to identify dealers. It produced a video featuring interviews with heroin addicts and the families of users who died from overdoses that Reynolds shows to schoolkids across the county. It offers drug treatment to jail inmates.

Solving the drug abuse problem will take care of many others, Reynolds noted.

"Almost all crime in Porter County — and Lake County is no different — is directly associated with substance abuse," he said.

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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