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Niagara County works to bolster opioid prevention, intervention and treatment

Last week, I had the pleasure of giving my annual State of the County speech to the Niagara County Legislature. We had a full house of legislators, staff and the public for the first time it what seemed like forever. I covered many different topics over the course of the 20-minute speech, some of which I will go into further detail in future columns. Today, I want to discuss the opioid crisis.

When I am putting together my State of the County address and looking across the broad scope of county government, I am reminded of all the different ways we touch people's lives. From public health and safety ... to emergency services ... to Workforce Development and training ... services for our seniors ... programs for those with mental health or substance abuse needs ... infrastructure work like roads and bridges ... a wide array of social services and safety net programs ... DMV services ... pistol permits ... help for veterans ... parks ... and more. The fact is, most people's interaction with government is at the

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

the most challenging issues that face us, progress is often made and then lost. It can feel like one step forward and two steps back. This is no more evident than in our battle against the opioid crisis.

So many across Niagara County have been impacted by overdoses and addiction and the terrible toll it takes not only on them, but their family and friends. I am proud to have been a part of OASIS, Niagara County's opioid task force, working to combat the opioid epidemic over the last several years. The combined efforts of our Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and

county level.

For those of us who serve in the legislature, it is this ability to have a positive impact across a broad spectrum of the community that draws us to run for office. Unfortunately, a tough lesson to learn is that, on some of

many partner agencies really have made a difference in the lives of people battling this problem.

In 2018, Niagara County had 485 total overdoses, with 46 of those resulting in death. But with a lot of hard work by the task force and its partners, that number was reduced in 2019 to 369 overdoses and 29 deaths. Still far too many lives lost, but trending in a better direction. Our expectation was that we were on the way to further reductions in 2020.

As many of you know, that did not happen. In 2020, we had 526 total overdoses, with 60 fatalities. Much of this was attributed to the pandemic, including increased isolation, the difficulty in providing services in a socially distant environment, and so on. We were hoping that would prove to be a temporary setback, but 2021 was not the reset we were all hoping for in so many ways, including the opioid crisis, as we increased to 607 total overdoses, with 94 fatalities.

Earlier this year, our legislature voted to accept a settlement with a pharmaceutical company that was

sued by New York state for their role in fostering this opioid crisis. This \$683,000 settlement from pharmaceutical company Allergan will help both our public awareness/involvement and law enforcement/first responders subcommittees fund the programs and initiatives that we know can make a difference. We need to be able to invest in prevention, intervention and treatment, and these funds will help support that. Let me also stress that this is just one settlement with one company, Allergan, but hopefully it sets the table for future settlements with other companies, while also bringing some measure of accountability to the industry.

As we turn the corner on the pandemic in 2022, let's pray that we see success in our battle against opioids. And always remember, if you or a loved one are in any need of help in battling addiction or are facing any mental health issue, please call the 24-hour Niagara County crisis hotline at 716-285-3515.

Lewiston Resident in Need of Kidney Transplant

A Village of Lewiston resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, recently approached Niagara Frontier Publications with a special request: assistance in locating a suitable donor for a kidney transplant.

The resident, a male in his middle 60s, disclosed he has been encountering the challenges of chronic kidney disease for some time and now finds himself in desperate need of a donor recipient. The male disclosed his blood type is O, meaning the donor must also have O blood type for a suitable match.

According to information from the "Living Donor Kidney Transplant Handbook," a publication of The Regional Center of Excellence for Transplantation and Kidney Care at ECMC in Buffalo, "Kidneys can be donated by anyone age 18 years or older, whether it be a family member (parent, child sibling, etc.), or someone emotionally attached to the recipient (a spouse, friend, etc.). Strangers or good Samaritans can also donate but must be 21 years or older."

The handbook continued, "Living donors should be good overall physical and mental health. Some medical conditions could prevent you from being a donor. Medical conditions that may prevent

Can You Help?

a transplant of a living kidney donation may include uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, HIV, hepatitis, acute infections, or a psychiatric condition requiring treatment. Since some donor health conditions could harm a transplant recipient it is important that you share all information about your physical and mental health."

Those interested in possibly assisting this resident are asked to contact him directly at 716-560-4307, or contact ECMC's transplant office at 716-898-5001, option No. 4, or email dhossfeld@ecmc.edu.

Friends Seek Community's Help for Cancer Victim

Lewiston resident Michelle Hosie recently reached out to Niagara Frontier Publications, requesting assistance from the community to help out a resident who is now battling cancer.

"I know a young man very much in need of help. Brandon Jones is not even 30 years old and has a 6-month-old son," Hosie said. "He has completely lost feeling in his legs, due to metastatic cancer tumors on his spine. He has not been able to work; he can barely walk with assistance. I don't know

if he ever will work again. He has an extremely difficult road ahead of him.

"This is a young family who were barely making ends meet even before this tragic diagnosis. They are trying to remain positive. Brandon has an incredible sense of humor and is taking on this battle with amazing grace. But I'm not as optimistic. The prognosis seems devastating.

"I'm trying to solicit any assistance I can find for these kids."

According to Aiden Hosie, who created a GoFundMe account on the man's behalf, "Brandon and his family received terrible news when he was rushed to the hospital just days after Christmas. Due to some severe back pain and numbness in his extremities, he was admitted into the hospital for further testing. It was determined that he had a mass growing near his spine that was compressing his spinal cord and causing the problems. After the emergency surgery to remove the tumor, the doctors were able to determine that it was the result of metastatic cancer. Brandon is facing additional surgeries, recovery, physical therapy and cancer treatments in the coming weeks and months."

Following a second round of surgery in January, Aiden Hosie said the news Jones received was not good, and the family continues to struggle.

"Since the last update, Brandon's doctors have discovered another tumor near his bowel and have determined that the tumor that was originally compressing his spine has returned. With these discoveries, the doctors decided to promptly begin chemotherapy."

"Today, Brandon has begun his second of five rounds of chemo," Aiden wrote in mid-February. "He has also already decided to shave his hair and beard due to the beginning of his hair loss. Luckily, mother nature has made it a little warmer for him today. He still does not have any feelings in his legs, and is receiving regular physical therapy to maintain his ability to walk while assisted."

As of Feb. 23, a total \$3,950 has been raised in the GoFundMe account, with a goal of \$7,500 sought to assist the family.

"Our desire is to help him focus on healing, so we created this fundraiser to help with his mounting medical and household bills. Please consider donating to and sharing this campaign," Aiden Hosie said.

For more information or to help out, visit <https://gofund.me/75f424f6>.

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PUBLISHER
Skip Mazenauer
GM/MANAGING EDITOR
Joshua Maloni
EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR
Terrence P. Duffy
WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS
Joshua Maloni, Lucia Spiritosanto,
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Kim Wendt

PRODUCTION MANAGER/ GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Wendy Juzwicky
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder
CLASSIFIED MANAGER
Toni Snyder
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Jennifer Walowitz
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/REPORTERS
Michael J. Billoni, Kevin and Dawn Cobello, Michael DePietro, Karen Keefe, Nathan Keefe, Wayne Peters, Mark Williams Jr., David Yarger

©2022 Niagara Frontier Publications
1859 Whitehaven Road
Grand Island, N.Y. 14072

Phone (716) 773-7676
Fax (716) 773-7190

Editorial:
Tribune@wnypapers.com
Dispatch@wnypapers.com
Sentinel@wnypapers.com
Advertising:
NFPDesign@wnypapers.com
Classifieds:
NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com
Circulation:
NFPcirculation@wnypapers.com
Legals:
legalnotice@wnypapers.com
Website:
wnypapers.com

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