Stand Together holds opioid town hall meeting in Crellin

by Renée Shreve
STAFF WRITER

CRELLIN — The Stand Together — Garrett County Against Drug Abuse committee held the final opioid town hall meeting in its current series of informational sessions at Crellin Elementary School.

Stand Together is a collaboration of the Garrett County Health Department, Community Action and other concerned agencies and citizens.

“We can’t do this alone,” said Sadie Liller, GCHD alcohol and other drug prevention coordinator, told about 40 people at the March 19 event. “We need the whole community to help us fight this problem, take back our community and help people.”

She said compassion needs to be shown to both those struggling with addictions and their families.

“This doesn’t just affect the person who has the substance use disorder,” Liller said. “It affects the whole family.”

She then shared how her family has been impacted.

“We can’t look at someone and say, ‘Oh, you’re a drug addict,’” Liller said. “No, we cannot do that because there are many people who struggle with addiction that we have no idea about it.”

The opioid epidemic has also touched State’s Attorney Lisa Thayer Welch professionally and personally.

“We’re all here because we all know someone,” Welch said. “I’m not ashamed to say I have a couple of direct relatives who have definitely been impacted.”

She provided statistics to illustrate the impact on local families. In 2017, 51 children were placed into foster care. In 2018, there were 96 children placed into foster care.

“Of those numbers affecting our children,” Welch said, “54 percent were placed as a direct result of a parent or caregiver having a substance abuse issue at that moment.”

That “moment” may include an arrest or a raid on the child’s home or the discovery of drugs in a vehicle in which the child is a passenger.

“More importantly, 77 percent of those children had at least one parent or caregiver who tested positive for an illegal substance right after they got into foster care,” Welch said. “So, we’re here for the children.”

She also reported there were at least 30 referrals for substance-affected newborns in 2018.

The state’s attorney noted addiction also affects everyone monetarily because of the cost of childcare, treatment, law enforcement and incarceration.

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Jade Kenney talks about her long journey from addiction to recovery during an opioid town hall meeting last week in Crellin.

Crellin Elementary School Principal Dana McCauley introduces speakers during the Stand Together — Garrett County Against Drug Abuse town hall meeting.
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"These are monies that we can't, perhaps, spend for education or other things in the community that we would also like to expand," she said.

The state's attorney reported the Garrett County Detention Center's daily inmate population was 60 last month.

"Thirty of them were held specifically for drug charges," she said. "There are currently 10 people in addiction programs within the facility."

Local resident Jade Kenney, a nationally certified recovery coach at Area Health Education Center West in Cumberland and the mother of two young children, talked about her long journey from addiction to sobriety.

"I've been going to meetings since I was 16," she said about her first support group session in 1998. "I was a chronic relaper, and it was through those chronic relapses that I learned a life lesson each time."

She noted her son witnessed her addiction firsthand, but fortunately, her daughter has not.

"One of the most wonderful things about having her is she never has to see me use again," Kenney said. "Last month I celebrated five years of sobriety, which is absolutely incredible. Unfortunately, my son did see me use, and I'm struggling with him right now."

She said children watch everything adults do.

"It's a great feeling to have a stable home today, because I didn't have a stable home growing up," Kenney said. "I started using at the age of 12 with my father when my parents were going through their divorce, and it was a terrible, terrible road."

But she doesn't dwell on that anymore because she now has a survivor mentality.

"I walk into the room with my head held high, no longer looking down at the ground," Kenney said, "I can be proud of who I am."

She added it was a great feeling when AHEC asked her to apply for a community health worker job.

"It's a really great feeling that I've been able to turn my reputation around and leave behind a legacy," Kenney said.

Her story echoed Garrett County health officer Bob Stephen's sentiments.

"There is hope because recovery does happen," he said.

He asked those attending the meeting to repeat the following phrase three times:

"Prevention works. Treatment is effective. Recovery happens."

Stephens said numerous resources are available to help those struggling with addictions.

Since June, opioid town hall meetings have been held in Oakland/Mountain Lake Park, Grantsville, Friendsville and Bloomington.

About 300 people attended the events, which included information from such resources as the Garrett County Health Department, Celebrate Recovery, Drug-Free Communities, Mountain Laurel Medical Center, Garrett County Lighthouse, the Dove Center, Community Action and Addiction Happens.

Liller asked citizens attending the Crelin meeting to submit suggestions and topics for future events. She said a Stand Together subcommittee is trying to determine a new direction for the town hall meetings.

For example, she asked, "Should we have just one speaker talk about a specific topic, such as medication assisted treatment, and then break out into smaller groups for those who don't want to share information in a bigger group?"

For more information, call Liller at 301-334-7730, ext. 6599.

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