

Community Forum – Drugs in the Community May 12, 2015

Attendees:

Carol Olsen	Joan Goodrich	Ruben Hook	Michael Kuban
Sheriff Bill Bohnyak	Kelly Lyford	Melinda Farnham	Brenda Vermette
Mark Vermette	William Mattoon	Abigail Mattoon	Elisha Mattoon
Rebecca Mattoon	Linda Kuban	Heather Mullen	Sarah Caouette
Charlotte Faccio	Leslie Marmorale	Johce Twing	Collins Twing
Betsy Painter	John Upham	David Button	Karen Lathrop

Carol Olsen welcomed everyone to the Community Forum about drugs in the community. She welcomed Sheriff Bill Bohnyak, OCSD, Melinda Farnham, Counselor, and Charlotte Faccio, Nurse, Chelsea Public School, Linda Kuban, Brenda Vermette, Kelly Lyford and Heather Mullen of First Branch Ambulance Service.

Michael Kuban gave a synopsis of events in early April which led to the Selectboard calling for a community forum. With two opiate overdoses in the community and more in the surrounding towns, one of which was fatal, the Board felt the need to come together with the leading entities in Town and try to generate ideas the Town could implement to bring awareness of the ongoing crisis and to help mitigate it in some way.

Sheriff Bohnyak stated, Sargeant Kaufman of VSP has been promoted to point person at this point in time and has reported the heroin that caused the overdose in Chelsea has been linked to the tainted heroin in Randolph that caused the fatality there.

Sheriff Bohnyak shared there are three towns in the surrounding area with drug issues on the scale of Rutland's drug issues; Randolph, South Royalton and Bethel. Also while in the past there used to be one person bringing drugs into a community, that today there are multiple individuals crossing state lines to bring in so much more than before.

Sheriff Bohnyak shared the three pronged attack strategy for ending the problem with drugs which are; education in the schools, law enforcement and rehabilitation.

There was a lively discussion on the moral dilemma of educating students to not use drugs while most people take a drug every day whether it be an aspirin or a pharmaceutical prescribed by a Doctor. The societal mores of the day show there is no age discrimination to using drugs Sheriff Bohnyak stressed education in the School with Charlotte Faccio, the School's Nurse, confirming the School provides education from Kindergarten on up, but stressed education must continue at home and beyond and thought if everyone was to be inclusive of all students so some do not get left behind, it would be beneficial to the students. The School is a mandatory reporter and DCF has changed reporting protocols, and the School will over report than under report. It is acknowledged there are many more calls than investigators and DCF has to triage cases. Melinda Farnham, Counselor, shared there are many resources out there such as Clara Martin Center and Gifford and the School connects families to resources such as Health Hub, which helps you manage many aspects of your life. She shared that the School received an After School Grant and there will be more activities for students to participate in soon.

Linda Kuban, First Branch Ambulance stated there are no opportunities to guide people having a opiate overdose with resources, while taking them to the hospital as they are not able to cope with problems at the time they are happening and the ambulance might not see the person again.

While education is happening, enforcement of the law is not. Sheriff Bohnyak reported many drug abusers are slapped on the wrist and sent on their way to break the law again. Sheriff Bohnyak urges the Selectboard to write the State's Attorney a letter to call for stiffer penalties than what is in place as of now.

Rehabilitation is falling through the cracks also. While there might be a person who would like to go to rehab, there are not enough places for them, not enough money to build rehab shelters and no plans to increase any on-going facilities. Rebecca Mattoon asked what the money that is seized is being used for to which, Sheriff Bohnyak, reported President Obama has stopped the Asset Forfeiture Law. As of now while, Massachusetts uses their seized money to help people go to rehab, only 10% of seized money in Vermont is allocated for it. Sarah Caouette asked if there were any prescription drug disposal programs in place. Sheriff Bohnyak stated OCSD will take them but there are no others in Town.

Mark Vermette stated many in the Town are in denial there is a problem, hence the low turnout of people at the meeting. Heather Mullen asked if the School has had any addicts in to speak with the students. Melinda said the School collaborates with South Royalton and has had day long workshops , one of which was watching the movie The Hungry Heart.

This prompted a discussion on what the Town could do to promote awareness. The students who attended were asked what they thought would help and if other students spoke about drugs in school. They stated students did not discuss drugs on a student to student basis and that there was not much except sports that helped them.

Linda Kuban stated First Branch Ambulance would reach out to other entities to try to put a resources flyers together to give out. Joan Goodrich thought having a booth at the Farmer's Market every Friday to hand them out and to bring awareness while people are out and about. Melinda said the school could distribute them. Melinda Farnham said the School has a movie they use to bring awareness to the students that could be utilized. Joan Goodrich said maybe a potluck with the movie to bring people together and also maybe the hall could be utilized for the young people to use more often. Sheriff Bohnyak suggested using the anonymous tip line the Orange County Sheriff's Department has in place and be very vigilant.

Carol Olsen wrapped up the meeting stating that our community needs some awareness for people to understand just what is going on in and around the town. She thanked everyone for coming and thanked our younger people who will grow our community in the future for coming also.

The meeting closed at 9:00 p.m.