

Natick addiction workshop supports loved ones

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Krystin Fraser, director of addiction services at SMOC, speaks about addiction during the Natick Opioid Task Force's "Understanding Addiction" at the Community-Senior Center in Natick on Monday. [Daily News and Wicked Local Photo/Dan Holmes]

NATICK – People who know someone battling addiction may feel like they are alone.

But, Eileen Collett and others who attended a workshop Monday met people in similar situations and learned about organizations willing to help.

“It can be a lonely situation when you have a loved one that has this disorder,” said Collett, of Natick, who has a loved one recovering from addiction. “Seeing other people going through it makes me feel a little better.”

Collett praised officials for organizing Monday's Understanding Addiction workshop, which she hopes helps end the stigma around addiction. Collett and some other attendees took part in training in how to administer naloxone, an opioid antidote medication. Some even received sample doses to administer in case of an emergency. Participants listened to a presentation on the basics of addiction and learned about treatment providers and support services for people with substance use disorders and their loved ones.

The event, run by the town's Opioid Task Force in the Community-Senior Center, marked the beginning of a monthly workshop series. The next session is scheduled for 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Oct. 16.

"We wanted to create a model where folks felt it is a safe space in the community," to talk with each other and people working in the addiction field, said Katie Sugarman, the town's prevention and outreach program manager.

The workshop comes after four people overdosed, one fatally, in Natick last week on a substance containing the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl. Fentanyl is a prescription painkiller authorities say is often mixed with heroin and other illegal drugs.



Natick Police Lt. Cara Rossi puts her contact info on the whiteboard for anyone who may need it during the Natick Opioid Task Force's "Understanding Addiction" at the Community-Senior Center in Natick on Monday. [Daily News and Wicked Local Photo/Dan Holmes]

"There's been great stigma and shame associated with addiction," Krystin Fraser, director of addiction services for the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, told the approximately two dozen attendees. But, "addiction is not shameful. It's a disease."

Fraser shared her personal connection to addiction.

"I am in this field because I am the child of two heroin addicts," she said.

Fraser's presentation explored the science behind addiction and traced the progression from experimenting with drugs or alcohol to becoming dependent on them.

Changes in behaviors and friendships as well as physical symptoms, such as weight loss, can be signs of an addiction, she said.

Opioids cause the body to slow down "to the point where sometimes it can be hard to breathe," said Robin Gordon of Justice Resource Institute.

Gordon, who ran training in the nasal spray version of naloxone, said the drug only works for 30 to 90 minutes. People should call 911 when they suspect someone is overdosing.

"It doesn't eliminate the opioid," she said.

Several members of the Rotary Club of Natick came to learn as they look for ways their organization can help.

"We're a community service organization," said Mark Blumenthal, a past president of the club. "We're trying to fulfill the needs of the community. This is by far the biggest need the community has right now."

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