

DRUG EPIDEMIC

Court officials, citizens hear about battling heroin addiction

By Daily Telegram staff

ADRIAN — A Lenawee County judge is taking a step toward widening the community's effort to combat what is being called a heroin epidemic among youths in their teens and 20s.

A presentation from Lansing-based Families Against Narcotics was given Wednesday in District Judge Laura J. Schaedler's courtroom to probation officers and citizens involved in efforts to deal with drug addiction.

"I don't know if we can corral this issue, but we certainly want to address the issue of addiction," Schaedler told the group.

She said the approach FAN is using in Ingham County is a model that could provide a better service for those who come through the court system with drug addictions. Schaedler said she hopes to see a program coordinated with the local Andy's Angels' family support group, the courts, Community Action Agency and Lenawee County Community Mental Health.

Phil Pavona, one of the founders of FAN, described how the organization's approach was developed to deal with issues he learned about during his son's addiction and death from a

heroin overdose five years ago. It was not until after his son's death he said, that he began hearing from dozens of people struggling with children and family members addicted to heroin and other opiates.

"Again, we didn't know about each other," he said. "I thought I had the only kid in Okemos with a heroin addiction."

Families have no idea what to do, he said. Heroin addiction is not recognized as the threat it has become for normal families and children who have done well in school and are starting college, he said. Once they are addicted, he said, young people face relentless pressure to keep using even if they want to quit.

A first step in FAN's approach is to change the "face and stigma" of opiate addiction, said Pavona. Information available that can help prevent addictions is ignored because the problem is not considered to be something that can happen in good families, he said. A forum for families is needed to give parents access to education and resources. Preventive actions involve schools, civic groups and also education for physicians.

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