

## Mother's pain leads to addiction support meeting

By **DEBORAH CIRCELLI**, Staff writer

January 8, 2012 12:20 AM



Linda Parkin of Deltona, whose daughter Sarah Day Heddy took her life in 2007 after years of addiction to pain medication, hopes to start a local support group for those experiencing a similar loss. (N-J | Mark Harper)

Linda Parkin wishes she had known more about prescription-drug addiction when her daughter was alive.



But the Deltona resident said she "didn't understand how bad addiction is" and that it's "an illness." She thought her daughter's addiction was better after a short stay in treatment, but "she wasn't."

Her 26-year-old daughter, Sarah Day Heddy, took her life in 2007 after struggling with oxycodone and other drugs she took for pain after a car accident.

"If I had known then what I know now, I would have done anything to put her in a long-term treatment center for at least a year," said Parkin.

She's hoping she can help community leaders make a difference to prevent other deaths.

Parkin will be participating in a Community Organizational Meeting for parents who have lost a child due to addiction or have children who are addicts.

The meeting, which will be the first in an ongoing effort, will be at noon Thursday at the Stewart-Marchman-Act Foundation building, 214 Loomis Ave. off Ridgewood Avenue in Daytona Beach. Entry is at the rear of the building.

The problem is growing. The 2010 Florida Medical Examiners Commission Drug Report shows deaths where one or more prescription drugs were found in a person's system increased 31.7 percent in Volusia County with 237 cases in 2010, up from 180 in 2009.

The district that includes Flagler, Putnam and St. Johns counties had 107 deaths in 2010, up 52.9 percent from 70 in 2009. Sixty-two people in Volusia County died in 2010 from oxycodone and 28 in the district that includes Flagler.

The initial planning meeting Thursday is intended to provide awareness, prevention, intervention and support for families affected by addiction to pain medication and other drugs.

Organizers hope parents can help find solutions and work with others in the community.

Families will also be linked to educational services and grief counseling.

"There are parents out there who are so isolated, they don't know there is help out there," said Victoria Kress, regional prevention director for Stewart-Marchman-Act Behavioral Healthcare and Keep Kids Drug Free Foundation. "We want them to have the support they need so they can grieve and feel like they are not alone. We want parents supporting and assisting other parents in our community."

Kress said Stewart-Marchman-Act, for example, has an existing, free family-education program that provides 12 sessions for a parent, family member or the person who is struggling. The family can also go together and join sessions with other families.

Parkin said her daughter's death devastated her, and the only way she knows she can get better "is to be proactive so I do everything to honor her."

For almost three years, she has spoken to high school students in Seminole County as part of a NOPE (Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education) Task Force.

"By helping one child, I figure it honors her and to help people not go through what I went through and to give them the knowledge I didn't have," Parkin said. "People treat addiction as a shameful thing when in reality, it is an illness. I wasn't able to help her because I didn't know how. I know a lot more now, and I'm hoping I can help others."

Parkin is on a local Substance Abuse Task Force of organizations and community leaders looking for solutions to prescription and other drug abuse and hopes a similar NOPE chapter can be started locally.

Kress said the local task force is looking at two new programs if approved by the school system. One would involve law enforcement and parents or siblings who have lost a loved one talking to students in high school. The other would have a doctor talk to high school students about the adolescent brain and its development.

The task force has been trying to find solutions to prescription drug and other substance abuse by working with various sectors in the community, including parents. They have also worked with business, youth, senior citizens, the medical community, government entities, service providers, schools, faith community, law enforcement, treatment and prevention providers and people in recovery.

A community forum last October showed the need is great, and parents want to get involved and provide advocacy, Kress said.



"Our community has a lot of work to do," Kress said. "But I believe, if we come together and work together and begin to focus and create a strategy, we can really make a difference if we do it together."

*For more information on the community meeting, call Kress at 386-254-1241 or email [vkress@smabehavioral.org](mailto:vkress@smabehavioral.org). Organizers hope to get confirmation from those planning to attend.*

---

© 2011 The Daytona Beach News-Journal.