

## Public 'Truth About Heroin' at Fort High School Jan. 27

By Ryan Whisner Union regional editor | Posted: Tuesday, January 13, 2015 9:14 am

To continue raising awareness about heroin addiction and the vices that lead to it, the Jefferson County Drug Task Force has established a set of educational seminars for students and parents.

Presented in conjunction with other area law enforcement agencies, "The Truth About Heroin: An Evening of Information and Solutions" is slated to be held at the Fort Atkinson High School auditorium later this month.

"What we're trying to do is educate the kids, before they go off to college or before they go out on their own, about the dangers of heroin and how it can impact their lives," said Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Detective Sgt. Margareta Gray of the Jefferson County Drug Task Force.

Gray said "The Truth About Heroin" is a two-part program, with one part intended for parents and the other for the students. The public and parents' program is set for 6 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 27. A presentation will be made to the student body at the school on Monday, Jan. 26.

For parents, the program is an education on the signs to look for, so if they start seeing indicators a child might be going down the wrong road, they can intervene.

"There have been way too many times, throughout my career and with this recent heroin issue, that parents are saying, 'if I would have known'; 'I didn't know what to look for,'" Gray said. "That kind of goes for all drugs."

She noted that the program isn't just for parents of high school students. Rather, it is open to everybody.

Should the auditorium be filled to capacity, the commons will be set up with television screens playing a live feed of the program.

The task force made a similar presentation at Johnson Creek High School in December. Additional arrangements are in the works to make presentations at other Jefferson County-area high schools, including Jefferson, Lake Mills and Watertown.

In general, the parent and student presentations will be held either on the same day or back-to-back so students have an opportunity to talk with their parents about heroin and vice versa.

"It is basically the same overall message," Gray said, noting that the public program will offer a greater opportunity to have questions answered.

The program was developed as the Jefferson County Drug Task Force began working with Drug Abuse Resistance Education or DARE program officers from Watertown, Lake Mills and Fort Atkinson, as well as the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Police Services.

In addition to Gray, participants include Lake Mills Officer Troy Oestreich, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Police Services Detective Cal Servi, Fort Atkinson Police Officer Dan Hefty, Watertown Police Officer Stacy Schroeder and Watertown Police Capt. Curtis Kleppin.

Kicking off the presentation, Gray said, will be a video focusing on the importance of the decisions one makes that affect one's life.

Then Gray will talk about heroin, followed by what she defined as the "impact speakers," Melanie Crandall and Tyler Lydert.

Crandall, of Jefferson, will recall the September 2012 death of her daughter, Alexis Schoeffling, who was 17 when she died as a result of an acute intoxication due to the combined effects of alprazolam (Xanax) and heroin.

Lybert, 27, will share his story of being a drug addict.

He reportedly started using drugs and alcohol in sixth grade and was a full-fledged drug addict by 17. Lybert describes himself as a monster who destroyed his family simply to make friends with people at school.

Gray said she views the presentations as a continued effort to educate the public about the increased prevalence of the heroin in the county.

Jefferson County is following a state and nationwide trend, largely due to the rising difficulty of illegally obtaining prescription opiate painkillers driving more addicts to its sister drug, heroin.

After using the opiate drugs — often for legitimate injuries — people can find themselves addicted. When the prescription painkillers dry up, addicts seek other sources that give them that opiate high.

Gray said the heroin found in Wisconsin typically comes from South America or Central America, traveling through Mexico to Chicago and Milwaukee and then spreading from those epicenters across the area.

"The big metropolitan areas are the suppliers to the smaller rural areas," Gray said.

Depending on the location in Jefferson County, the heroin comes from Madison, Milwaukee, Rockford and, in some rare cases, even Chicago.

Numerous high-profile crimes, including robberies and burglaries in 2013, were linked to heroin or other drugs. Two heroin-related overdose deaths in 2012 led to homicide charges in Jefferson County.

More than once, Gray said, heroin use has been linked to strong-armed robberies within Jefferson County involving banks and incidents at gas stations and other locations. Those include robberies at Badger Bank's Fort Atkinson and Jefferson locations and residential break-ins in Johnson Creek.

This year, there already have been four or five incidents of opiate-related overdoses in which investigations still are pending.

"We want to get out there and educate the public," Gray said. "In order to combat heroin, it is going to take more than just enforcement. It is going to take education and treatment."