

Dramatic video leads new awareness campaign aimed a heroin epidemic

Grant Bissell, KSDK 6:09 PM, CST January 10, 2017



In 2016 the St. Charles County Ambulance District responded to more than 400 heroin and prescription drug overdose calls. That was a drastic jump from 2015.

The heroin epidemic is reaching all corners of our area. But now there's a new awareness campaign aimed at stopping overdose deaths and it'll be featured at Fort Zumwalt East High School on January 25th from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Leaders of the campaign include paramedics, law enforcement officers and parents who've lost children to overdoses. They say the new strategy will open people's eyes to a problem that's killing hundreds of people in our area each year.

The campaign includes a dramatic video by the St. Charles County Ambulance District that features the use of a real 911 call from a desperate mother about her son's heroin overdose. The video transitions to a reenactment by paramedics of the response to that call. In the end, the victim dies in the arms of his mother.

Organizers say the video will help save lives through its raw message.

"We wanted to show the public through our eyes what we see and what we go through every day when we have to run these calls," said St. Charles County Ambulance District Paramedic Lisa Cassidy. "It's taxing on the system, it's especially taxing on the families of those overdose victims and we're having to tell parents their children are dead. So, it's taxing on us as people, too."

Terry Reynolds is a member of the ambulance district's board. She lost her stepson, John, to an overdose in 2009.

"Losing a child is the worst possible tragedy that you can have in your life," said Reynolds.

She's supported the new awareness campaign in the hopes it'll make an impact on kids and parents alike.

"That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to save our live out there."

Gee Vigna's daughter, Nicky, died of a heroin overdose in 2013. Since then Vigna's started Walking for Wellness – Stop Heroin, an organization dedicated to raising awareness of the heroin and prescription drug epidemic that claimed more than 600 lives in the St. Louis area in 2016.

Vigna says the awareness campaign will make a difference.

"No family is exempt from this. No child is exempt from being exposed to this," said Vigna. "Being proactive is 1,000 times less painful than being reactive."

The event is open to everyone, but organizers say the presentation may be too much for children younger than middle school age. Free childcare will be available for families with small children.