



Local advocate encouraged by recent discussions by county leadership on opioid addiction

Sharon Myers



Mike Loomis, founder of Race Against Drugs, is having one of the best weeks of his life four years after the worst day of his life.

Loomis and his wife lost their son, James, to fentanyl poisoning in April 2021. Since that day, they have been channeling their pain, anger and frustration into educating people on the dangers of opioid addiction, supporting those in need of recovery and advocating for public access of naloxone, otherwise known as Narcan.

Loomis has been an ever-present fixture at the Davidson County Opioid Settlement Funds committee, the Davidson County Board of Commissioners, the Davidson County Board of Education meetings and other events. He has been vocal about the need for access to Narcan in the community, including in the schools.

He says it has been an uphill battle, but this week he feels he has made some significant progress with county leadership.

"It's about time the county commissioners, the schools and the community have come together to provide this life-saving cog in saving lives," said Loomis.

On Monday, the Davidson County Schools Board of Education approved a new policy for the use of naloxone in emergency situations to prevent opioid overdose death. The proposed policy states each school in the district should have an adequate supply stored in a secure, yet accessible location. The policy includes training one or more employee at each school as part of the medical care program in the emergency use of Narcan.

"I would like to thank the superintendent and the school board for considering this policy," said Loomis. "This is only one cog in saving a life in Davidson County. Right now, we are at around 480 people in Davidson County who have died because of fentanyl. The highest growing number of deaths are from 14- to 17-year-olds; these are your students, these are your children."

This policy will be under review for the next 30 days before final approval by the Davidson County Schools Board of Education.

Narcan has been approved by the Federal Drug Administration as safe to use for the life-saving application during a suspected opioid overdose and can be administered to anyone regardless of their age.

On Thursday, the Davidson County Board of Commissioners continued their discussion on using opioid settlement funds for supporting school programs and whether to hire a full-time coordinator to oversee the use of the opioid settlement funds.

The commissioners heard from Davidson County Schools Superintendent Dr. Gregg Slate about the pending Narcan policy, as well as other potential early prevention programs through the schools.

Slate said the schools are working on developing a sustainable and vetted medical source to supply Narcan, as well as, estimating costs of training. He said the district has also considered parent and caregiver education, opioid awareness and prevention programming for students, as well as professional development for staff.

"We looked a variety of different things, from the front end and the back end," said Slate. "We've already started the conversation...We are trying to be on the forefront of this as far as school districts go because I think it is important."

The commissioners voiced strong support of the new Narcan policy and asked Slate to bring back a proposal on using opioid settlement funds to purchase supplies and training staff on its use.

Due to a scheduling conflict, the superintendents from Lexington City Schools and Thomasville City Schools, could not participate in the discussion on Thursday, but are scheduled to appear at a county commissioner meeting in September.

Davidson County Manager Casey Smith said there were not a whole lot of options in the state for consultants specifically for management of opioid settlement funds, but there was a group in Asheville, the Mount Area Health Education Center, that did offer training and development of impact strategies.

The commissioners decided they would like to hear more information from the MAHEC in a future meeting before making any further decision on deciding on whether to hire a full-time coordinator or use of consultation services.

Loomis says he supports the hiring of a coordinator rather than a consultant.

"They have enough money in the (opioid settlement fund) to hire a legitimate manager. Commissioners may come and go, but a full-time coordinator will know everyone involved and what is needed for this community," said Loomis.

To cap off this week of encouraging progress in the fight against opioid addiction, Race Against Drugs will be holding a special event on Saturday.

A Day of Recovery will be on Aug. 9 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Breeden Insurance Amphitheater in Lexington.

The annual event includes representation from local law enforcement, the Davidson County District Attorney's Office, Daymark Recovery Services, Davidson County Medical Ministries, Davidson County Emergency Services, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, Atrium Wake Forest Baptist Health, Goodwill Industries, several local churches and other non-profit organizations.

It will also include live entertainment, food trucks, play area for kids, games and door-prizes.

Loomis said he is thankful for all the support of those involved in the Day of Recovery, the county commissioners and the Davidson County Schools. He said he is encouraged with the progress made towards opioid awareness and prevention, but he has no plans to stop advocating for those touched by fentanyl addiction.

"I don't want to be a pain in the ass to people, but I will to save a life," said Loomis.

mike loomis, race against drugs



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Sharon Myers is a life-long resident of Davidson County and a graduate of Lexington Senior High School. She received her bachelor's degree in journalism from East Carolina University. Myers has over 15 years of journalism experience, including the past 12 years covering local government, education, crime and breaking news. She lives in Lexington and is married with two children