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Heroin: One Darien story

Think Darien doesn't have a heroin problem? Think again.

By Susan Shultz on February 25, 2016 in [A Question of Etiquette](#), [Latest News](#), [Lead News](#), [Lead News](#) · 0 Comments



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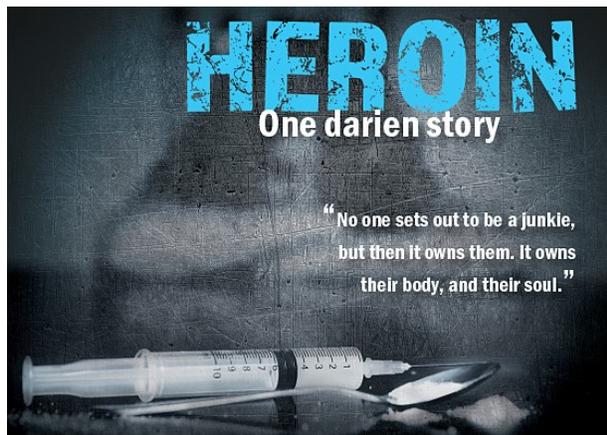


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Darien Times illustrations by Bryan Haeffele

The first time Mark overdosed was at a friend's house.

"I laid back in her bed and the next thing I knew there were 20 firemen over me on the floor. I flatlined for about five minutes," Mark, a Darien resident in his 20s, said.

Mark agreed to use an alias to talk to The Darien Times about his real experiences with addiction.

He was treated with [Naloxone \(Narcan\)](#), an opioid (narcotic) antagonist that may reverse central nervous system and respiratory depression secondary to an overdose of opioids such as heroin, and taken to the hospital for observation. Following the observation, Mark said he was free to go with no further discussion.

The second time he overdosed, he'd just arrived from rehab. He overdosed in his car, and again, next thing he was aware of were firemen over him. Narcan, again, saved his life.

"Thank God for that stuff," Mark said.

"If it wasn't for that," he added, "I wouldn't be here talking to you right now."

[Read all of our heroin coverage here.](#)

For those in town who don't believe heroin and other substances are a town problem, Mark can confirm it exists — because he has it.



Not even literally dying twice was enough to stop his craving for heroin. And he's not alone.

According to WhiteHouse.gov, as of the late 2000s, Connecticut is one of the top 10 states for dependence on illicit drugs from age 18 to 25. As a direct consequence of drug use, 444 people died in Connecticut in 2007. This is compared to the number of deaths in Connecticut due to motor vehicle accidents (309) and firearms (149) in the same year.

Heroin the signs of addiction

- Disconnection from family
- Not socializing as much — staying in a lot more.
- Socializing with a new set of friends
- Rapid change in grades
- Extreme change in a personality.
- Expensive items missing from their own home or other's homes



Heroin has rapidly gone to the forefront of Connecticut and other New England states as a growing problem. Recently, Dr. John Douglas of New Canaan's Silver Hill Hospital spoke as part of a "Lifting the Veil" program at The Depot.

Douglas explained that drug overdose is now the leading cause of injury-related death in the United States for adults between the ages of 35 and 54. Overdosing is common among heroin users, explained Douglas. He explained heroin creates a physical dependence within four to seven days of first use. Users quickly develop a tolerance.

This was Mark's story.

He started with just sniffing heroin — he told himself he'd never use a needle.

But then he got hooked.

Once Mark tried the needle once, "sniffing didn't cut it anymore."

In order to achieve the high Mark sought, sniffing took 10 bags of heroin as opposed to two with the needle.

"I did it wherever, every day. I was bad," he said.

It's so addictive "it happens in the blink of an eye," Mark says.

"It really does. Don't try it," he said.

Recently a friend of Mark's did not take his cautionary advice and tried heroin.

"He started with one or two bags, and then it was three bags a day in the matter of a month," Mark said.

The addiction is driving by the need for the high and the need to not feel sick when you don't get your fix, Mark said.

This is what leads to committing crimes such as stealing to get the money needed to support the habit.

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Mark said he did a lot of things he wouldn't have normally done while he was hooked.

That goes along with what Sgt. Jeremiah Marron said has been the experience of The Darien Police.

While it is tough to compare statistics to determine whether or not Darien has a bigger heroin problem than its neighbors, given the size and demographics of Stamford and Norwalk, Marron said, "opiate addiction can be attributed to most of the crimes and cases we are dealing with."

And it isn't just heroin. Mark said when he attended Darien High School in the mid-2000s, cocaine use was prevalent on the campus. Not in the classrooms, but the free periods and when students were able to go to their cars during the day.

Marron said Darien Police have not proven that to be the case but always hear rumors.

"We're fighting the heroin and pill problem — we're very aware there's a prescription pill problem," he said. Marron also pointed out the problem appears to be New England-wide and there hasn't appeared to be any statistical reason why the problem is worse in that region.

Part of the heroin problem is the abuse of prescription medications, both he and Depot youth center program director Janice Marzano said.

"A lot of the kids doing prescription drugs don't realize how close they are to becoming a heroin addict," Marron said.

Marzano, the Depot and Darien Police have tried to continue to raise awareness with programs for the community. While Marzano said she thinks people in Darien are "starting to understand," she thinks they still are not convinced that it's a problem among Darien High School students.

"They seem interested in but not really worried," she said.

"Most kids start with Adderall — they like it because it helps them to study. Then it keeps them up so they can't sleep. They take Xanax or Percocet or Oxycodone. And then they start the cycle because those are a nice high," she said.

"They go to heroin because it's cheaper. They think they can smoke it or snort it because they aren't shooting," Marzano said.

That, she said, is their mistake.

"The first time you do heroin it is the best high you will ever have. But you will never have that high again," Marzano said. Chasing that high is what fuels the addiction.

To compare, according to drugs.com, 100 Percocet tablets costs more than \$1,000. But that's not how kids are buying them — since a prescription is needed. They're buying them from secondhand sources or finding them in their medicine cabinets.

A bag of heroin is \$20 a bag, a bundle (10 bags) can cost \$110 to \$150. A gram of cocaine can cost \$60 to \$80. Cost isn't that much of a factor in some cases, Mark said, because often Darien kids have an "endless supply of money" due to an affluent population.

Mark said anyone who doesn't think it's a problem in Darien is "fooling themselves."

"It is a problem and it is here," Mark said. "And it is bad."

He said he's lost 10 to 15 friends in the area to heroin overdoses.

Out of the average 10 students at Darien High during his time there, he estimated that six to seven were smoking pot and about five out of 10 were using cocaine. And since beginning to use heroin, he said he found a lot more than he thought were doing the same.

Where do they get it? Mark said he went to the Bronx for his heroin, but he said finding the fix is easy for Darien kids. They can go to Norwalk or Stamford, or ask a friend of a friend with a connection.



Both times Mark left the hospital after an overdose, he said, he didn't receive any intervention or information on rehabilitative programs.

Marron said he thought providing such information would be helpful even if it helped "one kid." Police try to do what they can, Marron said, but often, once an overdose victim is taken to the hospital they are now out of the system, and often, police aren't called at all.

Mark's advice to parents is to watch their children's behavior. Rapid changes can indicate a problem.

"A lot of parents think, no, not my baby," Mark said, adding that's a mistake.

Another deterrent is to get rid of excess medications that might be in demand around the house.

The lobby of Darien Police Headquarters is open to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week and includes a medication drop-off box.

Discarded medications are processed as "abandoned property" and safely incinerated. They can be dropped off free with no questions asked and no forms to fill out! No needles are accepted. .

For those considering trying heroin, Mark's advice is strong — "Don't do it."

And for those who feel caught in the cycle, Mark urges them to reach out to their parents, ask for help. He said there are many types of treatment and he's "tried everything"

Methadone seems to have been his most effective treatment — one he has taken six days a week for two months. Today, Mark says he feels stronger.

"I feel better than I was," Mark said. "Waking up sick every day is not a life. Eventually people get sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Marzano, who knows Mark, said she's been through every step of his journey with him. She agrees that addiction happens quickly.

"None of them set out to be a junkie but then it owns them," Marzano said. "It then owns their body and soul," she said.

For more information, contact facilities such as Silver Hill Hospital at 866-542-4455, Yale New Haven Hospital Substance Abuse Treatment at 203-974-5777 and Four Winds Hospital in Katonah at 1-914-763-8151.

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