

# It takes a village to fight addiction

**H**eroin is no longer a rich kid's drug. The relatively inexpensive nature and increased potency of the narcotic has made heroin easier to obtain, leading to lethal consequences for many in our community.

After a brief fall-off in deaths by heroin overdose in 2011 to 2012, there has been an upsurge in those deaths among young people in their late teens and 20s. Tragically, 10 people died from the drug last year in Fauquier County and several more have succumbed this year.

We're told the epidemic is statewide, with deaths from heroin and painkiller overdoses now exceeding those by automobile accidents. Opiate overdoses killed 728 people in 2014, according to state data.

In the last five years, fatal overdoses have increased by 57 percent, killing nearly 3,000 Virginians.

Recently, a 34-year-old Warrenton man was arrested and charged with several felonies, including distribution of heroin, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon and second degree murder.

The murder charge stems from the heroin overdose of a 27-year-old man to whom the accused allegedly sold heroin.

On A1, we recount two Fauquier parents' struggles dealing with the heroin addiction of their children. One mother's daughter died from her addiction to the drug earlier this year, while another mother of young man tries to find ways to save her son's life.

For many families, the scourge of drug addiction is a non-stop nightmare, leaving many feeling powerless to fight a battle for which they are ill-equipped.

An addicted child will lie, steal, run away from home, abandon family and friends for the sake of those who supply the needed narcotic.

It often seems that nothing can be done to deter an individual headed in that direction. They're often deaf to counsel, blind to the consequences of their choices.

They travel down a path that leads to jail, endless rounds of rehab and relapse, and often death.

Some break the cycle, get help for their addictions and go on to lead productive, if scarred lives. Many do not.

Unfortunately, for many families the court system seems to be a meat grinder more interested in disposing of cases than seeking solutions to the drug and alcohol addictions that fuel so much crime, particularly among young people.

Public defenders, for their part, are overworked and under-resourced. While they valiantly represent their charges, most of the time that representation becomes little more than hand-holding while the heavy hand of justice is meted out.

Judges find their hands tied by sentencing guidelines that weigh more toward incarceration than counseling. And, admittedly, counseling is a fruitless task for an individual unwilling to see his or her need.

So where does that leaves us? We'd like to see a community-wide effort to develop the mental health and counseling tools to reach young people both before they become exposed to narcotics and to intervene once they have.

A combined effort by the school system, starting in middle school, the Sheriff's Office, the mental health system and other community resources is needed. Not all of our young people are at risk. Most are not.

But for those who are, the crisis is at hand. Too many become ensnared by drugs, some as young as middle school. By the time they reach high school, drop out and end up in jail, it's almost too late.

Let's reach them before they get that far.

# Public defenders are spread thin

**T**he Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees to all citizens the right to a fair trial.

In particular the amendment provides the right to “a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury... to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defence.”

That last phrase, “the assistance of counsel,” is especially important for individuals of limited financial means who have been charged with crimes.

But it wasn't until a 1963 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Gideon v. Wainwright* that the court determined that criminal defendants unable to afford a lawyer are entitled to court-appointed, or government-funded defense.

Fauquier County's Public Defenders office bears a tremendous case load of individuals accused of crimes who cannot afford the cost of a private attorney.

The Fauquier office is part of a district that includes Loudoun and Rappahannock counties. The lion's share of the caseload among the three counties is from Loudoun, where 10 public defenders represent 4,356 clients charged with 6,746 criminal offenses.

Fauquier and Rappahannock's three public defenders handle between 300 to 400 cases a year, or roughly 100 per attorney.

The Fauquier Public Defenders Office has been funded for five attorneys, but currently is staffed with only three. Many start careers, gain experience and leave for higher pay.

And that is unfortunate.

Particularly for their clients, who have no means to hire private attorneys who carry much lighter workloads — and can devote more time to their clients' cases.

We're told it's not unusual for an individual's public defender to arrive in court with a client, having to hastily read up on the case while standing before the judge.

Maybe not all defendants need an elaborate defense, and again, perhaps the system is providing an adequate defense, but we wonder if a possibly underfunded office staffed by overworked, underpaid attorneys can give defendants what they need.

There's a temptation to assume that individuals ending up in the maul of the criminal justice system deserve to be there.

Just today we published the Fauquier County grand jury indictments of 38 individuals (representing 15 drug-related charges, among others).

How many of those offenses are for drug dealers? How many are for addicts caught with their drug of choice, or who sell narcotics to fund their own addictions?

How many of these deserve to go to jail and for a long time? How many would be better served by receiving intensive rehabilitation treatments for drug addictions and their underlying causes?

And for those whose addictions fuel their crimes, are we providing alternatives to incarceration that would eventually help them become productive members of society?

We don't know the answer to those questions. And we believe our county's public defenders are doing the best they can under the circumstances.

But perhaps it's time to take a look at our local justice system to see if its serving our community in the best way possible.

# Virginians disarmed

**V**a. Attorney General Mark Herring last week unilaterally disarmed law abiding Virginians. On Dec. 23, he said the Commonwealth will no longer honor reciprocity agreements with other states that issue concealed-carry permits to handgun owners.

That means residents of 25 states can no longer legally carry their weapons in the Commonwealth. The decision also means that Virginians visiting those states will likely lose their ability to protect themselves and their families.

AG Herring squeaked into office in 2013 with a mere 165-vote margin out of more than 2.2 million votes cast.

Moments after swearing to uphold the Constitution of Virginia, he declared he would not defend that Constitution's amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

Regardless of one's position on that particular issue, it's worth noting that the Virginia marriage amendment passed by an overwhelming majority of Virginia voters.

Had Herring campaigned on revoking the amendment, former Senator Mark Obenshain would likely be attorney general today.

Similarly, had he campaigned on a platform of restricting Virginians' Second Amendment rights, he would be elsewhere employed now.

Last fall, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg dumped more than \$2 million into Virginia races in an effort to wrest control away from the pro-Second Amendment Republican majority.

Virginian voters recognized that effort for what it was — an attempt to quash our rights — and soundly defeated Bloomberg-backed gun control advocates.

Now along comes AG Herring, who unilaterally decided the Commonwealth will no longer recognize concealed-carry permits issued by 25 other states.

Outgoing Cedar Run District Supervisor Lee Sherbeyn, who himself often carries a pistol, called the move "another example how our Democrat leaders in Virginia think it is OK to make or change the laws as they see fit."

According to General Assembly Speaker William J. Howell, Herring "consistently seeks to interpret and apply the law of the Commonwealth through the lens of his own personal, political opinions."

Del. Rob Bell called the move "another Washington-style overreach from a nakedly partisan Attorney General."

Make no mistake, this decision will have zero impact on crime. There is no evidence that concealed-carry permit holders from other states come here to commit crimes.

Fauquier Del. Scott Lingamfelter asked the Virginia State Police about crimes committed by out-of-state concealed-carry permit holders.

"They have no data on crimes committed by in-state or out-of-state CWP holders," Lingamfelter told us. "What are we stopping?"

Like Virginia, most states require permit holders to pass background checks, receive firearms training and demonstrate a level of marksmanship.

For instance, Minnesota, one of the states targeted by the AG's order, requires eight hours of training, range qualification, and the normal background checks for a five-year concealed-carry permit. The differences between the two states is miniscule.

If the AG is truly concerned about the safety of Virginians, rather than simply burnishing his reputation among the fevered swamps of leftist imagination, perhaps he could work with other states to bring about uniformity in concealed carry requirements.

Better yet, why not push for national concealed carry reciprocity standards applicable to all states.

So if you're worried about losing the ability to peacefully and lawfully carry a weapon beyond the state line, urge your state legislators to roll back the AG's partisan attack on your rights when the General Assembly meets early next year.