



**Our Mission is to "Engage Wallingford's community resources to produce healthy, caring, and responsible citizens by raising awareness and reducing substance abuse among our youth."**

It is so appropriate that we take time on this day, Valentine's Day to share a special message:

It was only a short 3 years ago, 3 long years that a strong, loud, courageous mother stood up in her grief and confusion to rally this town to action. We were quietly losing a generation of citizens to an insidious disease- hopelessness. The death count astonishing, if not remarkable - 53 in three years, all due to some type of substance overdose. Jen's daughter, Taylor was one of them, 80% were under 25 years old.

The call was simple- Why isn't anyone talking about this? Why are we denying such a devastating reality? And, why aren't we doing anything about it? Is this the legacy we wanted for our community, for each of those precious lives ended far too soon? The names and families were real- Taylor, Craig, Jen, George, Brittany, Carlos, and on and on... The pain was paralyzing. Some were being saved within a breath of death by a drug we didn't know existed, and is quickly becoming a staple in our society, NARCAN... but ours weren't that lucky.

Almost immediately, people began to meet and talk. Soon the meetings took on a name- Coalition for a Better Wallingford. Our local government, however cautious they were, seemed at least to be open to the idea that Wallingford needed to grieve. Everyone was sympathetic, yet the word 'heroin' was still taboo and generally most were of the opinion that the grieving would happen and we could all go back to our lives.

As discussions went on, and communities and leaders across the country confirmed what we already knew, it was obvious that this problem was deeper than any of us realized.

Wallingford has owned the problem and sought solutions at every corner of the community. By way of example;

- The Board of Education recently approved and administered with the support of Youth and Social Services our second Risk Behaviors Survey to both high schools
- The Hope and Support Group for families and friends of substance abusers is now in its third year and continues to bring needed resources to those folks
- A website tracks and displays all town events and advocacy activities- CBWLFD.org
- There now exists a town-wide commission created to review and create appropriate health needs assessments and compile resources and recommendations for our town, called the Wallingford Health Improvement Plan (WHIP, for short)
- A group of parents have formed a sub-committee of district-wide PTAC to counter under aged drinking

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- Ulbrich Boys and Girls Club is addressing the teen population needs through activity nights and a newly charged mentoring program
- SCOW's Children and Youth Program Coordinator, Adriana Rodriguez shines through her programs that bring love and support for dozens of youth
- Wallingford Police Department started a dragnet to curb the doctor shopping of opioid prescriptions that led to both local and regional control of this illegal activity
- Just this week the Wallingford Police Department asked for and received funding for a police dog to be added to their roster- and a citizen stepped up and provided the necessary funds!!

Other organizations and individuals have also begun to contribute to this new legacy of love and support- too many to mention here. There is hope in Wallingford. This is a good and strong community that has begun the process of creating a new and bright future for our youth and this town. We have only started this movement, but it is extraordinary how many people have begun to step up, own this condition, and support the hard work of change. We all own a little piece of this, what's yours?

A special thank you to everyone who has contributed in any way to supporting these efforts! If you have an interest in joining us, you can contact us through the website or come to a meeting.

Wallingford, Happy Valentine's Day!!

Ken Welch, President  
Coalition for a Better Wallingford  
CBWLFD.ORG