

# Community members look to stamp out drug problem in York Region

By Jake Courtepatte

The York Region community came together under one roof at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex in Newmarket this month, and not to discuss matters of hockey.

About sixty concerned citizens showed up to begin the first stages of implementing a municipal drug strategy, the first of its kind in the Region.

Tim Greenwood, organizer of the movement, who works with the JVS Youth Reach program in York Region, put matters into perspective, comparing the community as a whole with an individual facing their own demons.

"Part of solving a problem is admitting that you have a problem," said Greenwood. "That's the point that York Region is at."

With no current Municipal Drug Strategy (MDS) in place, the Region is looking elsewhere for groundwork they can build upon at a local level.

Susan Shepherd, part of the secretariat for the Toronto Drug Strategy, was at the Newmarket session to outline the basis of a successful campaign against drug abuse.

"We're all members of the community," she said. "We all have a role to play. None of you are starting from scratch on this—everyone has a foundation, and you built upon it by being here today."

Four "pillars" constitute Toronto's strategy; prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement.

Although the four pillars form the foundation of the problem-solving method, Greenwood stressed the importance of community involvement in getting the project off the ground.

"The four pillars are like a temple. But with any good temple, there needs to be a spirit, an energy."

Shepherd echoed Greenwood's thoughts.

"We have school boards, public health, police services, etc., all dealing with the problem of drug abuse themselves. MDS's bring together these people that would otherwise not collaborate together on an issue."

And collaboration does not necessarily mean education. According to Shepherd, prevention goes well beyond simply the knowledge of the dangers of drug abuse.

Instead, what has been effective for the City of Toronto is the implementation of policies, mentoring programs, and harm reduction services such as needle programs.

In the local community, these structural changes must come from the top down.

"Political leadership is really critical in driving this work," said Shepherd. "Because those are the folks that can be those champions. People listen to them, they can drive change."

As a full-time employee of the City of Toronto, Shepherd explained the importance of an internal representative tasked solely with the implementation of the strategy.

"You really need a dedicated person where this is their job. You need someone that those in the community know to go to."

While some might point out the difference in size and population between Toronto and York Region, the area is certainly not without its drug issues. In 2008, York Regional Police busted 64 grow-ups while laying 501 charges for drug manufacturing and trafficking.

But with a population slightly half of that of Toronto, the Region will have to implement its own methods and coping strategies moving forward ? or at the very least, rework those of Toronto to represent a smaller, more local community.

?It must reflect a local context,? said Shepherd. ?Every community's different, with different dynamics.?

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