



February 27, 2018

League of Women Voters of the Prince William Area

PSA: Presentation and Discussion on the Opioid Epidemic

The statistics were shocking – over 64,000 Americans killed by drug overdoses in 2016, with that number more than doubling by 2018 (Nat. Center for Health Statistics). The reality of the pain, grief, and death suffered by individual opioid addicts, however, deeply affected the audience for the “Chasing the Dragon: the Life of an Opiate Addict”. The documentary was presented in Gainesville on Saturday, Feb. 24th, by the League of Women Voters of the Prince William Area, which plans another public education showing on March 24th in Woodbridge. Produced by the FBI in association with the Drug Enforcement Administration, the film combined sobering facts with the unfiltered testimony of addicts.

Teenaged victims of opiates, one of whom later overdosed and died, told how easy it was to become addicted, soon needing large doses of opiates just to feel “normal.” Adults spoke, some from jails, of their personal misery trying to support a habit that can often start with just one or two oxycodone pills, prescribed by a doctor. The emotions and, sometimes, the language were raw, as teenagers, parents, and drug professionals told their own stories in their own words, helping to bring already alarming drug statistics to life. As early as 2014, there were more deaths in Virginia from opioid addiction than from car accidents (Va. Dept. of Health), leading to opioid addiction being declared a public health emergency in Virginia in November, 2016.

Helping participants to understand the increasing crisis of opioids and to lead the discussion following the film were two health professionals who shared their experiences working with opioid addicts in the Prince William Area. Heather Martinsen is the Behavioral Health Wellness Supervisor, PWC Community Services-New Horizons Program Facilitator, the Prevention Alliance of Greater Prince William County. Chrissy Fauls founded the “It Takes a Village to Raise a Child, We’re Bringing that Village Back” and “WHY? Our Kids are WHY!” Both speakers will again lead the discussion following the March 24th League of Women Voters showing of the documentary, and the public is urged to attend and participate.

The League of Women Voters sponsors educational events throughout the year to help inform citizens of important issues that affect them and to increase their individual involvement with all levels of government. It is non-partisan, never supporting a candidate or political party, and is dedicated to educating the public on issues that affect them. The repeat program, including the showing of “Chasing the Dragon” and the ensuing discussion will be held Mar. 24, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Bungalow Ale House, 2840 Prince William Parkway, Woodbridge, VA, 22192. Attendees will have the option of staying for lunch after the program. Seating is somewhat limited, however, so please RSVP to lklebelarsen@comcast.net.

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