

# Heroin and our kids

On Aug. 15, a 16-year-old Cumming boy died of a heroin overdose in his house. Police don't know who supplied the drugs. Friends and family, no doubt, are devastated and mourn an unimaginable loss.

This is a story that is near and dear to my heart. It's about my 21-year-old son's heroin addiction. It's also a story of how suburban families are alone in a battle that is not discussed in the PTA, classroom, town-hall meeting or board room. This is the elephant in the room:

Heroin and our kids.

As a 20-year resident of Alpharetta, I knew my family would thrive in our cul-de-sac suburb. I knew raising my kids in this area would give them the jump start needed to create a life. What I didn't know were the dangers that lurked in my children's schools and their friends' homes. What I didn't know was that Roxy's, Xanax and Oxycodone were their drugs of choice. What I didn't know was that all are gateway drugs to heroin.

When you first begin to realize your child is an addict, you go through stages: fear, anger and denial are constant companions. Your greatest fear, besides death, is that your child will eventually get arrested and caught up in the criminal justice system with little or no hope of finding the help he needs. You and your child are on a path to a personal hell. It's like trying to single-handedly stop a speeding train.

Of course I knew about "Just Say No," "Red Ribbon Week" and the well-intentioned activities and programs that deal with substance abuse. What I didn't know was that when I discovered my child heading down the wrong path, there would be no support or place for help. I learned I would be alone.

Searching the Internet turned up expensive and sometimes untrustworthy options. I became so frustrated I decided a meeting with community leaders was the answer. I found out they were unaware of the heroin issues in our community and were unable to offer any solutions.

Our community leaders, school principals and public safety officials are unaware of the magnitude of this issue. We are losing our children to drugs at an alarming rate; the suburbs are the new battleground.

By telling my family's story, I have become a go-to person for fearful parents in hopes I have the answers they need to save their children. I don't. But I do know we need more support for families, better resources and a safe house for children.

Just ask the mother of an addicted child what she needs and she will tell you she simply needs help.