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Brian J. Hunt, who lost a son to heroin addiction in 2014, said "The child you have that has an addiction is not the child you know."



Susan M. Hudec, Ph.D., Archdiocesan Drugs and Alcohol Prevention Program, said she has lost someone close to her from drug addiction.



James J. Hasson told those assembled at the drug forum at Wagner College that he's been a recovering addict for 26 years.

GRYMES HILL

'Drugs took everything from me'

Community forum at Wagner College seeks solutions to scourge

By Ryan Lavis

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The difficult questions surrounding Staten Island's drug crisis were addressed Wednesday night during a community forum.

The event, titled "Staten Island's Drug Crisis: A Community Conversation," drew concerned residents to Wagner College to discuss solutions to the scourge of drug abuse in the borough.

Kevin Parker, whose leg had to be amputated as a result of overdosing, shared his painful journey

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Panelist for the drug forum at Wagner College include Donna Marie Holden, Kevin Parker and Amanda Wexler. (STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/HILTON FLORES)

Drugs

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— how he got hooked on heroin, how it devastated his life, and how he's faring on the road to recovery.

Amanda Wexler, interim executive director of the YMCA Counseling Service, shared her expertise on the impact of the drug crisis on the Island and what treatment options are available in the borough.

Donna Marie Holden, whose nephew Brandon Holden died in July of a heroin overdose, also shared her family's painful story.

The three panelists captivated the audience with their stories of survival and tragedy.

Parker said he was in a coma for three weeks after he overdosed.

Doctors thought he wouldn't survive and told his family to start making funeral arrangements before he finally woke up.

"At the darkest hour, I just woke up," Parker said.

"Drugs took everything from me," he added.

Still, he said that people should always seek help.

"No matter how far down this road you seem ... know there's always a way to turn things around and start over. If I could save one life ... then this is all worth it," he said.

After speaking, the

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Brian Hunt, who lost a son to addiction

three panelists answered questions.

When asked whether a person needs to hit rock bottom before they can finally be motivated to seek help, Parker said, unfortunately, that's what it typically takes.

"You can't decide for them because in the end they have to go through the suffering and pain of going through withdrawal," he said.

Brian Hunt, who lost his son Adam Hunt, 23, in March 2014, attended the meeting, and said that prevention through education is key to combating the drug epidemic.

Hunt said that parents are often powerless to help their children once drugs take over their life.

"The child you have that has an addiction is not the child you know. That drug is now their parent. The addict needs to be able to say to you, 'I want help,'" Hunt said.

The event was sponsored by the Staten Island Advance and Wagner College.