Safe Point, Bloodborne Infectious Disease Prevention Program

The Zanesville-Muskingum County Health Department operates a syringe exchange program (SSP) called Safe Point, as a means of Harm Reduction.

Harm Reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at mitigating the negative consequences associated with illicit drug use.

The goal is to reduce the transmission of the blood/body fluid borne infectious diseases Hep C, Hep B, and HIV through the use of shared/contaminated needles by People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs).

In the last decade, the majority of new Hep C infections have been the result of injection drug use.

Through SSPs, the local incidence of these diseases is reduced and the innocent of our community are protected from the high risk behaviors of others.

How effective are exchange programs? 1) Over the last 30 years, studies have unequivocally established that SSPs significantly reduce the incidence of HIV, Hep C and Hep B. 2) SSP participants are 5 times more likely to enter treatment and 3 times more likely to reduce their injection frequency than non-participants. 3) SSPs have consistently failed to show any connection to increased drug use. 4) SSPs protect the public and first responders by providing safe needle disposal and reducing the presence of needles in the community. 5) SSPs reduce the risk of needle-stick injury to law enforcement by 66%.

There are 20 other counties in Ohio that currently operate similar harm reduction programs.

Each participant can exchange used syringes, one-for-one, up to 30 per week. The used syringes are properly discarded.

Further, Safe Point is much more than a syringe exchange program.

At every encounter every participant meets with a nurse and a social worker.

Each is assessed for: readiness for treatment and recovery; need for Narcan, alcohol wipes, condoms; vaccination status and interest; free infectious disease screening; and for their Social Determinants of Health (insecurities in food, housing, healthcare, transportation, safety, etc).

Safe Point has been endorsed by the Muskingum County Academy of Medicine which donated $1,000 to initially fund the program in 2017, US Congressman Troy Balderson, and numerous community mental health and substance abuse agencies.

Safe Point is a professional, cost effective and socially responsible means to decrease the incidence of blood-borne infectious diseases, making our community a safer place to live.

Safe Point also decreases costs to the healthcare system in our community, while engaging with and offering positive lifestyle and healthcare services to a population that is too often marginalized, hidden, and who would otherwise not be reached.