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Cover Story
Eat well and prosper...
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Photo courtesy EAC Network

She cares about Long Islanders with disabilities. So she gives.
Did You Know?
The heroin epidemic has gotten so bad on Long Island that Queens District Attorney Richard Brown dubbed the Long Island Expressway the “Heroin Highway.”

Q&A | Collaborating to Tackle LI’s Opioid Epidemic
—— Brian Byrd, New York State Health Foundation Program Officer

How bad is the heroin/opioid epidemic in New York, and where does Long Island fit in?
The heroin/opioid epidemic is an unprecedented public health crisis in both New York State and Long Island. The devastation affects men, women, and children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or class. No region has been spared.
The Long Island statistics are astonishing. From 2009 to 2013, heroin overdoses killed 337 people in Suffolk County—the most in any county in the State. In Nassau, heroin claimed 128 lives. In the past few years, treatment admissions for opioid addiction among Suffolk young adults have increased 242 percent; heroin arrests have risen 32 percent.

Why is this a focus for the NYS Health Foundation?
The NYS Health Foundation is the only New York health funder with a statewide focus. We work as far west as Buffalo, as far north as Watertown, as far south as Staten Island, and as far east as Long Island. The statistics have made it clear the opioid epidemic is growing and pervasive. NYS Health supports a variety of efforts to address it, such as reducing its impact in rural upstate regions and training OB/GYNs to treat addicted mothers.

What needs to be done?
Fighting the opioid epidemic requires the combined efforts and resources of donors, foundations, the government, health providers, and community groups. As a foundation with modest resources, we intend to confront this crisis by leveraging our financial and human assets through partnerships.

How does working with LICF help address the addiction problem?
NYS Health is always looking to support projects on Long Island, and we have a history of collaborating with the Long Island Community Foundation. In addition to co-funding projects, we’ve even held our Board of Directors meeting at LICF’s offices. Working together to fight this epidemic is a natural fit.

Eat well, and prosper, in New Cassel

Nearly 30 percent of Long Islanders are 55 or older, and the Long Island Community Foundation wants to make sure homebound seniors stay active, healthy, and well fed.

Low-income seniors with limited mobility have difficulty getting to the supermarket, much less paying for nutritious food. Of New Cassel’s 14,000 residents, 24 percent live at or below the poverty level, nearly five times the Nassau County rate. With our help, EAC Network in Hempstead is providing door-to-door delivery of fresh produce for these elders with its new Fresh from the Garden Senior Initiative. Besides fresh vegetables and fruits, it offers social interaction, tips on nutrition, cooking lessons and more.

“We are so thankful to LICF for supporting our new initiative,” said Carol O’Neill, Senior Director of Senior & Nutritional Services at EAC Network. “Struggling seniors in New Cassel will finally have a reliable source of fresh, nutritional food.”

From right to left: Lance W. Elder, President & CEO, EAC Network; Carol O’Neill, Senior Director of Senior and Nutritional Services, EAC Network; and David M. Okorn, Executive Director, LICF.
**Confronting the Curse: Long Island’s heroin and opioid battle**

Heroin and opioid addiction has hit many Long Island families and communities hard, and it’s a scourge that shows no signs of slowing down.

Consider these facts:

- On Long Island, treatment admissions for opioid addiction rose 20 percent from 2010 to 2014, with a 242 percent increase in Suffolk County for those ages 18 to 24.
- Addiction counselors report seeing users as young as 12 — many from middle-class families.

From 2009 to 2013, Suffolk County had 337 fatal heroin overdoses, the highest number in New York State; meanwhile, Nassau County had 128 heroin deaths, the state’s fifth-highest toll.

Nassau saw a 32 percent increase in heroin arrests between 2014 and 2015; Suffolk’s heroin arrests are 2.7 times greater than Nassau’s.

These staggering statistics don’t conform to the affluent suburban image we have of Long Island — yet, this is our frightening reality.

Heroin and opioid crisis on Long Island

1. Bob gets back surgery and is prescribed painkillers.
2. The painkillers begin to have no effect on Bob, so he takes more pills than prescribed.
3. Bob runs out of prescription pills, his doctor says he doesn’t need more.
4. Bob steals pills from his family. “Soon, there is no more to steal. He begins to suffer from withdrawal.”
5. Bob’s friend says he has heroin. Bob never thought he would try heroin, but he is so desperate. So he starts using heroin.

Here’s what’s being done: A new State-funded recovery center has opened in Hauppauge to provide a drug- and alcohol-free place for young people and their families to maintain their sobriety. Nassau and Suffolk have joined forces to create a Long Island Heroin Task Force to leverage resources and strengthen drug enforcement to combat the epidemic. Countless local initiatives and organizations are working on drug education and prevention in schools and communities.

In October, LICF organized a briefing for educators, community leaders and experts in the field to discuss how we can fight this raging opioid epidemic.

We’ve also established the Long Island Opioid Crisis Fund, and several other foundations and businesses have agreed to help pay for and explore joint efforts. Through pooled resources and grantmaking, we expect the Fund to plug gaps in services, information and education, and resources.

Our unwavering goal is prevention, intervention, and recovery. The devastating impact the heroin crisis is having on Long Island’s families and neighborhoods has made eliminating it a priority for the Long Island Community Foundation.

*New York’s Suffolk County has the HIGHEST number of overdose deaths involving heroin and prescription opiates.*

**With heroin and opioid abuse becoming a widespread epidemic, Long Island’s top needs are:**

1. Services that function as a bridge from opiate overdose to treatment and recovery
2. Public education about the disease of addiction, treatment options, and resources for family support
3. Medical staff training regarding prescribing opioids, and screening for signs of addiction
4. Stronger integration of addiction treatment and mental health assistance
5. Additional recovery centers
She cares about Long Islanders with disabilities. So she gives.

We’re putting her fund to work with grants to help the hearing and visually impaired communities.

We are honored that Muriel Pless chose the Long Island Community Foundation to do her giving and leave her legacy. You can do the same.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE?

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