

SCCC to boost drug counseling courses

Tuition reduced over next 3 years

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Starting this spring, tuition and books will be cheaper for Suffolk County Community College students interested in studying drug and alcohol counseling.

Thanks to a grant of nearly \$850,000 SCCC has received from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, those breaks will last through 2017 for students enrolled in the college's chemical dependency counseling program.

The program, which is taught at SCCC's Brentwood campus, "prepares students for employment or advancement in the field of chemical dependency counseling." It was one of 18 programs nationwide to receive the grant — and the only one in New York State.

"This grant comes to us at a time when we've seen a record number of heroin deaths on Long Island and drug abuse, sadly, continues to rise," said SCCC president Shaun McKay. "This federal award will allow Suffolk County Community College to train and certify compassionate professionals who will help Long Islanders fight the scourge of chemical and drug dependency."

The federal funds will reduce average tuition for CDC students from about \$5,000 per year to about \$2,000 per year, according to program director Kathy Ayers-Lanzilotta.

Heroin addiction has taken center stage on Long Island over the past year. State leaders passed a series of bills over the summer aimed at tackling the "public health crisis," as Gov. Andrew

Cuomo described the problem.

The 11 bills were designed with four particular goals in mind: assisting enforcement against the illegal trafficking of such drugs, helping with emergency response in overdose situations, implementing insurance reforms to improve treatment options for those suffering from heroin and opioid addiction and creating public awareness campaigns aimed at school-aged children, adults and even prescribers, who are the legal gatekeepers to opioid drugs.

SCCC's grant fits into the third goal.

Students in the CDC program train to become credentialed alcoholism and substance abuse counselor trainees, which prepares them to take the exam required to ultimately become a fully credentialed counselor in New York State.

Locally, East End law enforcement officers — who are often the first to arrive at the scene of a heroin overdose — are now equipped with Narcan, a life-saving drug given to individuals who have overdosed on heroin.

According to data released at the beginning of the year by Dr. Michael Lehrer, chief toxicologist with the county medical examiner's office, heroin-related deaths in Suffolk County increased from 28 in 2010 to 64 in 2011 to 83 in 2012.

The \$847,059 coming to SCCC will enable it to expand the CDC program 70 percent to about 120 students from its current enrollment of 70.

In addition to helping with tuition and book costs, grant money will also be used to expand career development and job placement services



for students in the program, according to the college.

Ms. Ayers-Lanzilotta said she has already seen interest from enough students on the East End that she's considering expanding the program to SCCC's eastern campus in Northampton.

"If that's what the community needs, why not?" she said. "Let's start talking about it."

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