

Group confronts abusers of area methadone clinics

By Sabina Mollot

It's been almost half a year since the formation of the East Side Alliance, a group dedicated to putting a stop towards serious quality of life issues that were affecting areas near methadone clinics, mainly around Union Square Park and 23rd Street.

Since then, the clinics who'd agreed to keep a closer watch on patients, some of whom have been known to cause problems like shoplifting, selling drugs or loitering in local businesses, have been responsive and have taken action, according to Jennifer Brown, executive director of the Flatiron/23rd Street BID. The BID is one of the partners in

the Alliance, along with the Union Square Partnership, and the methadone clinics run by Beth Israel, Bellevue, Gramercy Park and Greenwich House; local community boards and the office of the Manhattan district attorney.

"We've seen progress along 23rd Street, but we have a way to go," said Brown. "We're plugging away, trying to keep on top of it."

Brown, like others involved in the Alliance, stressed that it's only a handful of methadone clinic users who've created quality of life issues, from dozing off in parks to brawling on the streets.

"We realize that this is a small percent-

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age of the overall population, compared to the thousands of people," she said. "We know this because we know who they are and because for the most part, the clinics have been responsive, coming out at the request of the BID and USP to patrol the area to make sure their clients aren't violating the policies in any way."

The initiative was inspired by a similar contract program spearheaded by the district attorney's department of community affairs that helped to rid the 125th Street area streets of drugs and other crimes caused in part by methadone users.

The Alliance even meets once a month to report on the progress

of the initiative, which began with talks last summer, after years of wildly reported use of the methadone program by business owners, especially those near the parks.

Now, those caught violating policy, especially selling or distributing of drugs, are made to leave the methadone program.

The East Side Alliance came about through meetings on the issue held by several community boards.

About 1800 people are registered in methadone treatment programs at clinics in the areas of Gramercy, Flatiron and Union Square, most of them at Beth Israel's Second Avenue center.

Jim Mandler, a rep for Beth

Israel said the formation of the Alliance was welcome, but said things haven't changed that much at the medical center's clinic—because the rules have always been enforced.

"If there's a breach of agreement then (the patients) are spoken to and if disciplinary action needs to be taken that's what we do," said Mandler. "We understand the community's concerns and in general, our relationship with the community has a record of being good."

Meanwhile, Raymond Sanchez, manager at Gramercy Park clinic, had a different view on the subject.

"We are always here to offer treatment," he said, "but we don't police people here. When you go see your doctor, does your doctor follow you?"