We can’t jump to conclusion that struggling addicts are unfit to be parents

I WAS disappointed in what I thought was a sensationalized approach to your article about substance-exposed newborns ("Cases soar of newborns with opiate addiction"), which painted too much of a one-dimensional picture of a multi-layered issue.

In Project NESST (Newborns Exposed to Substances: Support and Therapy), a program of Jewish Family and Children's Services, we provide support and psychotherapy to mothers who are battling the disease of substance use disorder. Some of the mothers use prescribed medications; others are on medication-assisted treatment, such as methadone; and some use illegal drugs. Many are determined to conquer their addiction.

They attend parenting classes, drug treatment clinics, and individual therapy. Some parents fail at providing their child with a safe environment. But many persevere, battle the dark pull of substance use, and provide their children with loving, healthy homes. At NESST, we work to understand and respond to the unique needs of each family in a way that recognizes their diversity, their struggles, and their humanity.

The Department of Children and Families has a crucial role in protecting children. We as a society also have a crucial role in ensuring that we do not jump to judgment and condemnation.

We cannot presume that those who suffer from substance use disorder are necessarily unfit to parent. This is a complicated, pervasive problem that demands equally complex, compassionate solutions.

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