

(title) One of Our Earliest Supports Reflects on Educating Youth About Drugs

(lead-in) Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, FL helped NOPE Task Force start presentations to thousands of students. Years later, the agency's chief deputy reflects on the importance of teaching youth to stay clear of drugs.

We are putting a spotlight on the people/organizations that have supported NOPE Task Force from the beginning. And that certainly includes Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, which has provided us with staff, resources and funding to expand our program far beyond our initial base of Palm Beach County, FL.

Michael Gauger, the chief deputy of Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, has worked with us for many years. He's not only a law enforcement officer but also a licensed social worker. We asked him to reflect on NOPE, opioids, and the way out of the current epidemic.

1) Why have you supported NOPE over the years?

Michael Gauger: Progressing through the ranks of the Sheriff's Office, I was involved in too many investigations related to overdose deaths. The interaction with families and significant others was painful for me and I know it was devastating to the families. Some of the families splintering their family units due to the anguish experienced. NOPE was a program that displayed purpose and a passion for saving lives through education, teaching how quickly one can experience addiction and fall into behaviors devastating to them.

Students need to hear the NOPE message about the pitfalls of engaging in poor choices of experimentation with addictive substances. Also, it provides information on how to save their classmates' lives who are taking these death-defying risks.

2) What in your experience has been the most effective strategy in combating the opioid epidemic?

Michael Gauger: The most important effective strategy is getting the message to middle school and high school students, due to the probability of early exposure of experimentation by their peers. In addition, when there is a family history of substance abuse, there is a predisposition that the student might also have the same inclination. Therefore, by giving them clear cut choices early, they might be able to make the "right" decisions and avoid the dangers of experimenting with substances that could end their lives.

Read more about Michael Gauger here: pbso.org/inside-pbso/general/executive-staff/chief-michael-e-gauger/