

This Past School Year, NOPE Reached More Than 100,000 People

Our school presentations, vigils and other activities have reached youth, parents and advocates across the nation.

By Karen Perry



NOPE Task Force had another record year of educating people to stay away from dangerous drugs.

In all, we reached more than 100,000 youth, college students, parents, and community leaders in 19 states during this school year. They attended our school presentations, candle light vigils, support groups, and conferences in dozens of middle and high schools, universities, community centers, and other locations.

Our programs have been growing for years, but this school year they've expanded even further. Here are the numbers:

Total students and parents served through school presentations: 69,800

Total students served through university presentations: 1,500

Total number of vigil locations: 50

Total people served through vigil: more than 6,000

Total people served through conferences; more than 6,000

It's been a great year, but we have much more work to do in countering the spread of drug abuse, especially prescription drugs, among young people. Just look at these statistics from National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA):

- More teenagers die from prescription drugs than heroin/cocaine combined.
- Every day in the United States, an average of 2,000 teenagers use prescription drugs without a doctor's guidance for the first time.
- In 2012, 15% of high school seniors used prescription drugs, and only 35% felt regular use is risky.

- 1 in 9 high school seniors has tried Spice/K2 (synthetic marijuana).
- More than 60 percent of teens said that drugs were sold, used, or kept at their school.

According to NIDA, teens abuse prescription drugs for a number of reasons, including to get high, to treat pain, or because they think it will help them with schoolwork.

These are scary facts.

NOPE fights back by going to schools and community centers to educate students and their parents about the dangerous consequences of abusing opioids, stimulants and over-the-counter drugs. Part of our presentations is to explain the facts and dispel the myths about these dangerous drugs. We tell them: Even using the drugs once can land you in the hospital or be fatal.

We also fight back by arranging vigils to raise awareness and open the doors to recovery for the masses by eliminating the prejudice that has followed the disease of addiction. Our vigils started with just a handful of communities six years ago and have grown to more than 40 because so many lives have been lost or destroyed due to substance abuse and the unfortunate shame that goes with it.

I'm really grateful to the scores of volunteers and advocates who brought our presentations into schools and organized vigils across our country. As an organization, we've impacted thousands of lives – and we will impact thousands more as we grow even stronger in the years to come.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.