

Critical Time to Reach Young People

With schools starting up soon, NOPE Task Force is preparing for a new year of presentations at a time when many young people are using new and dangerous drugs.

By Karen Perry



With the new school year just weeks away, the staff at NOPE Task Force is gearing up for an important year of presentations.

Here's why:

Right now, dangerous “synthetic drugs” are fast becoming popular among teens, while prescription pills abuse is continuing to claim young lives at alarming rates.

Just in the past six months, fake cocaine and marijuana products like “Ivory Wave” and “Spice” have sent hundreds of youth to hospitals. Many were poisoned by the unregulated chemicals that are often sold legally in these packets at many convenience stores and on the Internet. Because of this, calls from emergency room physicians have increased to poison control centers across the nation.

A survey done late last year found that nearly one in nine high school seniors have gotten high in the past year from synthetic drugs, which mimic the effects of real cocaine and marijuana.

At the same time, teens’ abuse of prescription medications like painkillers, depressants and stimulants remains at epidemic levels. Too many teens still think that abusing prescription drugs is safer than abusing illicit drugs.



Every day, an average of 2,000 teens use prescription drugs without a doctor's guidance for the first time, according to National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Another disturbing fact: among youth who are 12- to 17-years old, close to 8 percent reported using prescription

medications for nonmedical use last year, NIDA reports.

In fact, prescription and over-the-counter drugs are among the most commonly abused drugs by 12th graders, after alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco.

So, as you can tell, we need to expand our outreach and connect with more youths in middle and high schools and on college campuses across the nation.

Our school presentations force youth to think twice about trying drugs, even once. We bring police officers, grieving parents and other volunteers impacted by drug abuse to share very personal stories of how drug abuse devastates families and communities.

The good news is that NOPE has grown in the past few years, and we're now reaching into many new communities. But with economic problems hitting schools and government agencies we can't do as many presentations as we'd like.

Still, we are a powerful, grassroots force in fighting drug abuse. During the past school year alone, NOPE reached close to 70,000 students through hundreds of presentations at local schools, community centers, and college auditoriums.

Our staff and volunteers are eager to return to schools from the summer's break and begin speaking again to students.

These are critical times to reach youth about drugs. We hope our many supporters can continue opening doors for us in their communities so we can start new chapters and continue expanding our reach into more schools.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.