

New anti-drug program slated for schools N.O.P.E. to use those who have lost family members to drug overdoses

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In the coming school year, Bradford County will be starting an anti-drug program in its public schools that will incorporate talks given by area residents who have lost family members to drug overdoses, the Bradford County sheriff said.

The Bradford County commissioners on Thursday approved an agreement with the Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education (N.O.P.E) Task Force to provide the program in Bradford County at a cost of \$3,000 per year.

The program will be geared toward students from fifth through eighth grades and it will provide presentations to the students in their school auditoriums, said Bradford County Sheriff Clinton "C.J." Walters, who is spearheading the expansion of the N.O.P.E. program to Bradford County. The presentations will probably take place annually in each school, he said.

"The goal is to reduce the use of narcotics and prevent overdose deaths among children," Walters said at the Bradford County commissioners' meeting on Thursday. "Hopefully, it will instill (in them knowledge) so that as they get older, they will stay away from narcotics and (not have) overdoses."

In 2012, there were 37 drug-related deaths in Bradford County, the most in the county's history, Bradford County Coroner Tom Carman has said.

The presentations will teach the students about addictions, the consequences of drug use, and about "how important is to tell" a responsible adult if they know someone who is using drugs, such as a friend or family member, Walters said. By telling a responsible adult - such as a pastor, a teacher, a parent, or guidance counselor - "hopefully they will get an intervention and treatment for the person (who is using drugs)" and prevent overdoses, Walters said.

At each assembly, a presentation will be made by at least four people, including a law enforcement officer, a moderator, and at least two people who have lost family members through drug overdoses, Walters said.

The presentations "really hinge" on the talks given by people who have lost loved ones to a drug overdose, because they are showing the "reality" of drug use, Walters said.

"The N.O.P.E. presentation is purposefully blunt and evokes powerful emotions," according to the website of the N.O.P.E. Task Force. "(As a result of the presentations), many students reach out to NOPE's wealth of resources beyond the presentation and seek guidance for themselves or to get help for a friend."

One parent who will be participating in the N.O.P.E. presentations in Bradford County will be Marlene Rohe, who owns the McDonald's in the Valley and who lost a son to a drug overdose, Walters said.

Walters said he has teamed up with Bradford County Coroner Tom Carman and Rohe to launch the N.O.P.E. program locally.

All the money to pay for the N.O.P.E. program in Bradford County has been donated, Walters said.

Rohe has made a substantial donation toward launching the program locally, he said.

The Bradford County Sheriff's Department is also donating funds toward the program that were raised at its annual golf tournament, Walters said.

The N.O.P.E. Task Force will be training up to 40 people in Bradford County to make the presentations, including law enforcement officers and citizens who have lost relatives to drug overdoses, Walters said. Anyone who participates in making the presentations must go through the training, he said.

The task force will also provide educational materials for the programs.

The presentations are appropriate for all sorts of drugs, such as prescription pills, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and bath salts, Walters said. In Bradford County, the presentations will be focused on the drugs that are being used in the area, he said.

The N.O.P.E. Task Force, which is a non-profit organization, was formed in 2004 in Palm Beach, Fla., according to its website.

The effectiveness of the N.O.P.E. program "has been researched and it was found to be a well-received program," Walters said.

The N.O.P.E. program is "widely used across the state of Florida," Walters said. Bradford County will be the first county in Pennsylvania to have a N.O.P.E. chapter, he said.

So far, the Sayre and the Athens area school districts have agreed to participate in the N.O.P.E. program, Walters said.

Walters said he anticipates to have agreements in place shortly to hold the presentations in four or five other school districts in Bradford County.

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