

NOPE Candle Light Vigils Spread to Many New Communities

The fast spread of prescription drugs abuse, particularly among teenagers and young adults, has inspired parents, police officers, college students, and others to organize more than 50 vigils across the country.



By Leon Fooksman

Since the overdose death of her son two years ago, Pam Dallas-Roffall searched for a way to prevent more drug-related tragedies in her community of Prince William County, Va., a suburb of Washington DC.

Dallas-Roffall, a government worker, believes she finally found the right outlet: organize a NOPE Candle Light Vigil during the last week of October.

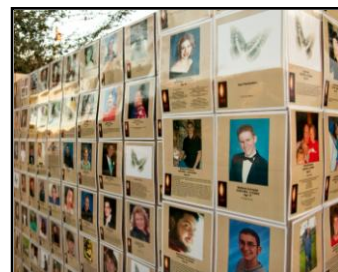
“It feels good to get out there and do something instead of wallowing, which is so easy to do,” she said.

Roffall is one of many new parent activists, police officers, college students, and others coordinating more than 50 vigils in towns and cities across the country organized by Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education (NOPE) Task Force.

The goal is to change the stigma of drug addiction and honor children who have died from drug overdoses. This year’s vigil -- the fourth and largest annual event so far -- will feature a keynote address from White House Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske, who will discuss the importance of drug prevention and education.

The vigils, on October 24-29, are intended to show families’ love for their children regardless of the fact that their children died from addiction or drug overdose, said Karen Perry, executive director of NOPE. The nonprofit organization wants addiction to be treated as a disease and encourages people to treat those who are addicted to drugs with respect, love and dignity.

During vigils at community centers and parks, memorial walls will show photos of local people who died of drugs, representing some of the



26,000 people who die every year of drug poisoning. There will also be speeches from local residents who lost loved ones and recorded remarks from Kerlikowske, who heads the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Kerlikowske will be talking live on Oct. 28, at a vigil at NOPE's headquarters in West Palm Beach, FL.



According to Kerlikowske's office, NOPE embodies the White House National Drug Control Strategy, which was released in May 2010 by President Obama and Kerlikowske. The strategy reflects a comprehensive approach to reducing drug use and its consequences through a balance of prevention, treatment and law enforcement.

For these reasons, Dallas-Roffall signed on to organize a vigil in her community on Oct. 24 in a public plaza.

She and another organizer -- a mother who also lost a child to drugs -- have invited close to 500 people, including directors of community services organizations, who will set up tables to educate the public about drug treatment and other programs in the area.

After her son Jason died, Dallas-Roffall said she talked to many of her neighbors about organizing anti-drug programs to counter the growing number of drug overdoses in their community. There was interest, but nothing came to fruition. Then she came across NOPE's website and learned about the vigil.

"This was exactly what I needed," she said. "We needed so badly to bring education and awareness to the area."

NOPE educates children in schools on drug prevention through blunt and emotional presentations. The organization teaches children and adults how to look for signs of drug addiction.

Dallas-Roffall hopes to start a NOPE chapter in her county after the vigil.

The fast spread of prescription drugs abuse, particularly among teenagers and young adults, has inspired many parents like Dallas-Roffall to plan vigils this year, Perry said.



Dallas-Roffall said she hopes people attending the vigil in Manassas walk away with a deeper understanding of addiction.

“It’s not a weakness. It’s a disease. The people who died didn’t deserve it. They had families and friends who loved them,” she said.

If you value NOPE Task Force’s commitment to preventing drug overdoses, please consider a financial contribution to support the organization. Donate at www.nopetaskforce.org/donations.asp

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