

Eye-Opening Trip to Indiana

Our executive director's recent trip to Scott County, Ind. brings attention to the enormous need to educate young people about abusing prescription drugs.

By Karen Perry

A few weeks ago, shortly after I told the students of an Indiana middle school about losing my son Richard to drugs, my cell phone was abuzz with messages.



One student wrote: "When I heard Richard's story, it made me cry and it defiantly shows me how dangerous drugs are. And if I find a person who is on drugs, then I will for sure call 911."

Another wrote: "I know so many teens that you've touched today. Thank you so very much. I am so sorry for your loss. RIP Richard Perry."

In the past seven years, I've done dozens of talks like this about the painful passing of my 21-year-old son and how hard my family tried to prevent him from overdosing. But I can't recall the last time I got so many powerful responses, so fast, from young people who were unaware of the dangers of misusing prescribed medicine.

To me, this proves the enormous need to educate our children about drug abuse, and just how intractable our nation's drug problems really are.

This talk was one of four forums I participated in across Scott County, Ind. in early December. They were organized by Coalition to Eliminate the Abuse of Substances (CEASe), which is comprised of school leaders, judges, social workers, pastors and others who

intend to put a dent in drug abuse in the rural community of 24,000 people between Louisville and Indianapolis.

I was invited following the showing of a *CBS Sunday Morning* report in October about the proliferation of prescription drug abuse. The story focused on NOPE and our school presentations.

I jumped at the opportunity to visit Scott County. At least 17 people, mostly young adults, died of prescription drug abuse in the county last year, according to the Courier-Journal newspaper, which recently summed up the area's drug problems this way:

"Scott offers one challenge after another. Its child smoking rate is higher than the state average. People are generally less healthy than are people in any other Indiana county. Oxycodone use is similarly off the charts."



The community's leaders, including CEASe Chairwoman Lori Croasdell and Sheriff Dan McClain, joined me in leading NOPE-style presentations to hundreds of middle school and high school students and their parents. Another organizer, Sharon Blair,

founder of the Jennifer Act and a longtime NOPE supporter, drove an hour to participate as well.

Everyone did a tremendous job in getting the youths to understand the deadly consequences of abusing drugs.

In addition to students sending me messages, others lit virtual memorial candles on the NOPE website, signed up for our student certification program, and asked questions for ADAM, our online question-and-answer forum about using drugs. Several students even contacted their guidance counselors to discuss drugs.

It's great that Scott County is fighting back against drug abuse. I wish many other communities who too are struggling with the epidemic could do the same.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.

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