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Words and Images Prod Youths to Get Help

NOPE Task Force aims to get youths addicted to drugs into treatment programs. The organization helps subsidize treatment at a recovery center in Florida at a time when the need for drug rehabilitation is growing in the U.S.

By Leon Fooksman

Perhaps it was the body bag spread across the stage. Or maybe it was the faces of the dead students staring into the crowd. Or maybe yet it was the chilling story from the seasoned police officer.

After an emotional NOPE Task Force presentation at a Florida high school last year, two students quietly stepped forward and asked for help. Both were struggling with drug addiction.

The task force's executive director, Karen Perry, walked the students to the school's counselors, who later contacted their families. Before long, the students were admitted into drug rehabilitation programs.

"Today, we know they are doing great," Perry said.

Narcotic Overdose Prevention & Education (NOPE) Task Force aims for similar results at all of its presentations at schools and colleges in which police officers, judges and concerned parents use powerful images and words to educate youths about the dangerous consequences of using drugs.

Exactly how many youths have sought help following NOPE's presentations is hard to know. Students don't always inform NOPE or their schools if they are entering rehabilitation.

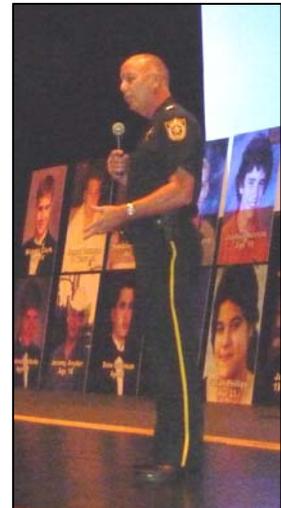
"We know that every year at least a handful of students enter programs sometime after our presentations," Perry said.

NOPE supports recovery programs by contributing to the Hanley Center, a drug treatment center in West Palm Beach, Fla. The funding subsidized treatment for eight people at the center in 2009.

The need for drug treatment is growing. The number of people addicted to drugs in the United States has been estimated at 23 million, with 7.6 million needing treatment. For many experts, drug addiction is the number one public health threat in the country today.

Getting even a fraction of those people into treatment programs will reduce costs to society in a multitude of ways, treatment experts say.

Researchers recently released a study that shows drug rehabilitation costs are more than made up for by a reduction in crime and an increase in earnings for people who used to be addicted. The study



stated that for every \$1 spent on drug treatment, society gained \$7.66 in monetary benefits in savings to medical care, criminal activities, unemployment, and public aid for mental illness.

Still, treatment can be expensive, particularly for individuals struggling in this economy. Residential treatment for alcohol or drug abuse cost \$3,840 per admission and outpatient methadone treatment cost \$7,415 per admission, according to a 2004 study by The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Despite its costs, "treatment is a bargain compared to expenditures for jails, foster care for children, and health complications that often accompany addiction," then-SAMHSA Administrator Charles Curie said in a statement. "Rarely do we have public initiatives that can save society as much as substance abuse treatment and recovery support services. Treatment provides an opportunity for recovery for the individual, better homes for children, and improved safety for our communities."

The challenge is getting people addicted to drugs to understand the signs of their dependence and take voluntary steps to get help, experts say.

Perry believes NOPE's speakers made the two youths from Florida realize it was time to seize their "opportunity" to straighten out their lives.

"They needed someone to listen to them," Perry said. "I was so happy they came and approached us for help. It makes us feel great that they are doing really well now."

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

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