

Three New NOPE Task Force Chapters Form

New chapters in Florida's Hillsborough County, Volusia County, and Martin County will educate tens of thousands of students and their parents about the dangers of abusing drugs.

By Karen Perry

In recent months, NOPE Task Force has added three new chapters, enabling us to reach tens of thousands of more students and their parents with our anti-drug messages.

I welcome our new chapters in Florida: Hillsborough County, Volusia County, and Martin County. These communities have been hit hard by our nation's drug abuse epidemic, particularly by the fast-spreading prescription pills abuse.

These new chapters have enthusiastic program coordinators and volunteers who have embraced NOPE's mission of educating youths about the dangers of drugs and reducing drug addiction and overdose deaths. I know they will work hard to get us into schools, college campuses, and neighborhood centers across their communities.

Let me tell you a little about each new chapter's program coordinator.



Michele Phillips in Hillsborough explained why she got involved in NOPE: "We want to save lives. My son, who is our junior spokesperson, wants to make sure no one else has to be without a family member due to drug overdoses. We want to provide education about the dangers of not only illicit drugs but mixing with prescription drugs and alcohol."

Her goal is to reach 7,000 students in this school year and 14,000 students in the next school year.

She tragically lost her son, Spencer, who died of an accidental prescription drug overdose at the age of 14.



Linda Parkin in Volusia County also is a passionate advocate for educating youths about drugs. She said 83 people died of drug overdoses in Volusia and another 18 in nearby Flagler County in 2011. She said “we have many ‘pill mills’ in the area and we have heard from many in the community, including students, that drugs are abundant in our schools.”

Here’s her reason for getting involved: “I lost my 26 year old daughter, Sarah Heddy, to suicide as a result of her addiction in 2007. I was involved in Compassionate Friends in Longwood in Seminole County where I was contacted by the Altamonte Springs Police Chief to become a parent speaker for their NOPE chapter that was forming at that time. I was a parent speaker for them for the past three years. I have worked hard for the past two years to form a chapter in my area as I have lived in Volusia County for over 30 years and my daughter grew up here. I recognized the need for a chapter here as many of our youth have died in the past few years. Along with 9 other parents/siblings and with the help from several people in the community (Victoria Kress, County Commissioner Patricia Northey and DBPD Chief Michael Chitwood, primarily) we were able to raise the funds to finally achieve our goal. We have given 6 presentations to students and 1 to parents so far this year with several more on the schedule.”

Her goal is to reach up to 15,000 students this year and next year.



Stacey LoSardo in Martin County hopes “to make NOPE a household name through presentations at all middle and high school in Martin County.”

She added: “We hope to have a team of parent volunteers and law enforcement officials to make the NOPE presentations.

We also hope to grow our database of families who have lost loved ones so we can take their specific messages to our local schools... I suspect that Martin County needs this program for the same reasons as others

do: prevention programming is based on science that shows that increasing resiliency skills and protective factors in a child helps reduce risk. Another way of saying -- if we can prevent one death, we are successful.”

She said the Martin County chapter was formed as a collaboration of between Tykes & Teens (where she works), Martin County Board of County Commissioners, Martin County Sheriff’s Office, and the Martin County School District.

The chapter’s goal is to reach up to 2,000 students this year and up to 7,500 students next year.

I hope you agree that we have added some great new leaders to NOPE. I’ll keep you posted on our successes at each of these new chapters.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.