

In Decade of Service, NOPE Serves 500,000 People

NOPE Task Force is celebrating our 10th anniversary with a spotlight on our accomplishments, including growing our organization to 14 chapters and holding our annual candle light vigil in more than 60 communities.

By Karen Perry,

More than 500,000 people.

That's how many youth, parents and other adults NOPE Task Force has served in the past 10 years.

As we celebrate our decade of service, it's humbling to recognize how far our nonprofit NOPE (Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education) has come and how many people we've touched through our high-impact school presentations, advocacy, and support groups.

Since starting in 2004 to combat the illegal use of prescription drugs and narcotics, as well as other abused substances, our goal was clear: to diminish the frequency and impact of overdose death through community education, family support and purposeful advocacy.

And we've certainly stayed focused as NOPE has expanded from our base in Palm Beach County, Florida to 13 other counties across Florida, Pennsylvania and California.

Along the way, NOPE has created a national candle light vigil held every October, bringing together thousands of people to honor those who have lost their lives to drug overdoses and to honor those who are still coping with the disease of addiction. This year, we held vigils in more than 60 locations across the U.S. and Canada.

NOPE has also been a strong advocate for families struggling with the loss of loved ones and friends who died of drug-related overdoses. Our support groups have offered emotional support and friendships to these families and helped them overcome the stigma associated with drug abuse.

In addition, we've served as a major voice in supporting legislation that fought back against the proliferation of "pills mills" across Florida and elsewhere in the nation in the past few years. Our email chains, public testimonies, media campaigns, and other advocacy educated the masses about the damage those clinics have done to families and communities.

Our work is far from over. We have to continue countering the spread of drug abuse, especially prescription drugs, among young people. These statistics, which we've shared before, from National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) are overwhelming and scary:

- More teenagers die from prescription drugs than heroin/cocaine combined.
- Every day in the United States, an average of 2,000 teenagers use prescription drugs without a doctor's guidance for the first time.
- In 2012, 15% of high school seniors used prescription drugs, and only 35% felt regular use is risky.

I believe NOPE has the capacity to reverse these numbers in many communities. We've changed many, many lives in the past 10 years with our presentations, advocacy, and support groups, and we're going to change many more in the years to come.

I'm grateful to the countless volunteers, supporters and families who have contributed to building NOPE into a thriving and important organization. I expect our next 10 years to be just as meaningful!

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.