

New NOPE Chapter: Indian River County, Fla.

The coastal Florida community brought in NOPE to get more aggressive about educating youth on the danger of abusing drugs, especially prescription pills.

By Karen Perry



The start of our newest chapter in Indian River County comes at a critical time for the coastal Florida community struggling to contain substance abuse.

In recent years, Indian River County, a tight-knit area of less than 150,000 residents between Daytona and West Palm Beach, has seen a rise in overdose deaths, particularly among young people who are most vulnerable to drug abuse.

One of the organizers of the new Indian River County NOPE chapter recently told us that the community brought in NOPE to get more aggressive about educating youth about the dangers of abusing drugs.

“Indian River County is growing, and unfortunately some bad habits are coming here as part of our growth,” says Kathy Hurt, a development director at Hanley Center in Vero Beach, Fla. “We need to educate our young people before yet another tragedy occurs in the community.”

Before the summer recess in June, we intend on bringing our powerful, anti-drug presentations to as many as half of all the county’s high school students.

In schools, local volunteers will teach youths about the signs of an overdose (seizures, confusion and hallucinations), dangers of combining drugs, and concerns over letting a friend or loved one “sleep off” their intoxication. They will also explain how to place an inebriated individual in a recovery position if that person is unconscious but still breathing.

Educating these students will be police officers from local police departments and the Indian River Sheriff’s Office, along with volunteers from the Hanley Center and parents who have lost children to drugs.

We’re grateful to the Hanley Center and Indian River Sheriff’s Office for making it possible for NOPE to expand to Indian River County.

Indian River is now our eighth chapter in the Sunshine State, where so many residents, as we all know, have struggled dearly with drugs, particularly prescription pills that became easily accessible through “pill mills” and doctor shopping. The drug abuse epidemic, at its highest peak, had claimed the lives of as many as eight people a day in Florida.

When NOPE Task Force formed in 2004, we intended to bring our school presentations to counties throughout Florida and beyond. We are meeting that goal as we grow every year and expand our reach. NOPE educates tens of thousands of students and parents every year, as well as advocates for sensible laws aimed at reducing drug abuse.

In Indian River County, we are confident that our school and community presentations will make many teenagers think twice about abusing drugs. They will walk away with a new understanding of the devastation that drugs can cause to their bodies, their families, and their communities.

That newfound knowledge will go a long way in stopping the spread of drug abuse in the county.

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