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National Drug Control Office Throws Support For NOPE's Mission

By Leon Fooksman

When NOPE Task Force directors met with the nation's drug czar and his top deputy a few months ago, the organization got a major endorsement for its challenging mission: teaching young people about the dangers of drugs at a time when abusing prescription painkillers is socially popular.



Director Gil Kerlikowske

The separate meetings with Gil Kerlikowske, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and Dr. A. Thomas McLellan, deputy director of the office, ended with them pledging to write letters in support of Narcotic Overdose Prevention & Education (NOPE) Task Force. The federal directors also talked about recording an anti-drug message for the dozens of NOPE Task Force vigils in October.

Dr. McLellan said in an interview that educational, grass-roots organizations like NOPE Task Force provide much-needed information on drugs and alcohol to segments of the population that authorities have a hard time reaching, he said.

"The federal government and state governments haven't done enough to give parents and communities information," Dr. McLellan said.



Deputy Director
Thomas McLellan

The support from the Office of National Drug Control Policy is helping to raise NOPE Task Force's profile as it expands beyond its base in southeast Florida, said Richard Perry, one of the group's founding members. NOPE Task Force has chapters in eight communities in Florida, California and Indiana.

"My hope is that this organization can be duplicated in many other places," Perry said. "There's no reason why we can't be a national organization."

Over the last few years, NOPE Task Force has built partnerships with local police departments, school boards, drug treatment facilities, and anti-drug advocates. Those coalitions bring police officers, counselors and parents who lost loved ones to drugs into schools, colleges and community centers where they deliver blunt and emotional anti-drug presentations. More than 150,000 students and parents have heard the presentations in recent years.

The organization also is the Florida affiliate for The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, a New York City-based nonprofit that helps parents steer their children away from drugs.

NOPE Task Force members attending the meeting with Kerlikowske in his Washington, D.C. office in late November were Perry and his wife, Karen, who is the organization's executive director; Capt. Jeff Lindscoog of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in Florida; and Gary Martin, an overdose death detective at the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and associate dean for student wellness at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla. Richard and Karen Perry met Dr. McLellan separately in Miami shortly before the trip to Washington.



Captain Jeffrey Lindscoog
Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office

On the same one-day trip to Washington, the group also talked with a director at the federal Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. That meeting provided NOPE Task Force directors with key contacts at schools and educational organizations.

“By getting these high-level meetings, it’s gratifying to know that we stand out among the many grass-roots groups across the country,” Lindscoog said.

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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