

NOPE's Growth Comes From Community Support

As NOPE Task Force expands across the country, new chapters are reducing overdose deaths by establishing community support.

By Karen Perry

Establishing community support.

That's the key to building a successful NOPE Task Force chapter --- whose main goal is to reduce overdose deaths in a community through education, family support and purposeful advocacy.



Since our start a decade ago, NOPE has expanded to more than a dozen chapters across the nation, bringing our powerful anti-drug presentations, vigils, support groups, and community events to tens of thousands of teens and their parents every year.

In just the past few years, we've added new chapters in Florida and Pennsylvania, with several other new chapters in the works.

All of our chapters do great work in finding volunteers to run the programs, getting schools, colleges and community centers to open their doors to us, and building relationships with law enforcement, school boards, and other institutions to reduce drug abuse and prevent tragedies.

Still, a few chapters – namely Hillsborough and Pinellas counties in Florida near Tampa – have stood out for establishing community support that is so vital to NOPE's mission.

Since NOPE of Pinellas was formed in 2010, over 80,000 Pinellas middle and high school students, parents, and citizens have heard the NOPE message. This included over 100 school assemblies, parent orientations, PTSA meetings, community groups such as the Rotary Club and neighborhood watch groups, local college presentations, public health groups, Job Corp, hospital grand round, and Guardian Ad Litem groups.

Here's how Mark and Laurie Serra, founders of the Pinellas chapter, explain their success in getting into schools and the community:

“NOPE of Pinellas is a true community effort bringing together law enforcement, families who have lost loved ones to drug overdose, community leaders such as

school board members and local physicians, drug court members, and students from across Pinellas. NOPE in Pinellas is constantly seeking new members, new stories, and our community continuing to work together to communicate to the citizens of Pinellas on the ever changing topic of drug education, abuse, and current trends.”

What draws people to NOPE?

“After our son, (Matthew, died in 2008 of a prescription drug overdose), what we realized was the best way to bring about positive change for our community related to drug use and abuse was to educate citizens so that they make good choices, as we say to the students, when no one else is around. We believe what draws people to the NOPE message is that it is relevant, it shares information which can be used, and it tells true stories from right here in our community about individuals and the consequences that happened to them and their families due to their choices to use and abuse drugs. We consider ourselves seed planters...planting seeds with students and the community, so that when they are in a setting and the drugs come out, they will make a good choice independently, based on the knowledge they have learned through the NOPE presentation.”

In Hillsborough County, the chapter’s founder, Michele Phillips, explains what draws people to NOPE:



“We feel this is because everyone, in some way, is connected to this message. A family member, a friend, someone in their circle has been impacted by drug abuse and death.”

She estimates that more than 14,000 students have been reached there through 18 high school presentations and five middle school presentations. That was done through partnerships and support from Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners, School District of Hillsborough County, Tampa Police Department, Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office, and DACCO.

Michele Phillips plans to continue growing the chapter by doing the following:

“Expand the NOPE of Hillsborough volunteer base; recruit additional family speakers and moderators; extend team to include broader diversity; continue partnership cultivation with key supporters; and ramp up fundraising and donations to support the chapter.”

Thanks to all our chapters for their great work.

As NOPE expands as an organization, there will be many more great success stories to share. We’re changing the lives of youth and their families. And we’re doing it by building community support.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.