

TORN COMMUNITIES RALLY TOGETHER

Kentucky Post, The (Covington, KY) - March 13, 2003

- Author/Byline: Shelly Whitehead, Post staff reporter
- Edition: Kentucky
- Section: News
- Page: A12

Alexandria Police Chief Mike Ward put heroin abuse and himself on the front burner with the Feb. 5 community meeting he organized to discuss recent overdose deaths. Ward got a lot of heat from heartbroken and fearful families, but he ultimately achieved his goal of lighting a fire under the community.

Groups are forming. Parents are seeking help and drug tests for their kids from police. The media has focused on the issue.

"It's exactly what we were hoping would happen," said Ward. "We're getting a lot of requests for small group sessions and that's what needed to happen. We all need to sit down, talk openly and exchange information."

Ward stresses that law enforcement is but one of many constituencies needed to address what is a complex, multi-dimensional community concern. The problem also demands, he said, attention from parents, medical professionals, educators, spiritual leaders, social service workers and neighborhood activists.

That process is well under way with several small informational sessions in churches and homes since the Feb. 5 meeting.

Parents who lost sons to heroin addiction this winter have formed a Campbell County chapter of Residents Attacking Drugs, a national organization launched in Maryland in 1998 after a similar wave of heroin overdose deaths there. The group has scheduled a public meeting at 7 p.m. April 3 at Campbell County High for students there.

"We're going to have the students in one area and parents in the other," said RAD board member Pam Kinney. "Our intent is eventually to do the same kind of program throughout Northern Kentucky."

The program will include information and presentations from **Kids Helping Kids**, Campbell County police and drug treatment leaders.

Campbell County Police Lt. David Fickenscher said police attended a meeting earlier this week in Alexandria to help residents interested in forming community watch groups. He said such efforts primarily target neighborhood crime, often committed by addicts in need of drug money.

Ward said he has been reassured by the community's willingness to act, even though it's been a painful process and may get even more so as the scope of the problem is uncovered. He predicted heroin will be identified as "the tip of the iceberg."

"So if this is the issue that causes people to look harder at our kids and young adults and keep on top of them and get in their faces and find out what they're doing so there's a likelihood they'll stop or slow down or not get into other drugs -- then -- OK," he said.

"I hope that's what happens."

Text of fax box follows:

More info

* For information about the new Campbell County chapter of Residents Attacking Drugs, call (859) 635-5725.

- Memo: Series: Heroin is back: 3rd of 3 parts: Sidebar Text of fax box follows story

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NEW ANTI-DRUG GROUP TO MEET

Kentucky Post, The (Covington, KY) - April 1, 2003

- Author/Byline: Post staff report
- Edition: Kentucky
- Section: News
- Page: K2

The newly formed Northern Kentucky chapter of Residents Attacking Drugs will hold a special drug assembly for Campbell County teachers, students in grades 8 through 12 and their parents from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Campbell County High School auditorium.

The assembly will include youth speakers from Kids Helping Kids, a drug dependency treatment program in Clermont County, Ohio; Dr. Mike Kalfas, medical director of the St. Luke Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center in Falmouth; Lt. Dave Fickenscher of the Campbell County Police; and Laura Kruthoffer of the St. Luke West Intensive Outpatient Chemical Dependency program.

Plans are under way for a similar meeting for students, parents and teachers at Bishop Brossart High.

The local RAD chapter was formed in response to the heroin overdose deaths in recent months of three young men in rural Campbell and Kenton counties.

For more information on Thursday's session, call (859) 392-0184.

- Record: 0304020013
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