

A Better Life

Youth Told Truth About Drug Use

By Neil Probst



An Oklahoma Wing cadet, middle, assists two fellow cadets through a simulated minefield during a Drug Demand Reduction program exercise. The blindfold and goggles mimic the impaired vision a drug user would experience, teaching cadets the difficulty of completing tasks under the influence of drugs.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kacy Harsha, Oklahoma Wing



Civil Air Patrol members routinely fly search and rescue sorties and take on difficult ground team missions — tireless work that requires great endurance, time and skill.

Other members' contributions to their communities are off the radar.

Their efforts won't show up on a mission after-action report or make headline news, but they are still making a profound difference in people's lives.

CAP's Drug Demand Reduction Program is teaching youth in CAP squadrons, schools and communities that a life without drug dependency can be fruitful and long-lasting, that there are "Better Things to Do Than Drugs."

The need for awareness of the destruction drug use causes is tremendous, said Lt. Col. Susan McDonald, the Wyoming Wing's drug demand reduction administrator.

McDonald said Wyoming is No. 1 nationally in methamphetamine use and underage alcohol consumption. Both habits can lead to addiction, violent lives, jail and even death.

She and other Wyoming Wing members are taking this anti-drug message into schools across the state, and she enjoys knowing it might save a life.

McDonald said the program works.

"I've seen what is out there. My squadron in Denver was in the inner city. The CAP program did a lot of good for those kids. They may not have known it at the time, but they are realizing it now," she said.

DDR administrators also are helping increase awareness of the challenges children and parents face that aren't as obvious as the dangers of cocaine, heroin or marijuana use.

"We have a lot of kids that think prescription drugs are OK because they're legal," said Lt. Col. Kacy Harsha, the Oklahoma Wing's DDR administrator.

In addition, parents need to know curious children will try to inhale anything, from gas out of propane

tanks attached to grills to cooking spray, Harsha said.

"Once they do try inhalants, they'll inhale anything," she added. "They'll just do trial and error until they find something, and unfortunately their trial and error can kill them."

NO ESCAPING DDR

In the Wisconsin Wing, the DDR message resounds everywhere. Go to any wing function and you'd have to be blind to miss it.

Capt. Donna Daniels, the wing's DDR administrator, puts the programs together. Cadets hear from state counterdrug officers at squadron meetings, and youth and senior members take part in national anti-drug efforts that Daniels brings to the wing. At the wing's state conference, she plans to teach members about the "Every 15 Minutes" program, which explains the community consequences of drinking and driving.

Next year members will hit parks across the state for National Kick Butts Day. Squadron leaders will take cadets to pick up cigarette butts and other garbage, and afterward speakers will emphasize the negative effects of smoking.

Daniels believes spreading the DDR message is a matter of life and death.

"I have seen too many kids lose out on opportunities and die because they made a choice to try drugs," she said. "The drugs today are not the same as 30 or 40 years ago. They are more potent and more dangerous. In addition, kids are combining drugs in an attempt to get a greater high."

SAVING KIDS

Saving lives is DDR's goal.

Chaplain (Capt.) Gordon Rourk, the Colorado Wing's DDR administrator, summed up the nationwide sentiment: "Just knowing I've reached the life of one student, it's been worthwhile," he said.

Rourk talks to students about making good choices in life and, in the process, emphasizes that CAP members could not perform their incredible missions with minds muddled by drugs.

“Vicodin is the No. 1 abused prescription drug in America today among teenagers,” said Rourk, emphasizing children can readily find the powerful painkiller in their parents’ medicine cabinet.

“We’re getting the message out to students about the various drugs on the market, not only illegal drugs but prescription drugs as well,” he said.

VITAL MISSION

The efforts of DDR members don’t always make headlines, but their work helps shape young people into responsible adults.

Mike Simpkins, chief of the DDR program at CAP National Headquarters, noted the volunteers’ impact in communities across the nation: “They realize prevention efforts are America’s and CAP’s first line of defense against illegal drug use,” he said. “Their dedication to the DDR program holds the promise of preventing drug use before it starts and sparing families the anguish of watching loved ones fall into the grasp of addiction.” ▲



Photo by Capt. Randy Stringer, Colorado Wing

Sr. Mbr. Ashley Stringer, right, of the Colorado Wing’s Thunder Mountain Composite Squadron interviews a Mesa View Elementary School student after the girl helped lead the school in reciting the Colorado Wing’s DDR pledge. Shown with the Mesa students are Chaplain (Capt.) Gordon Rourk, Colorado Wing drug demand reduction administrator, left; Colorado National Guard Staff Sgt. Michael Martich; Beckie Hughes, Miss Colorado USA, who helped promote the DDR message; and Thunder Mountain Composite Squadron Cadet Master Sgt. Evan Buek.

NATIONAL RED RIBBON WEEK

When: Oct. 21-29

Where: Across America

How it started: Red Ribbon Week was born from the tragic death of Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, a brave federal agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration. Camarena was killed while working to keep drugs out of U.S. communities. Following his passing, his friends and family wore badges of red satin to remember him as a symbol of their promise to keep up the fight against drugs.

What it means now: Red Ribbon Week today is a time when people across America promise to stay drug-free and fight drug use by wearing red ribbons, T-shirts, stickers or anything red. More than 80 million people across America now wear red during National Red Ribbon Week to show their support for a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.