

California Drug Demand Reduction

Sgt. 1st Class Warren J. Savage

SACRAMENTO--*"For America to succeed in defeating the threat of drugs, each of us must play a role. Our nation's community leadership must provide the essential commitment... Teachers, coaches, medical professionals, and mentors need to steer young people away from drugs and toward bright futures. Most of all, parents must talk honestly and frequently with children about the danger of drugs. We need to give young people the courage and judgement not only to reject drugs but to help friends do so as well,"* said Barry R. McCaffrey, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy

Educating and enabling America's youth to reject illegal drugs, as well as alcohol and tobacco, is the number-one goal of the 1998 National Drug Control Strategy. Every child that learns to reject drugs is one fewer drug addict and one fewer crime statistic. If boys and girls reach adulthood without using illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, they probably will never develop a chemical-dependency problem. Reaching this goal requires a lot of effort from parents, coaches, mentors, teachers, clergy, and other role models in our communities.

The California National Guard Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) Program is charged with helping community-based organizations reach this goal. Sgt. 1st Class Vernon Gaukle is the DDR coordinator in the San Diego High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). During a recent interview he explained what DDR does to help communities teach their youth to reject drugs:

Q: Why is the National Guard involved in demand reduction?

Sgt. 1st Class Gaukle: "The Guard soldiers and airmen live in the communities - they shop, attend church and belong to the Kiwanis. Their kids go to the local schools. They know the community, and have a stake in their community's 'quality of life.' They've all voluntarily taken an oath to protect and defend the constitution. There's a pool of volunteers who can organize, lead and direct large tasks, and are willing to defend our communities. I think the most important part is the soldiers and airmen are positive role models to the kids - many voluntarily take the next step and become mentors."

Q: What does DDR do to help the community efforts?

Sgt. 1st Class Gaukle: "We actively seek community organizations, such as parent-teacher associations, Boy- and Girl-Scouts and Kiwanis, who want to do something about

the drug problem. We encourage the organizations to work together, and help them develop their leadership skills. We suggest programs and events that have been successful in other areas, and we help the groups plan and organize. We find Guard volunteers -- not just individual soldiers and airmen, but units that can sponsor an event or provide needed services. For instance, we'll arrange for an aviation unit to land a helicopter on the school's soccer field for drug demand reduction activities."

Q: What groups or programs do you work with?

Sgt. 1st Class Gaukle: "We're affiliated with around fifty agencies like the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (D.A.R.E.), several Explorer Scout posts, Friday Night Live, and others. The big events, though, are Drug Store and Red Ribbon. Drug Store happens because police, sheriffs, paramedics, doctors, judges, lawyers and a lot of other people volunteer their time and effort. During the week that a Drug Store runs, they'll present it to around 3,000 junior-high school students, mostly from neighborhoods where drug abuse is widespread. I don't want to give away exactly what happens at a Drug Store, but it's definitely in-your-face drug education.

"The Red Ribbon campaign was started as a memorial to the Enrique (Kiki) Camarena, a Drug Enforcement Agency

undercover agent who was slain in the line of duty in Mexico in 1985. Most, if not all schools hold Red Ribbon rallies, and at many of these, the local guard unit provides unit members and equipment for static displays. The kids flock to the displays and ask hundreds of questions. The guard members distribute drug education items - red ribbons, stickers, buttons, drug education booklets and coloring books for the younger children. While doing so they remind the kids that if they want to fly a helicopter or operate the equipment, they have to stay in school and stay off drugs."

Q: How effective is the DDR Program?

Sgt. 1st Class Gaukle: "To answer that, you have to realize that drug abuse costs the United States money. A study done at the University of Southern California estimated that drug abuse cost the nation nearly \$150 billion in 1997, 70 percent of that was from the crime associated with drug abuse, the rest was medical and death-related costs. In 1997 a survey estimated that almost 35 percent of Americans over the age of 11 had tried illegal drugs at least once. Not everybody who tries illegal drugs goes on to be an abuser, but if you never try illegal drugs, you'll never become an abuser. The Center for Substance Abuse prevention has a web page,

<http://www.samhsa.gov/csap/facts4.htm>, that quotes several studies showing reduction in drug abuse due to drug education. Overall, Demand Reduction means between 25 percent and 50 percent fewer kids and young adults are likely to try illegal drugs. And that's 25 percent to 50 percent fewer that might become abusers, and crime and medical statistics, saving America more than \$35 billion a year. Yeah, I think we're pretty effective."

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Sgt. 1st Class Gaukle: "Well, the Guard has been around since 1637. Drug Demand Reduction is one more example of the truth of the National Guard motto: 'Always Ready, Always There.'"