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# A FOCUS ON PREVENTION

READ A NEWSPAPER, WATCH TELEVISION, OR LISTEN TO THE RADIO and you cannot help but encounter stories about the problems related to alcohol and other drug use. How can this harm be reduced? One strategy is to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

In Los Angeles County, the Alcohol and Drug Program Administration of the Department of Health Services is working to do just that. It currently oversees 37 prevention contracts with 37 different community groups. The groups, with assistance and support from ADPA, implement prevention programs in their communities. Funding for these programs comes from the federal government and California state government under the auspices of the county government.

The current prevention program began in 1995, when the Los Angeles County Board

**All communities are different, and community members need to be involved throughout the planning and implementation process.**

"We heard from community coalitions and prevention organizations that they wanted comprehensive, community-based programs," says Yolanda Cordero, section head for prevention at ADPA. So, from the 150 applications it received, ADPA awarded 28 contracts to community-based organizations that geared prevention

work to a specific community's needs and goals. It awarded an additional seven contracts in subsequent years to organizations that work with high-risk youths. Although the contracts initially were scheduled to run for three years, the County has since extended them.

In promoting community-based prevention work (called a community prevention model) ADPA recognizes that it is the residents of a community, not government agencies or outside entities, who

can best determine what actions will be most effective in reducing the harm caused by alcohol and other drug use.

"All communities are different," says Cordero, "and community members need to be involved throughout the planning and implementation process."

In addition to being geared to individual community needs, the community prevention model views each community as being in its own state of development. For example, some may be more organized and sophisticated than others. Some may develop more slowly than others. Each community begins at a different point and proceeds at a different pace.

The first step in developing a community-based prevention plan is assessing the needs



## COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES **Public Health**

of Supervisors asked ADPA to solicit prevention contracts. In preparation for the contract selection process, ADPA convened a summit meeting of people who had worked in the prevention field to provide advice and counsel on what kind of prevention work would be most effective in reducing problems.

## NEW ADPA STAFF

Since last spring, the Alcohol and Drug Program Administration has welcomed three new staff members. According to Yolanda Cordero, section head, the additional staff members were needed to strengthen the community prevention efforts and to enhance existing prevention services.

Veronica Emami is a prevention specialist who comes to ADPA with a background in criminal justice. She earned a BS and MS degree in the field from California State University, Long Beach and has worked with the Orange County Probation Department. She has also worked with nonprofit organizations, evaluating intervention and prevention programs for high-risk youth.

"My focus is empowering youths so they can recognize and cause change in the community," she says. "They are the future."

Connie Salgado-Sanchez, prevention specialist, joins ADPA after four years at United Way where she was a fund-raiser and investment advisor.

Salgado-Sanchez has a BA in English literature and women's studies from UCLA.

"I want to learn as much as I can about alcohol and other drug prevention issues and apply my skills toward creating better programs," she says. "I want to help community-based programs to be even more successful than they think they can be."

Ian Galvan is an 18-year-old student worker at ADPA who attends East Los Angeles Community College in pursuit of a degree in sociology and administration of justice. His interest in alcohol and other drug issues dates from his attendance at a MADD national youth summit in October 2000, which he says, "opened my eyes to underage drinking."

Galvan's work at ADPA is directed toward youths.

"I want to get young people involved in decisions that affect them," he says. "There is a better outcome for youths if they have input."



l to r: Yolanda Cordero, Veronica Emami, Ian Galvan, and Connie Salgado-Sanchez.

ences. The emphasis is on addressing the broad development assets that all youths need, such as caring relationships, safe environments, engaging activities, good health, and navigational skills. As part of these programs, many young people also participate in civic events and contribute to their communities.

"We want to teach youths to be advocates," says Cordero. "They have the power."

Four times a year contractors meet with ADPA at a prevention roundtable. There, ADPA staff members distribute the latest information about research and resources in the prevention field. Community organizations report about their progress and problems and network with others confronting similar issues in their communities.

"We keep up with the research and require that programs use evidence-based approaches. We are making the link between theory and fact," says Cordero. This is particularly true in the area of youth programs, where ADPA ensures that its providers are using the developmental model that is required by government funding sources. In this way, Los Angeles County's programs can position themselves for future state and federal grants. But Cordero notes that although the ADPA educates its contractors, it also learns from them.

"They are out there doing the work and telling us what the issues are," she says. "They work very hard."

One of ADPA's support services is to provide training to the staff of the community organizations. In November, the Institute for the Study of Social Change conducted an all-day

and resources of a particular community. To this end, community residents examine:

- characteristics of people who live in the community
- community conditions that contribute to alcohol and other drug related problems
- stressors on individuals and families
- availability and accessibility of social services
- availability and accessibility of recovery programs

Once community members have assessed its needs and assets, the next step is to determine how to mobilize residents to become involved with prevention efforts. Community members can do this in a variety of ways. They can, among other activities,

- hold neighborhood meetings
- sponsor social and recreational activities
- conduct skills-building training sessions
- "reclaim" areas of the community by cleaning them up

- establish drug-free zones
- change policies affecting the availability of alcohol and other drugs

All these activities are designed to change environmental factors in the community that may contribute to alcohol and other drug problems and to strengthen residents' abilities to take preventive action when it comes to alcohol and other drug use.

Because ADPA's 37 prevention contractors are working in communities with differing characteristics and needs, they have implemented a range of prevention strategies. Some have closed down alcohol outlets or problem bars, some have started youth development programs and some have enhanced existing neighborhood watch programs. But all benefit from the support of ADPA.

When it comes to youth activities, ADPA contractors provide programs that are grounded in youth development practices, which prepare young people to grow from adolescence into adulthood through structured, progressive experi-

We want to continue to promote community-based approaches," says Cordero. "We want to help create safer and healthier communities.

training session about evidence-based environmental approaches for reducing or preventing alcohol and other drug problems. This training enabled providers to enhance their community prevention efforts. Also in November, the Youth Leadership Institute conducted a two-day session for contractors of youth programs. Refresher courses are offered as needed to respond to staff turnover.

In its role as a governmental organization in the state's largest county, ADPA participates in statewide prevention programs. By attending conferences and encouraging its contractors to do the same, it promotes collaborative efforts. Often, the ADPA asks its groups to showcase their efforts at the conferences. At the recent Annual California Prevention Summit, Day One in Pasadena conducted a workshop on youth advocacy, United Coalition East Prevention Project presented a workshop on how they used environmental and media advocacy strategies to clean up the skid row community, and the San Fernando Valley Partnership presented a workshop on the statewide *Cinco de Mayo* campaign, which focused on the marketing practices of the alcohol industry.

ADPA is active in the Southern California Prevention Exchange, a multi-county prevention collaborative that was formed in 1998 and includes county administrators of alcohol and other drug prevention programs from ten Southern California counties and Baja California. The primary objectives of this group are to develop cross-county collaboration focused on media advocacy and environmental

prevention strategies and increase the impact of environmental prevention work by applying media advocacy to issues of region-wide concern.

ADPA recently hired three new staff members (see sidebar) and hopes to form an advisory committee and a youth council to assist in the county's prevention efforts. In the meantime, the community prevention model forms the basis of its prevention work.

"We want to continue to promote community-based approaches," says Cordero. "We want to help create safer and healthier communities." □



# A GEM OF A PROGRAM

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Surveys found a total of 150 billboards in all of the cities—with 53 percent of them containing alcohol ads.

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AN ENCOURAGING ATTITUDE AND PLENTY OF PHOTOGRAPHS TO HAMMER HOME AN IMPORTANT POINT have led to several key changes in alcohol ads and liquor sales permits in one Southeast Los Angeles community.

The changes have occurred in the city of Cudahy as part of the ongoing efforts of JADE and its director, Marcos Vega.

JADE, which stands for Juvenile Assistance Diversion Effort, has a "high-risk youth" contract with the Los Angeles County Alcohol and Drug Prevention Administration, a division of the Department of Health Services for Los Angeles County. Now in its 26th year of operation, JADE strives to reduce the juvenile crime rates in the communities it serves through intervention services that provide professional counseling programs, and to prevent juvenile delinquency through school and community programs.

JADE was founded by five communities and their respective police departments in response to the escalation of juvenile crime and delinquency. In addition to Cudahy (with a population of

about 26,000), JADE programs

target the neighboring communities of South Gate (100,000), Huntington Park (70,000), Bell (30,000) and Maywood (30,000).

Combined, the communities are about 96 percent Hispanic and all have a high population of youths—more than 50 percent.

Vega, director of JADE for 21 years, is excited about two recent accomplishments of the program. Early in 2000, JADE efforts successfully led to ordinances in Cudahy that ban alcohol advertisements on billboards and establish a three-year moratorium on the issuance of conditional use permits (CUPs) to alcohol outlets, both on- and off-site sales.

"This year, it's our goal to have the other four cities also adopt similar ordinances," Vega said.

The Cudahy victory grew from a true grassroots' campaign, he said, one that is still ongoing in the other four communities. Vega added that a priority of JADE is to "become proactive in the planning and delivery of services, and to impress upon residents our philosophy that community problems are best resolved through a community approach."

Vega believed a disproportionate number of billboards in the cities advertised alcohol. He decided to document his hunch by taking a picture of each billboard.

His snapshot surveys found a total of 150 billboards in all of the cities—with 53 percent of them containing alcohol ads.

The largest percentage (57 percent) was in Maywood and the smallest (42 percent) was in South Gate. In Cudahy, Vega's survey showed that 54 percent of the city's billboards advertised alcohol.

Data also were collected on the number of alcohol outlets for both on-sale and off-sale, and the ratio of outlets to overall city population.

A community-wide education meeting was called in Cudahy and Vega presented his findings and photos, which, he said, "made quite an impression." Residents were then surveyed about their attitudes toward billboard advertising of alcohol, as well as on-site advertising at alcohol outlets.

Results showed that fully 100 percent of the 565 surveyed wanted an ordinance that completely



# in Southeast Los Angeles

banned any alcohol ads from billboards and alcohol outlets anywhere within the city.

When the findings were presented to the Cudahy City Council, the council instituted the billboard ban. It also passed an "urgency ordinance" for a three-year moratorium on issuance of CUPs for the sale of alcohol.

"The City Council finds that there is a correlation between crime and the places where alcoholic beverages are sold," the ordinance reads. "The Council also finds that there are too many alcohol outlets in the city. . . the City Council finds that the current (CUP) application process for alcoholic beverage sales presents an immediate threat to the public health, safety and welfare."

"This has been a great benefit to the city," said George A. Perez, the city manager of Cudahy who was mayor when the ordinance was passed. "Otherwise we'd have three or four alcohol stores on every corner and we don't need any more at all."

Perez credited JADE and Vega for effectively bringing the billboard and CUP issues to the Council's attention. "Marcos also did a fine job in developing a good working relationship with us," he said.

After the billboard ban was passed and the CUP moratorium in place, Vega again met with Cudahy residents.

"I told them it's up to the community to help enforce this code," he said. "They need to be the eyes and ears and to report violations. This will go a long way to making it work."

Last May, Vega made presentations to the city councils of Bell, Maywood, Huntington Park and South Gate, with recommended changes or improvements in municipal codes related to alcohol billboards and alcohol licenses. Each city received a 40-page document that presented the

survey results, sample ordinances and comments from community meetings.

Vega is optimistic that meetings with individual planning commissions will be set early in 2002.

He said his approach is "to use positive pressure." In addition to presenting planning commissions with the photo documentation of billboards in their cities and survey results from residents, Vega also drafts ordinances with sample language "so they don't have to reinvent the wheel."

He will also remind them that of the 84 cities within the county of Los Angeles, a handful in addition to Cudahy have banned billboard advertising of alcohol, including San Fernando, Carson, Compton and Lynwood.

As he did in Cudahy, Vega said he'd tell the commissions "that we don't want to be the last cities to jump on this bandwagon."

He added that it is important to involve service clubs in the ordinance effort, because police officers and city employees often belong to such associations as the Optimists.

This past summer Vega began the Southeast Youth Council through JADE, a group that now numbers about 25 teens. One of its purposes is to help educate the kids about the effects of advertising as related to alcohol use.

"I want them to become more aware of their surroundings and to learn how environmental change can work," Vega said.



He added that initially the kids are loath to admit that they are even affected by advertising at all. He said he usually can dispel this notion with a few simple questions to them.

"Even though these kids don't drink, I tell them they sure seem to know a lot of beer brands," Vega said, "and then they begin to see how they are impacted by advertising."

The JADE director said the efforts to ban alcohol-themed billboards are good ones with which to involve youths, and he plans to take members of the newly formed Youth Council to make presentations before city councils.

"It's things like this that help them to grow mentally and to learn how to organize themselves," said Vega, adding, "so often communities make a mistake by not getting the young people involved."

As examples in his own backyard, Vega cited a park planned for Maywood and a youth center planned for Huntington Park.

"It sounds kind of silly, but no youths were involved in planning these things although they were going to be the ones using them," he said. □

# PLAYING AROUND LATE AT NIGHT

WHAT DO BASKETBALL, RAP MUSIC, SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY AND PREVENTION WORK HAVE IN COMMON? They are all a big part of Late Night Sports, a Saturday night program that attracts approximately 80 young people, ages 14 to 25, to a gym in the South Bay community of Torrance. The youth come to learn basketball, but when they leave the gym, many take with them skills that help them not only in sports, but also in life.

Late Night Sports has been operating for six years. Funded principally by the Los Angeles County Alcohol and Drug Program Administration, it is one of several programs of the South Bay Youth Project. The young people who participate are primarily from neighborhoods in Inglewood, Los Angeles, Compton, Long Beach and Gardena. Some, however, come from as far away as San Bernardino. Ninety-two percent are African American. Many play high school and college basketball, but recreational players are also welcome. Female players are welcome, too, and on any given night, 10 to 15 of them play alongside the young men.

"Basketball is the hook," says Mike Gervais, who runs the

Every Saturday evening at a little before 8 p.m., trained youth volunteers from the South Bay Youth Project's Youth Advisory Committee greet the basketball players as they arrive at the gym. If the players do not already have them, they are given membership cards, complete with photographs and fingerprints.

"It gives them a sense of belonging to something," says Gervais. The membership cards also allow the staff to monitor the activity level of each player. Records show that the vast majority of the players return to the program week after week; only about 20 percent drop in and out on a random basis.

Raul Ramos, now 27, was the 12th person to walk through the gym door on the first night of Late Night Sports. He has been coming back ever since and now he helps Gervais with the program.

"It's the atmosphere that keeps people coming back," Ramos says. "They know they are safe. It's a family structure, a team. That's the key. When we see each other on the street, we know each other."

Every participant signs a contract, agreeing to abide by a set of rules. The contract is driven by respect for others, and it demands honesty and the maintenance of a drug- and alcohol-free environment.

Although the program deals with a tough, physically aggressive population, including youths flirting with gang membership, they "know how to behave," according to Gervais. Since the program's inception, there have been only three fights.

For the first 10 to 15 minutes of Late Night Sports, before the basketball games begin, the youths listen to an educational talk given by Gervais. He uses this time to set the tone for the evening. Since Gervais is a sports psychologist

who has completed all of his course work for a PhD, he is well qualified to speak about how to be a successful athlete. His topic is generally sports, but Gervais includes information about conflict resolution and leadership, and he teaches techniques that "enhance performance at whatever you do." In addition, he speaks about the harm that alcohol and drugs can do.

"At the beginning, it was hard," says Ramos, who notes that Gervais' talks are often repetitive. "But now people are aware of the damage of drugs and alcohol. After awhile, it sinks into your character."

"I use sports as a vehicle for individual and social change," says Gervais. "I try to give them (the youths) the skills they can carry with them once they leave the gym."

But the real learning occurs on the basketball court.

Late Night Sports occupies three courts simultaneously and each youth plays several 20-minute games every evening. Between their own games, players watch other games from rows of bleachers.

Staff members assign the players to games and teams, which are a mixture of age and gender. The older the players, the more they are expected to be role models.

Staff members also assign team leaders. These are young people who, during their time at Late Night Sports, have been taught how to take control of a group and how to resolve conflicts.

"There are always debates," says Gervais. "Basketball is something to care passionately about."

When conflict arises, the leaders test their skills in this passionate environment. They try strategies for conflict resolution, and if things don't cool down, they ask a staff member for help.

"It's a safe way to try stuff out," says Gervais. "Then it might work in the real world."

"In the beginning, tempers would flare," says Ramos. "Now, 99 percent of the time, they work things out themselves, without yelling or screaming."

During the games, Gervais observes the players and learns about their individual action and response patterns. Then, between games, he gives the players one-on-one psychological skills training that will make them better athletes. For example, if a



project as a youth coordinator for South Bay Youth Project. "Basketball and rap music. We play it so loud, they feel comfortable."

## ... FOR PREVENTION

player becomes angry during a game, Gervais talks to him about how to control his emotions. Players learn to improve their "self-talk," which is the way they talk to themselves during a game. They learn positive self-talk and they are taught to not call themselves losers, to not "beat themselves up."

Often, Gervais asks players to set goals for a better performance in an upcoming game. Then at his next contact, he asks whether the goal was met.

"We start with baby steps," he says. "Then we transfer it to goals in school and goals in life."

Eventually, some of the players begin to write down their goals. That is when they realize how much they have learned from Late Night Sports. According to Gervais, that's also how they get "direction and purpose."

Ramos, for one, says that he has gained a lot from the program. He has learned to be ambitious, patient and self-sufficient. And he has learned teamwork and trust.

When he is not at the South Bay Youth Project, Gervais works with professional and Olympic athletes as a sports psychologist. The strategies he teaches these paying clients are identical to the ones he teaches his young basketball players. But at Late Night Sports, the strategies are taught for free. Gervais delights in telling this to the basketball players.

Sometimes, professional basketball players from the National Basketball Association, the Continental Basketball Association, the Women's National Basketball Association, or amateur players from elite colleges come to Late Night Sports to participate in the games.

"We don't invite them," says Gervais. "They just know about it."

Late Night Sports is unique. Although officials from nearby communities have observed the program, they have been unable to duplicate its combination of lessons in psychological skills training from a professional sports psychologist and basketball.

Many communities, however, do sponsor midnight basketball programs aimed at getting a high-risk youth population off the streets on Saturday nights. These programs are popular, but they are different from Late Night Sports. In fact, Late Night Sports began as midnight basketball, which Gervais describes as a program that "felt hollow, like a missed opportunity" and evolved into a program that, according to Gervais, "presents youth with tools and skills."

Gervais calls Late Night Sports a success, "one of the most powerful tools that shapes the lives of the participants that enter the gym."

Ramos agrees.

"It changes the character of people," he says. "And besides that, it's fun. People go to play basketball and without even thinking about it, they are learning." □

*Editor's note: For more information about Late Night Sports, visit their Website at [www.drugfreeteens.org](http://www.drugfreeteens.org)*

## Q&A

### WITH KATHRYN ICENHOWER



*Kathryn Icenhower has been executive director of SHIELDS for Families since the organization was founded in 1991 to help pregnant women with alcohol and other drug problems in the Watts and Compton neighborhoods.*

*In her decade at its helm, Icenhower has helped SHIELDS grow into an award-winning, comprehensive prevention and treatment program for central Los Angeles families. She spoke recently with Prevention File about her organization and why prevention is so important in resolving alcohol, tobacco and other drug problems.*

#### **How did SHIELDS for Families get its start?**

**A:** We began working with substance-abusing, perinatal women because a study had found that in the Watts/Compton area, 1,200 babies were born every year who had been substance-exposed. This was an extremely high number, and we wanted to do something about it.

But, in working with these women, we quickly learned that they and their children had many needs that weren't being addressed. Their alcohol and other drug problems didn't happen overnight. Often, these women had a long history not only of alcohol and drug use, but also of physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. On average, they were reading at a fourth-grade level.

They didn't just have one or two children, but four or five, and their children had usually been in and out of their homes, in foster care. These children were having academic and behavioral problems. Some were already in the criminal justice system, and some were already using alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol and other drug problems are family problems. Research shows that children of substance-abusing parents are more likely to develop such problems themselves. These children are the highest-risk group there is when it comes to this issue and other issues. We felt we needed to work with whole families to prevent these problems from passing down through generations.

#### **How does this help with prevention?**

**A.** We are working to break the cycle of family alcohol and other drug problems and are proactive in the movement to save children from an almost inevitable path of further problems. Our Heroes & Sheros program empowers 50 youths 10 to 17 by offering individual and group sessions, cultural enrichment, alcohol and substance abuse education, recreational activities, educational support.

Program activities focus on developing a cadre of youth leaders in their school and home communities. We believe that "re-empowered" youth grow into "re-empowered adults and that a "re-empowered" community has the greater potential of bringing about positive change. And our leadership development workshops provide community youths with an awareness of their community responsi-

bilities, knowledge of community mobilization theory and an opportunity to develop school and community prevention campaigns.

In addition our staff nurture "mobilizers" from within our various programs by developing "community events" to provide community members with opportunities to become more aware of the issues affecting them. Our efforts at mobilizing and re-empowering the community's youth and adults impact both the treatment community of SHIELDS and the surrounding community. These services result in increased confidence; increase community pride, an increased sense of community responsibility and an increased willingness to address community issues.

### **That sounds like a lot to deal with. How did you begin to resolve so many problems?**

**A:** Healthy communities support healthy families, so you don't have to pass alcohol and other drug problems from one generation to the next. When you see your mother is clean and sober and going to college, you know you can do the same.

Some people said, "Why don't you just get them out of the neighborhood and let them start over someplace else?" There were days when that sounded like a good idea, but, really, this community has strengths as well as challenges. For one thing, this is "home" to them. For another, family is very important in this community, even when family means children and a single parent.

We decided we needed to take a holistic approach. We needed to work with the whole individual and the whole family. And, we wanted to work with them within the community because when they became sober, productive families, it would benefit the community. These families would become a positive influence on other families.

### **How does SHIELDS work with whole families?**

**A:** We service the community in a number of different ways. Our programs include a number of

perinatal programs. We continue to serve pregnant women, and we have demonstrated success in that area. The number of substance-exposed births has decreased from 1,200 a year in 1991 to about 200 annually today.

We also serve women with dual diagnoses. We found that the women we were working with not only had substance-abuse problems, but other, mental health issues that needed to be dealt with.

We offer residential treatment. SHIELDS oversees an 86-unit, long-term, residential treatment complex called Exodus that houses substance-abusing women and their families. Another of our programs, Revelations, serves substance-abusing youth, ages 13 to 21.

Because we are serving so many women with children, we have programs specially designed for the children. These include school-based mental health; after-school programs; a program for children ages three to five who have special needs; and a multi-systemic program for high-risk, probation youth and their families.

Then there is Healthy Start, our outreach and case-management program for pregnant and parenting women, designed to reduce infant deaths.

We also strive to help women support themselves and their families. We offer vocational assistance, including job training, job placement and education.

And, because there is such a huge demand for affordable housing in our community, SHIELDS oversees 126 units of low-income housing. We also oversee family preservation for the city of Compton.

Our motto is "Believing, Building, Becoming." First, you have to believe in yourself. Then, you have to build yourself up to become what you want to be.

### **What successes are you seeing in your programs?**

**A:** Many. For instance, most residential treatment centers are considered successful if they have a 25-percent completion rate. At Exodus, we have a 75-percent completion rate. And, this is not a 30-day

program; this is long-term. We recently had two families graduate who had been there two-and-a-half years. This problem doesn't happen overnight, and you can't treat it overnight.

I am pleased to say, too, that our residential program is the only one that accepts more than two children per family. We have women with four or more children who wouldn't be able to get in anyplace else unless they were willing to place some of their children (elsewhere). That's an awfully hard decision to make, and at Exodus, they don't have to make that decision.

For families that have been separated, we have an 80-percent reunification rate. If we weren't working with the children as well as the mothers, that probably wouldn't happen. We work with men also—those who are still involved with their families. We have education and parenting classes for the men.

I'm proud of our children. They are cleaning parks and helping with voter registration. They are finishing high school, some with honors, and going on to college. I see them becoming a positive influence in our community.

Many of our mothers are graduating from college. They are working as bus drivers and child development workers or they are coming back to work for SHIELDS.

### **You are doing so much now, but what are your hopes for the future?**

**A:** We need more low-income housing. We never have enough to meet the demand. Our families need a place to live.

We also have transportation problems, particularly for our youths. There are many programs for them, but they don't always have transportation. □

**When you have healthy families, you don't have to pass alcohol and other drug problems from one generation to the next.**

