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Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition shares numbers and strategy



Rebecca Fusco shares information with people Tuesday afternoon (May 21) in an effort to reduce deaths, injuries, violence, theft and the subsequent heartache in Dixie County.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 24, 2019 at 10:19 a.m.

CROSS CITY – Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam and Event Coordinator Rebecca Fusco shared information with people Tuesday afternoon (May 21) in an effort to reduce deaths, injuries, violence, theft and the subsequent heartache in Dixie County.

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam watches and listens as Rebecca Fusco of the coalition presents facts supporting a belief that Dixie County has a problem with drug abuse. At one point during this session, VanAernam said there was a point when she thought people can abuse drugs and that would not affect her. Then, she learned that violence and thefts are very often driven by drug abuse. The impact on the community as a whole can be very strong in a negative way.



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Like its counterparts in Levy County and Gilchrist County, the DCADC strives to protect the community from the ill effects of drug abuse.

VanAernam opened the lunch and learn session by explaining how Fusco would speak about statistics reflecting the problem in Dixie County is similar to that across the nation.

The event included a do-it-yourself buffet-style submarine sandwiches from the Subway located next to the Dixie County Public Library in Cross City. (Buy local.)

Fusco provided statistics and information that could fill a book, as she reviewed surveys and assessments the DCADC conducted to document the drug problem. Surveying the people of the community, mirrored that the people know about the problem with alcohol abuse, as well as the methamphetamine and prescription drug epidemic in Dixie County.

Fusco said she was surprised that the community perception survey results lined up exactly with the hard data found in arrest records, overdose records and other factual evidence.

That 2018 survey, which was “kinda’ astonishing,” was followed by a 2019 survey, where the researchers found people willing to share their perception on the location of drug problems in Dixie County, Fusco said.

Municipalities and neighborhoods that survey takers said the drug problems included Cross City, the Town of Suwannee, Old Town, Suwannee Gardens, Bobo’s trailer park, and Old Town Hammock (the woods with 20-acre lots), Fusco said. She took the survey results and compared it with jail log records showing locations of arrests and locations of suspects’ residences, and that data lined up with the community survey, Fusco said.

The one “hot spot” on jail logs that did not show up on the community survey, Fusco said, is a small town located south of Cross City named Eugene. The researcher blamed herself for that, because she did not put it on the survey for people to check as a location.

The top three “substances of concern” in Dixie County that were noted in community surveys are methamphetamine, prescription drugs and alcohol respectively, Fusco said.

The problem of methamphetamine in regard to research to find our problems, Fusco said, is that it’s “almost invisible” from a data perspective. The number of overdose deaths from ingestion of methamphetamine is almost zero, she said.

“We know it’s there,” Fusco said. “law enforcement tells us it’s a problem. Our residents tell us it’s a problem. We see the consequences of it, but not necessarily in the data.”

There are arrests for possession of methamphetamine and sale of methamphetamine, Fusco said. However, methamphetamine is not a drug found to cause fatal overdoses as often as opioids such as heroin or prescription pain relieving drugs.

There’s no data showing prescribing rates for methamphetamine. There’s no method to measure how much is being purchased and how much is being sold as would be recorded from retail outlet records such as from a pharmacy, Fusco said.

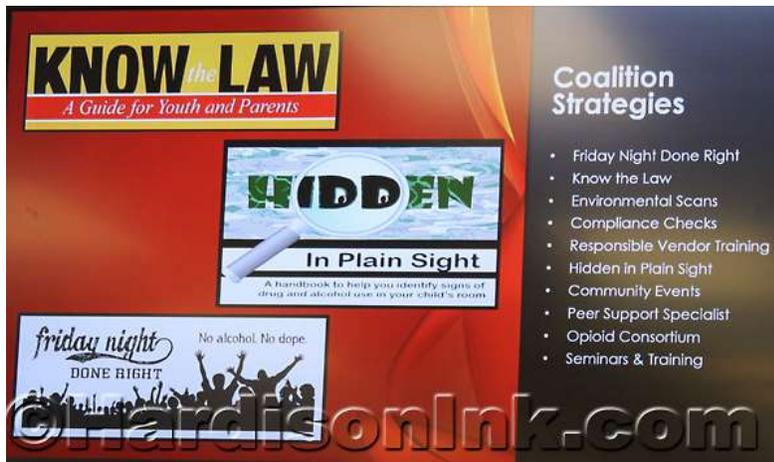
One piece of data does show a difference in drugs of preference based on ages.

Arrests for meth are primarily for people aged 22 to 45 years old, Fusco said.

Arrests for illegal opioid possession and sale are primarily for people aged 45 years old and older, Fusco said.

Fusco said survey of the community reflects what they consider to be the best

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methods to solve this problem. The first method people see is too provide a rehabilitation center. The next most important solution to the drug abuse problem in Dixie County, Fusco said, according to the people noted, to have more jobs.

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive

Director Katrina VanAernam (right) and Event Coordinator Rebecca Fusco both give listeners a plethora of information.

Fusco shared many, many more facts, as well as providing a card showing examples of opioids, such as codeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone, hydro morphine, methadone and oxycodone. Tramadol is listed as an opioid. Fusco mentioned that Tramadol does little to relieve pain, however it is very addictive.

The card also lists many benzodiazepines such as Xanax, Klonopin, Tranxene, Librium, Valium and many more.

Both opioids and benzodiazepines slow heart rates, Fusco said, and mixing two types of drugs can result in death. Mixing either of those with alcohol also can prove to be a fatal mix, she said.

Among the numerous valuable bits of information distributed during the 90-minute session, was when Fusco shared with the listeners strategies of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition.

Fusco mentioned three programs. Know The Law is an educational course taught by law enforcement officers for middle school and high school students to better understand the consequence of their actions.

Another strategy is Friday Night Done Right. In this program, participants enjoy fun activities without using alcohol or illegal drugs.

Another program is relatively new and it is called Hidden In Plain Sight. In that program, people are taken into a teenager's mock bedroom to see 50 different points of evidence that may not have been noticed had the person not been brought into awareness about methods to camouflage drug abuse.



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In addition to these programs, the coalition also looks through places where retail outlets where alcohol and tobacco are sold to see the level of advertising in the store that might influence young consumers, as well as to witness other community-affecting behavior by clerks, such as not checking IDs.

The coalition also provides a program called Responsible Vendor Training, where clerks are taught the best practices in regard to checking identification for the ages of purchasers of alcohol and tobacco products.

The coalition helps support compliance checks, which are conducted by local law enforcement officers. Compliance checks help ensure that vendors in Dixie County do not sell alcohol or tobacco to minors.

Fusco and other members of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition are also active in community events, seminars and training as well.

After the information session, participants traveled over to the DCADC office, which is within the four corners (although separated) of the Ameris Bank in Cross City. There, the people learned about 50 different hiding spots and indicators showing that the teenager in that mock bedroom had a significant drug abuse problem – as they participated in the Hidden In Plain Sight exercise.

All of those items in that teenager's mock bedroom were purchased online and locally. Fusco mentioned that while in Walmart buying items needed to create homemade methamphetamine, she was approached twice by other shoppers willing to help her find the best ingredients for her recipe.

While shopping at a local gas station, Fusco noticed how certain items were placed within one area, as if to provide more ease for the do-it-yourself meth cook.

This lunch and learn session was another of the many ways the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, the Gilchrist County Anti-Drug Coalition and the longest established group like this – the Levy County Prevention Coalition – are involving people to help other people stay away from dangerous drugs.

There was a contingent of Taylor County residents at this Dixie County event as people from that county to the north consider methods to help residents there in this regard.