

The Telegraph

Nashua Prevention Coalition set for Red Ribbon Week

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NASHUA – A coalition focused on educating the public about substance use met Wednesday to prepare for upcoming events for the annual Red Ribbon Week. This year’s theme is: *“Life Is Your Journey, Travel Drug Free.”*

Nashua Prevention Coalition members were joined by representatives from the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua and Nashua High School South Students Against Destructive Decisions members to lay the foundation for this year’s Red Ribbon Week campaign, which is slated for Oct. 23-31.

In the upcoming week, people involved with the coalition will go to different businesses and organizations to hand out red ribbons and fliers in preparation for Red Ribbon Week, to promote drug abuse awareness.

Red Ribbon Week first was introduced in 1985 after a Drug Enforcement Administration agent was tortured and subsequently killed by a drug cartel he was investigating in Mexico. The family of Enrique “*Kiki*” Camarena launched the campaign in his memory. Nashua annually participates in Red Ribbon Week, and in observance of this red ribbons will be displayed throughout the city.

The Coalition aims to put red ribbons on downtown flag poles, to display a Red Ribbon Week banner across Main Street and have law enforcement wear Red Ribbon Week pins on their uniforms, event organizers said. The Coalition and its affiliates also will have volunteers giving out fliers, stickers and pins to businesses to raise awareness about the event.

“The more people who know about Red Ribbon Week, the better,” Program Coordinator Kameo Chasse said during Wednesday’s planning meeting.

During Red Ribbon Week, the Coalition and SADD will host a kickoff event at Leda Lanes in Nashua where Jim Donchess will deliver a mayoral proclamation. The first Senior SADD Dinner also will be set for that week, when senior citizens will learn about drug misuse prevention and educating the younger generation.

In addition, each school in the city will observe the week by engaging in red ribbon-themed activities.

Members of the Boys & Girls Club announced they have made more than 500 red ribbons to hand out to as many people as they can. Ribbons were handed out to everyone at Wednesday’s meeting in preparation for distribution. Also discussed during the planning session is how Nashua North will man tables to educate the public about Red Ribbon Week. Chasse said the Coalition plans on *“ramping it up”* in the coming weeks.

Coalition Executive Director Donna Arias said Red Ribbon Week is important because of the impact drugs have on the community.

“New Hampshire has the second-highest rate of opioid-related overdose deaths in the country. In 2016, there were 437 opioid-related overdose deaths – a rate of 35.8 deaths per 100,000 persons – nearly 3 times higher than the national rate of 13.3 deaths per 100,000. From 2013 through 2016, opioid-related deaths in New Hampshire tripled. This increase was mainly driven by the number of deaths related to synthetic opioids (predominately fentanyl), which increased more than tenfold, from 30 to 363 deaths, during this time,” according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Arias noted the alarming statistics.

“I think it’s important because (the opioid epidemic) has an impact on our community. Substance use disorder is a challenge that spreads into many areas,” she said. *“If we’re able to address it as a community, we’re able to have a positive impact on people minds and we’re also able to prevent some major health issues.”*

Nashua South SADD Officer Alexis St. Laurent said she is thrilled about the event.

“Oh, I am so excited for Red Ribbon Week,” she said. *“We have a bunch of activities planned for Nashua South.”*

St. Laurent said those plans include games, trivia, photo booths and handing out ribbons. Nashua South SADD Club Advisor Leah Elliott said SADD will reach out to schools in the Nashua community to distribute red ribbons. Elliot said she also is excited about the event.

“I am feeling really excited that it is becoming such a big thing in the community because substance misuse is a community issue and we need as many people on board as possible to give them hope,” Elliot said. *“I feel hopeful that Nashua can continue to be a faith community for teens and one that supports teens in being able to be substance free.”*