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HUNTERDON COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE RECEIVES ATTORNEY GENERAL'S AWARD FOR COMMUNITY POLICING INITIATIVES

On May 22, 2017, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office hosted an award ceremony at Rutgers University; Livingston Campus to recognize ten recipients for their community policing initiatives. The Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office was the sole Prosecutor's Office in the state to be recognized for this honor.

According to New Jersey Attorney General Christopher S. Porrino, "I firmly believe that community policing is more than having uniformed officers walk a beat. Rather, it is an overarching strategy that depends on collaboration between police departments and community groups to identify and solve local neighborhood problems."

The award recognized the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office for successfully partnering with community members and organizations to offer three highly successful community policing programs to its residents.

One Voice, created in 2012, is a two-way communication process that addresses social issues through the faith-based community. During Prosecutor Kearns' first term as County Prosecutor, while facing the battle against opioid addiction, he looked for new ways to connect to members of the community. Prosecutor Kearns decided that the faith based community could be a valuable untapped resource that law enforcement could use to help educate the community. The result was One Voice, a coalition of faith based leaders from all denominations working together with law enforcement to address social issues affecting the community. One Voice is managed by a steering committee comprised of the prosecutor, diverse faith leaders and the Safe Communities Coalition. Working together, they construct a unified message that clergy present to their congregations on a designated weekend, either through sermons, bulletin messages or children's lessons. Since its inception, One Voice has been used address social issues, such as prescription drug abuse, heroin addiction and suicide prevention. In addition, Hunterdon County's One Voice initiative has become a model for other communities both locally, and around the country.

L.E.A.P., Law Enforcement Adolescent Program, L.E.A.P. is an early intervention program that serves as a diversion from the legal system. The objective of the L.E.A.P. program is to decrease the overall number of juveniles entering the legal court system by connecting at-risk youth and their parents with support and assistance. The program provides an alternative to criminal charges for minor infractions and help young members of the community to learn from their mistakes, interrupt behaviors that would lead to further involvement with the criminal justice system, and help them become productive members of society. A staggering 98% of adolescent participants have not re-entered the court system upon completion of LEAP.

The **START** initiative, which began in 2013, provides life-saving addiction and crisis services referrals. Police officers and troopers deliver the referral and resources packet to families and victims at the time of their crisis. In addition, these START packets are placed in libraries, hospitals, social service buildings, and other community locations.

According to Prosecutor Kearns, “Getting the message out to the public and letting them know about the valuable resources that are available is vital to helping people prevent addiction, overdoses and cope with their problems. Our core responsibilities are to enforce the laws, while at the same time, striving to save lives. Law enforcement will not be able to arrest our way out of this epidemic. We will do justice and seek to preserve the quality of life that we enjoy here in Hunterdon County and throughout the state.”

The START Initiative has been endorsed by the New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police and has been adopted by other law enforcement organizations throughout New Jersey. Law enforcement agencies throughout New Jersey have embraced the START program concept.

Prosecutor Kearns stated, “I am honored to be recognized by New Jersey Attorney General Porrino for our community policing initiatives. This award is a testament to the dedication and innovation of the Hunterdon County Prosecutor’s Office, our community partners, faith leaders, and coalition members. The Hunterdon County Prosecutor’s Office will continue to work together with our community partners to save lives and preserve the quality of life here in Hunterdon County.”

Please see the following link : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qR7ir595-A>

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