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HUNTERDON'S START INITIATIVE EXPANDS WITH THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION PARTNERING TO PROMOTE THE DEA'S CAMPUS DRUG PREVENTION PROGRAM

Hunterdon County Prosecutor Anthony P. Kearns, III, Chief of Detectives John J. Kuczynski, Lesley Gabel, of Prevention Resources, the Hunterdon County Chiefs of Police Association and the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, are pleased to announce that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has now joined the START Initiative.

Carl J. Kotowski, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New Jersey Division said, "The Drug Enforcement Administration-New Jersey Division is proud to be a partner in the START Initiative. The START packets are a great way to provide information to the public on available resources. We are happy to include resource cards with DEA's various informational websites."

The addition of the DEA's "Campus Drug Prevention" program to the already highly successful START Initiative could not have come at a more relevant time than now, just as schools are starting back in session. The Campus Drug Prevention program is specifically designed to promote awareness and prevention of drug abuse for students heading off to college, encouraging students to reach out both for themselves as well as friends who they know need help.

For more information, and to access the DEA's Campus Drug Prevention initiative, please visit www.CampusDrugPrevention.gov

The START initiative is a concept, designed by the Hunterdon County Prosecutors Office in collaboration with the Safe Communities Coalition of Hunterdon/Somerset and the Hunterdon County Association of Chiefs of Police.

One of the first of its kind, the START initiative is in its fourth year providing direct referral information, in a prepared packet, to individuals and families who may be ensnared in the grips of addiction or other crisis. While initially these packets were provided only to individuals upon release from jail or police custody, the program has greatly expanded and now includes Hunterdon Healthcare, among several other agencies, ensuring packets are now distributed to Emergency Room and Crisis Patients as well.

START gained the endorsement of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police in 2016 and has expanded to a number of counties in New Jersey. Now the United States Drug Enforcement Administration's New Jersey Division has joined in the initiative.

According to Prosecutor Anthony P. Kearns III, "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 to 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. We are grateful for the DEA's partnership in START, providing valuable resources online and in print."

Hunterdon County Freeholder Director John E. Lanza stated, "The County of Hunterdon and the Board of Chosen Freeholders support the START initiative. Through this partnership we are able to provide direct access to information on County and State services to battle addiction. We applaud all the partnerships in the START program."

The County of Hunterdon provides access to services and the printing of resource materials including the START packet. The START Packets are made available at the County libraries and Justice Complex.

According to Lesley Gabel, "Since 2013 well over 2,000 START Packets have been distributed to our community partners, with requests for more packets coming in every week. The START Packets provide not only information on addiction services, but prevention information that includes; overdose protection act, 911 lifeline legislation, prescription pill safety and disposal and mental health issues as well."

The START referral packets are assembled and provided by the Safe Communities Coalition utilizing staff and volunteers. For more information please visit www.safecoalition.org

Chief of Detectives John J. Kuczynski added, "This is a Step to Action. Our local community partners, such as the clergy from Hunterdon's One Voice and various other County Human Services groups are participating as well."