

Shelby raid part of community drug elimination effort

Wednesday's drug-related arrests in Shelby are a positive step toward alleviating the region's drug problem, law enforcement officers said, but those officers added it takes an entire community working together to fully address the issue.

METRICH, with assistance from the U.S. Marshal's Office, the Shelby Police Department and the Northern Ohio Violent Fugitive Task Force, arrested six people Wednesday when attempting to serve 11 warrants between Mansfield and Shelby.

Brandon Manns, 32; Tyler Rice, 30; and Thomas Scherer, 50, were indicted on felony heroin trafficking charges in Shelby. Deandre Dwayne Able (a.k.a.) George Lester, 39, and Rachel Kiser also were indicted on felony heroin trafficking charges in Mansfield.

Warrants have been issued for the arrest of all five individuals. None had been arrested as of late Thursday.

As law enforcement officers from around the county work to arrest those five and others suspected of selling drugs, their message is clear: It takes more than just police to put an end to a community problem.

"We've said many, many times that law enforcement alone cannot solve the drug problem within our community," METRICH Project Director Ken Coontz said. "We need a multi-faceted approach where you have the courts, probation, police, community services and county organizations working together to get a handle on this."

Coontz said drug sweeps such as the one that took place Wednesday are only the beginning as detectives are working on drug cases throughout the county.

"There is still a lot of work to be done," he said. "Our work is laid out in front of us."

All of us.

Youth education

In the case of the six people arrested Wednesday, five of them — Eric Ensminger, Dylan Sandy, Eric Lauderbaugh, Destrey Potts and Brittany Kamann — were indicted on charges of trafficking heroin in the vicinity of a school zone or near children.

Drugs such as heroin are extended to every part of a community when they become prevalent in a city.

How a community responds though, partially depends on the culture, which includes perceptions of drugs formed by some of its youngest members.

"As a small community in particular, we recognize we have a responsibility to help our young people make good decisions," Shelby City Schools Superintendent Tim Tarvan said. "And we will be diligent about that."

Tarvan said instilling a drug-free mindset within a child begins in the classroom. Teachers serve as the first line of defense for detecting drug abuse as they see their students every day and can quickly notice changes in behavior.

Between health classes, group assemblies and speakers, Tarvan said students are exposed to a strong anti-drug message from a young age.

Tarvan added that guidance counselors also are available for students should they need to talk about a drug-related problem at home or with a friend.

"We have teachers who continuously drive home the importance of making good decisions on the issue of drug and alcohol abuse," he said.

The district has policies in place to address students who do not make those good decisions or endanger others; Tarvan said Shelby City Schools has a working relationship with city and police officials.

"We have a tremendous responsibility to work together and keep our kids safe.

"We all have to work together."

Community involvement

Working together with the school district and other institutions within the city is vital to a police department and a community in overcoming a drug problem, Shelby police Chief Charlie Roub said.

Taking drug dealers out of the area is important, but locking people up for months or years at a time will not completely address the issue.

"You can't arrest it away," Roub said of the region's heroin issue. "It takes more than the police to make a problem like drugs go away."

Roub said one of the best ways of dealing with a neighborhood drug problem is to establish a culture of non-tolerance for drug activity. That is best done through vigilantly reporting suspicious activity to the police.

Calling the police with tips — especially reporting license plates and other pieces of specific identifying information — will add to the database of information kept by officers. This eventually lead to arrests such as the ones made on Wednesday.

Roub said the idea is to make it unattractive for drug dealers and drug users to stay in the community.

"Let it be known that these folks are not welcome here," Roub said. "If you see drug activity in your neighborhoods, report it. Step up on things like that and they'll get the idea."

Roub said reporting drug activity could be frustrating as police may not immediately respond to the area. Police prioritize calls they receive, so an officer may not be free right away to check on the area.

Still, Roub said people working together in stamping drugs gives the community the best chance to make a change.

"If you don't call, you're contributing to the problem," he said.

Treating the problem

Treating the drug problem can be, at times, a problem itself.

The six arrested on felony drug trafficking indictments were all charged with either fourth- or fifth-degree felonies related to drug trafficking or possession. A fourth-degree felony is punishable by anywhere from six to 18 months in jail and a fifth-degree felony carries between six to 12 months of jail time.

Cases are decided in the courts after the arrests are made.

METRICH Assistant Project Director Keith Porch agreed with Roub in saying arrests alone will not eliminate heroin from the region.

Recent legislation aimed at curbing prison populations have placed an emphasis on probation and diversionary programs as alternatives to incarceration.

Drug dealers have caught onto this, Porch said, and have made adjustments to game the system.

"Dealers now stash the big stuff someplace and take just enough to be charged with a fourth- or fifth-degree felony (if caught)," Porch said. "What we know is no different from what a dealer knows. It's a cat and mouse game. They know the game — especially if they've been through the system once or twice."

Porch said that true recovery comes when a person is willing to accept treatment.

In Shelby, there are a number of faith-based treatment options available for recovery.

Calvary Baptist Church Pastor Steven Schag assists in administering Reformers Unanimous, or RU. Reformer's Unanimous is a national faith-based addiction recovery program that began in Illinois and has since spread to more than 600 churches across the nation.

Shelby-area churches opened their chapter in April 2008.

Each Thursday at 7 p.m., participants — referred to as students — meet and study a faith-based curriculum complete with reading, prayer, group discussion and testimonials.

The nondenominational program boasts roughly a 70 to 80 percent success rate upon completion, which could take anywhere from four to six months.

"It's been a real exciting program for us," Schag said. "We believe it's the link with the Lord that contributes to that success. He's the ultimate author of recovery and reconciliation."

Be it prevention, incarceration or recovery, heroin is a real problem in Richland County which requires a number of different organizations to combat.

"I don't think the drug problem is beyond getting a handle on," Coontz said. "I think we're not there yet although the county is very proactive. We have the resources in place where we're starting to get something going. Whether it's Mansfield police, Shelby police or METRICH, we're all doing our small part to add to that."

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