



Officials offer 'hope' to those struggling with drug addictions

By Kyla Woodard
For Clay Today

ORANGE PARK — The Clay County Sheriff's Department, Fire Rescue, and local community organizations came together with the spirit of hope last Friday to deal with drug addiction in the area.

"I know that drugs and drug addicts many times just need a pathway out. So, using the platform of the sheriff, what I have done has been able to pull community service providers from across the county together," Cook said.

The event was held at the Church of Eleven22. It included many tabling organizations such as Clay County Community Services, The Way Free Medical Clinic, Clay Action Coalition, Recovery Road and Foundations of Freedom.

Cook herself created Hammer and Hope three years ago to combat the striking drug presence in Clay County.

Cook and Fire Rescue. She said Friday's program was one out of a two-prong approach to addressing the problem.

The "hope" approach aimed to give addicts a way out. Stephen Teal, a captain with the Clay County Fire Rescue's Paramedicine Program, said that spreading awareness of the drug crisis and providing help to those affected was the goal of the second approach.

"Our big thing is to be there for the people who want help but don't realize it's there. There's a lot of people looking for help, a lot of people that can't afford it," he said.

It all ties in with Florida's Coordinated Optoid Recovery program, which expanded to Clay in Fall 2022. The Initiative allows addicts to receive medically assisted treatment, as patients are transported to a medical facility equipped to deal with addictions after a

SEE HOPE, 10





PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

Resident found answers and were connected to programs to help them, or a family member, overcome drug addiction. Twenty agencies attended last week's Hammer and Hope.

Hope

from page 9

trip to the hospital so that they can begin a clinical pathway to sobriety.

Cook said the annual event could be attributed to helping about 40 people rehabilitate themselves and get their lives back on track.

"I've actually had a couple of people stop me and say, 'How do I get into that Hammer and Hope help stuff?' And these are people who need help and want help," Cook said.

Tables were circled in the large area, some decked with informational pamphlets and others with keepsakes — all to spread awareness and be an asset to the community.

Stephanie Geoghagan, Clay Action Coalition project coordinator, said her organization's table was filled with resources for young people and even featured Detera pouches.

Geoghagan said Detera is a safe, environmentally friendly way to eliminate old prescriptions or over-the-counter medications.

"We do that so that it can't be diverted. Because we know that young people often will experiment with medications in their homes before they do anywhere else. So, we're just trying to create a safe environment for young people and then also visitors who may be coming into your home who may be drug seeking," Geoghagan said.

Tommy Ferretti, the founder of the sober living program, Foundations of Freedom, said he loves being at events that allow him to be utilized and on the front lines

of solving the issue.

"I get a lot of phone calls where if there was an overdose, the fire department will call me. If somebody is struggling, the police department will call me. And if the person is ready to change their lifestyle, they'll actually call me directly," Ferretti said.

Barbara Davenport, owner and operator of Recovery Road, said she wanted to serve as a resource for people who are struggling but also to raise awareness of the stigma associated with addiction.

"There's still a lot of people that have a negative stigma about addiction. They think it can't happen to their family, type of family, or wealthy family. That's not true," Davenport said.

Since the annual event has made its home in Clay County, Teal said it seems to be working. However, he said its impact on lowering the drug count waxes and wanes. Teal said that just a few weeks before the event, the county saw a large intake of drug overdoses.

"Apparently, another stream of drugs at some point came through the county. What all they were, I'm not sure," Teal said. "But we can tell when it waxes and wanes."

Cook said that she hopes to continue the Hammer and Hope initiative to build a healthy and safe community — all by holding people accountable and providing assistance for the ones that want it.

"If you're dealing drugs in Clay County, we're going to find you, and we're going to arrest you. But, if you're an addict and you want help, there is a pathway out. And we will help you find that path," she said.

Staff reporter Lee Wardlaw contributed to his story.