



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO News Release

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COUNTY SAVES THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN FROM “METH HELL” *Drug Endangered Children Program Marks Tenth Year*

The Nation’s “Drug Czar,” John P. Walters, joined County Board of Supervisors Vice-Chairwoman Dianne Jacob, and other County and law enforcement officials in today’s celebration of the County of San Diego’s successful Drug Endangered Children (DEC) program. In the past 10 years, 2,276 children have been safely removed from meth infested homes and other drug settings. On average, about 19 children each month are rescued by the DEC program.

“Drug Endangered Children programs across the country have been extremely successful in ensuring that children found in these environments receive appropriate attention and care,” said Director Walters, who coordinates all aspects of federal drug control programs and spending. During his visit to San Diego, Walters praised the County’s DEC program as one of the first in the nation to begin rescuing young, innocent victims of meth and other drugs.

The cornerstone of the DEC program is the partnership between law enforcement and social services. Officers call the DEC program when children are found in homes raided for suspicion of drug use or sales. A social worker immediately reports to the scene to address the needs of the children and investigate for possible abuse and neglect.

“Ten years ago, officers would end up changing dirty diapers. They would have to comfort screaming and scared children, traumatized by what is happening around them,” said Jacob, who was also joined by Mary Harris, Director, Child Welfare Services, Health and Human Services Agency; Norma Rincon, Supervisor, HHSA’s Drug Endangered Children Program-South County; Chief Jim Maher, Escondido Police Department; and La Tisha Herrera, a former meth user who lost children because of meth addiction.

“Though the program has been a success, officers are still finding too many children living in filthy and unhealthy environments,” added Jacob, while unveiling what she called a “Meth Wall of Hell,” displaying photos of drug paraphernalia, drugs, weapons, drug money, and dirty homes from which children have been rescued. “They find infants, toddlers, and young children living in meth hell. It’s a meth hell because, to a meth user, the most important thing is the drug, and the children often come last.”

If children are removed from the home, they are transported to a medical facility for thorough

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examination and testing for meth and other drug exposure. Of the 2,276 children rescued by the DEC program to date, 180 tested positive for drugs; 95 of those tested positive for meth; 66 of the 95 children that tested positive for meth were under the age of 6.

Sometimes, losing their children is the impetus for parents to kick their drug addiction. La Tisha Herrera, a former meth user, had to choose between her addiction and her children. “Giving up my child was the hardest thing I had to do,” said Herrera.

Herrera, 29, began using meth at 16 years of age. Two of her children were removed by Child Welfare Services. It wasn’t until December, 2006 that she entered into treatment and found the strength to maintain sobriety.

“I did not want to live like that anymore,” she said. “It’s been pretty awful. I did not want them (my kids) to go through what I went through. I did not want to hurt my children anymore.”

The DEC program started as a pilot project in North County in 1998. The program is now available countywide.

“The safety and wellbeing of children is our top priority,” said Mary Harris, Director of the County’s Child Welfare Services. “Before the Drug Endangered Children program, some of the children ended up back in unsafe environments. That’s not the case anymore.”

If you suspect drug activity or child abuse or neglect, call the meth hotline, (877) NO2-METH or file a report online, WWW.NO2METH.org. The calls and reports are completely confidential.

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