

Drug Program Got \$2,000 In 1980, Asking \$45,000

Hunterdon Drug Awareness, a county-wide drug abuse prevention and treatment program which grew out of the Lambertville-based NARCO, wants the county freeholders to contribute 22 times as much as the county gave last year.

In percentage, it is the biggest of several major increases sought by county departments and social services this year. In dollars it means a request for \$45,000 this year against \$2,000 in 1980.

Adrienne Peck, director of the group, told the freeholders Tuesday that the program receives \$28,000 in federal and state aid to treat young people with drug problems, but will get nothing for its education and prevention work in schools and community organizations.

It has used a great deal of volunteer help, and will continue to do so, but needs money for professionals, such as counselors, she said.

Originally centered in Lambertville, NARCO was an offshoot of an Atlantic City project, but it went county-wide and decided, last year, to leave NARCO and incorporate as a purely Hunterdon program, Ms. Peck explained. The organization hoped to "achieve local control of the program, and, consequently, to obtain greater local financial support."

The project operates a "drug-free outpatient program," working with clients 17 years old, on the average. Referrals come from the young people themselves, their families, the courts, probation and the schools, she said.

23 Being Treated

Twenty-three teenagers now are getting treatment, and several are on the waiting list, Ms. Peck added. The organization is provided with space at the Phillips Barber Medical Center in Lambertville and at Hunterdon Central High School. The First Presbyterian Church of Lambertville offers a meeting place and office equipment.

Ms. Peck said a vital part of the work is "in-service training for teachers," so that they can recognize and deal with drug problems, and going into health classes to talk with students.

"When their people come in, the kids perk up," said James Loper, superintendent of South Hunterdon Regional High School and one of the officers of Drug Awareness. "They listen to 'outsiders.' They think they're talking to an expert, and they are."

Former Police Chief Frank Masterson of Lambertville said he helped organize NARCO, and continues with the new group, because as chief in the 1970s he was concerned about "12 drug-related deaths in my area." The toll has dropped since Awareness began, he asserted.

Ms. Peck said Awareness is "the only comprehensive county-wide drug prevention program in New Jersey," and even so, operates "on a shoestring."

Last year's budget was \$40,900, including

total salaries of \$29,346, kept low, she said, because the organization had CETA (Comprehensive Training and Employment Act) help — now ending, and because some counselors donated their time.

The new budget would be \$85,100, including \$62,917 for salaries.

Ms. Peck said the group cooperates with but does not duplicate other services, working with the Hunterdon County Youth Shelter, the Mental Health Center's Juvenile Counseling Service, and county departments, but "not overlapping."

Prosecutor William Palleria said he "wholeheartedly supports" the program. "We have a severe drug problem in Hunterdon County, and not just in the high schools. It has reached the grammar schools," he declared. His department focuses on "the sellers, the pushers, the distributors, the criminal drug enterprise," while hers works directly with young people and their mentors to stem drug abuse, Palleria said.

In a survey of 14 and 15-year-olds in Hunterdon, we found that 39 percent had tried marijuana, 14 percent were using it, and 23 percent had tried other drugs," Ms. Peck said.

The county Criminal Justice Planning Board has suggested that municipal government as well as the county contribute to the program. Freeholder Ben Kirkland said "we need support from the municipalities and the school districts."

The county has asked Mrs. Betty Layden, a member of the criminal justice board, to sound out local government on this. "We really have to declare war on drugs in Hunterdon County," she said. "Kids are playing Russian roulette with everything in the medicine chest."