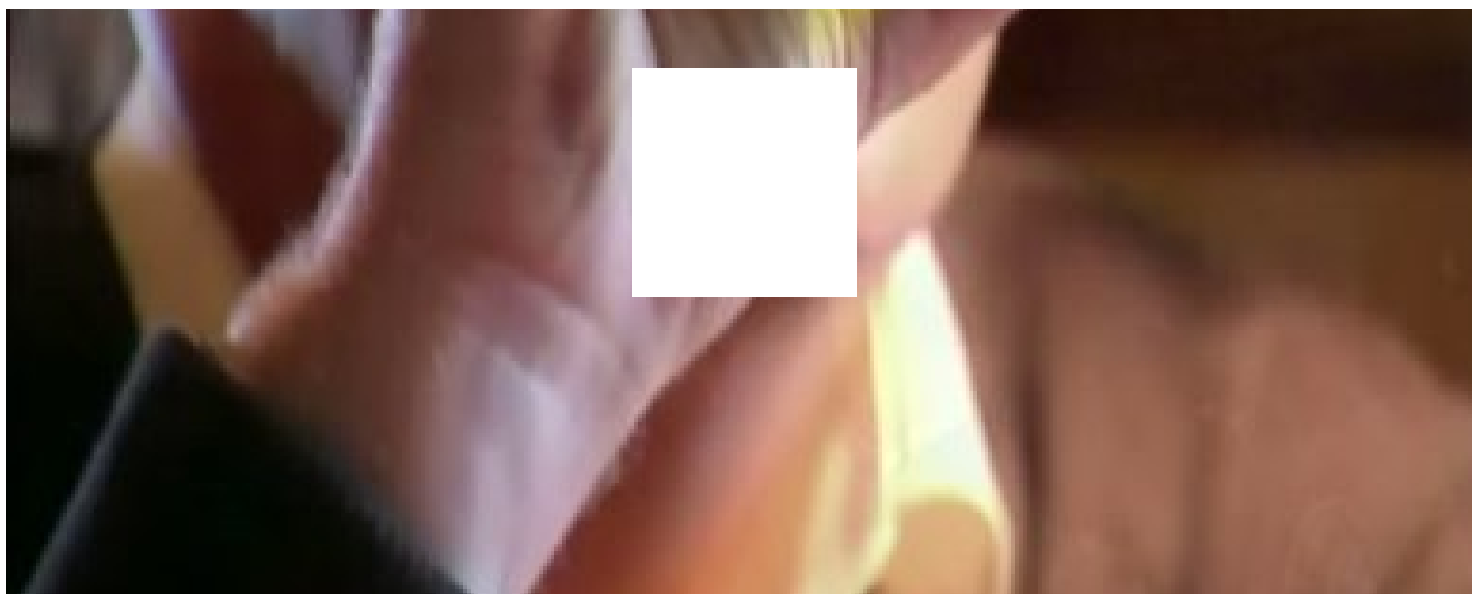


New efforts to curb underage substance abusers

POSTED 5:15 PM, JULY 11, 2013, BY STEVE KIGGINS, *UPDATED AT 06:29PM, JULY 11, 2013*

Monroe Prevent Underage Drinking

KCPQ - Seattle



MONROE — Underage drinking and drug abuse has become such a big problem that the state is now taking a new approach to fighting it.



The Department of Social and Health Services is identifying the cities with the biggest problems and funneling to them resources directly, instead of spreading money evenly all over the state.

Its newest target is the city of Monroe, and police there say heroin and meth addiction are a major problem right now.

“This isn’t a law enforcement issue as a whole,” Monroe police Deputy Chief Ken Ginnard said. “This is a community issue and we need to partner with everybody in the community to help curb this problem and to get a handle of it.”

Monroe is the latest of more than 50 communities participating in the initiative designed to find ways to deal with the growing problem — like school-based prevention education and counseling.

Cops, educators, even faith leaders gathered on Thursday to come up with a plan to keep kids off booze and drugs.

“There has been abuse with prescription drugs in the past,” added Ginnard. “A lot of prescription drug abuse and that’s been dried up just a little bit, and with that drug of choice going away, heroin is the replacement for that.”

Just spend a few minutes on Main Street and you can see lots of young people with lots of time to waste. Nineteen-year-old Kyle Roetemeyer said he likes to drink beer, smoke pot and shoot heroin.

“Some of those who started earlier, it’s more of a problem for them,” Roetemeyer said. “I have a friend who drinks every day and every time he doesn’t drink his stomach gets queasy and he starts getting sick.”

Roetemeyer is exactly who the group hopes to reach – but he said that he needs a job to keep him so busy that he can’t abuse drugs and alcohol.

“If we got a job and got paid at the end of it, like a work program or whatever, if you stay clean we give you this by the end of this many months,” said Roetemeyer.

Getting kids busy and working could be a start to stopping underage substance abuse — because cops can’t be the only solution.

“Law enforcement and stopping people and writing tickets is not the whole piece of the puzzle,” Ginnard said. “It’s a very small piece of the puzzle.”

There’s a lot at stake. The coalition believes if they can make a dent in underage drinking and drug abuse, they will see reductions in crime, violence, school dropouts and even fewer teen pregnancies.