

Combating Prescription Drug Abuse/Misuse in Benton, Arkansas



Summary

During the spring of 2009 we were approached by a citizen who owns a monument company about the rising problem of prescription drug abuse. He was tired of making headstones for children he knew that abused prescription drugs and asked for assistance in helping to raise awareness.

Data was used to determine there was in fact a problem with prescription drug abuse/misuse among our teenagers. One alarming fact came from our county coroner's office that showed that 30 people died in 2009 as a result of prescription drug abuse, either directly (overdose) or indirectly (vehicle crash).

Surveys conducted by the Federal Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration and the Arkansas Drug Directors Office both indicated that Arkansas has the worst teen prescription pain reliever abuse problem in the entire nation (SAMHSA 2007 Survey). The rate of the past 30 day sedative use among Arkansas high school seniors

is roughly three times the national rate. (Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, June 2009).

It was determined that a multi-pronged approach to dealing with this growing problem head-on was needed, including education and empowering our citizen's to take action. We tackled this problem by constructing booklets for parents that included commonly abused medications, pictures of them, and "street" names for them. A countywide prescription drug take back was then successfully organized to help drive the point home.

Since the drug booklet first came out it has been copied twice and has now been distributed statewide to various communities. Two additional nationwide drug take back events have taken place since our first local event and each one has demonstrated more progress than the previous. Social media has proven to be invaluable in assisting with the dissemination of information and event details.

There has been a 50% reduction in prescription drug related deaths in our county in 2010 when compared to 2008 (15 vs. 30). This information demonstrates that by raising awareness about the problem there has been a significant drop in deaths in our county as a result. This will require continued efforts on our part to ensure the numbers continue to drop.

At each take back event we have had a larger quantity of pills turned in than the previous event which demonstrates we are focusing on the right avenues to tackle the problem. The first event took back 142lbs of pills and the during the 2011 event 734 lbs. was collected.

Scanning

A resident in our community of Benton (Population: 30,000) who owns a monument (headstone) company, and is a coach and mentor through American Legion baseball, approached us in the spring of 2009 about the rising problem of prescription drug abuse. This citizen, Coach Russell Goodwin, was tired of making monuments for children he knew and coached that had abused/misused prescription drugs.

Mr. Goodwin proposed educating the public about the dangers associated with prescription drugs. Too many people assumed that since the drugs were prescribed by a medical doctor and dispensed by a doctor of pharmacy that the pills didn't pose any dangers to them.

In addition to the information Mr. Goodwin presented there was also information that teenagers and young adults were having 'Pharm' parties in our community. These are parties where the participants gather together and throw various pills into a large bowl and then each person takes two or three of the 'cool' looking ones. These pills were all too often taken without any knowledge about side effects or the consequences of mixing them together. A majority of the time the pills came from somebody they knew such as a parent or grandparent.

During the time we were formulating our response to what we already perceived was a serious threat to our teenagers and young adults a new survey was released by the

Arkansas State Drug Director's Office. This survey, the Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Survey (2009), solidified that we indeed had a serious problem since it found that Arkansas has the worst teen prescription pain reliever abuse problem in the entire United States.

Analysis

Various data and information was used to help us further validate a problem we knew existed. The rise of prescription pill overdoses and illegal possession of the drugs has been on the rise since the late 1990's in our community. Within the past five years the number of arrests has doubled and we have seen a spike in prescription drug related deaths in the form of overdoses and traffic crashes where they played an integral part.

We then decided to look into the problem not just in the city of Benton, but in the county (Saline) as a whole to gain a better perspective on it. The Saline County coroner provided us with some startling numbers on this issue. It was determined that 30 people had died in 2008 as direct result of abusing/misusing prescription drugs. It further showed that all but two of the people were less than 25 years of age. These numbers might not sound alarming until you factor in the population of our city is 30,000 residents and the county is 100,000.

Our initial analysis seemed to show a common theme: Most young adults and teenagers were not aware of the dangers associated with prescription drugs and had never been warned about it. Our information seemed to indicate that children wanted something to be

done about the problem, because they had seen firsthand the dangers involved. It seemed to be a rising problem and there was a peer pressure indicator about it in the schools. The Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Survey (2009) backed this information up by showing there was almost no education provided on the subject and that it was indeed a problem. This survey was done in 2009 and took responses from all 6th grade through 12th grade age students in Arkansas on a volunteer basis.

The APNA survey further showed that the problem wasn't just older teenagers, but it was also having a huge negative impact as young as 6th grade. Arkansas 6th graders abuse prescription drugs more than any other substance except alcohol, cigarettes, and inhalants. In 2008 alone, 93 young people in Arkansas aged 12-17 were admitted to substance abuse treatment services related to non-heroin opiates, synthetics, tranquilizers, and sedative abuse, misuse, and dependency (SAMHSA, 2009). SAMHSA has consistently ranked Arkansas among the ten states with the highest rate of non-medical use of pain relievers by twelve to twenty-five year old individuals since state estimates of this measure first began in 2002 (SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Short Report on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues-Arkansas, December 2008).

A survey was conducted in June, 2009 by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (ARDHS) regarding prescription drug abuse/misuse. It showed that the rate of past 30-day sedative use among Arkansas seniors is roughly three times the national rate. Another report put out by ARDHS in October, 2009 strongly indicated that over-the-counter and prescription drug abuse is rapidly increasing in earlier grades and at a rate comparable to,

but faster than alcohol and cigarettes (Special Report on Over the Counter and Prescription Drug Abuse Among Arkansas Students).

The problem of prescription drug abuse/misuse really wasn't being addressed on a large scale prior to our problem-solving project. Prior to our project the main focus of drug prevention dealt with marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and other illicit drugs. Very few programs mentioned, let alone focused, on the problem of prescription drugs. For all intensive purposes it appeared that there wasn't a perceived problem until the past few years. Since they were prescribed by a medical doctor and dispensed by a doctor of pharmacology, then the misconception seemed to be there couldn't be any danger associated with prescription drugs.

Situational information was needed to be able to specifically address the problem and tailor it to the right target group in our community. A lot of this information was already available through the APNA survey, but more information was desired. A small survey was done through the American Legion Baseball program during the fall of 2009. It showed us another vital piece of information in that it indicated the public schools in our community were more inundated with prescription drug issues than originally believed.

Response

It was determined that it would be best to combat this problem was through a two-pronged approach of education and community action. It was decided the education

segment would be the design of an informative drug booklet containing all of the most commonly abused drugs, and the community action would start off with a drug take-back event.

To design the drug booklet we approached a local pharmacist in September of 2009, Christina King, about helping to design it. With her help a booklet was soon drafted that included color pictures of commonly abused prescription drugs, slang or street names for them, side effects and symptoms of use, and resources for obtaining help if a problem is detected. The pharmacy she worked for, Smith-Caldwell Drug Store, was helpful through the process of designing the booklet and provided monetary donations towards its design.

The booklet was designed with the local school mascot, a panther, on the front. This was done because the original book was aimed at parents and guardians in our school district. We made 500 of the booklets and coordinated with the local newspaper about announcing the release of them. People were encouraged to come to the police department to obtain a copy and we handed them out at community events. Another order for 500 had to be placed within two months because we exhausted our stock due to strong demand for them. All of these booklets were funded by drug seizure money taken from local drug dealers.

Due to the success of the citywide booklet it was determined, after a meeting with other local law enforcement officials, that the booklets should be distributed to the other four school districts in our county. We started work on a redesign of the cover to include a picture of the mascot from every school district where they would be distributed. All of the law enforcement agencies involved were also added to the booklet to show a unified

response to this problem. The rest of the booklet remained the same as the original and 1,000 were ordered.

We held a formal unveiling of the countywide drug booklet at our department in December of 2009. We asked that the superintendents from all of the schools attend along with the head of the law enforcement agencies involved in the project. Local television and newsprint media were invited as well to help spread the word about the booklets. All of the school superintendents were given 200 copies of the booklet to distribute to the parents and teachers in their districts.

It was decided that we would hold our first drug take-back event during the winter of 2009-2010. It was decided that the event would be a countywide endeavor with all of the law enforcement agencies in our county signing on to participate. It was decided that the Prescription take-back event would be held on February 6th, 2010 with four different drop-off locations in the county.

To help promote the event we approached the editor and publisher of the local newspaper, The Saline Courier. We had a meeting with them and presented some of the data and information we had on the prescription drug problem to help garner support for the event. As it turned out, the publisher at the time was familiar with the problem in his own family and was extremely helpful in providing free advertisements preceding the take-back and coverage of the event. It was decided that in the poor economic conditions that it would benefit our citizens if we could provide them with a 'reward' for taking the time to get rid of their old, unused prescriptions. We approached numerous businesses in our

community and were able to secure various gift cards from grocery and department stores, and coupons for free food from restaurants. Thanks to them we were able to offer over \$1,000 worth of free items to our citizens during the event.

We decided on an event name of Operation Medicine Cabinet which had been used before in another part of the country for something similar. We obtained permission to use it because it really fit the persona of the whole event and what we were trying to accomplish with it by having people clean out their medicine cabinets.

We also marketed our event to the local television media and they provided advance notice to people in our viewing area prior to the event, and they provided coverage during the event to help promote it. Press releases were put out for the event on our website and also forwarded to our neighborhood watch groups and citizen police academy alumni for additional exposure.

Operation Medicine Cabinet was a huge success with 142 lbs. of pills collected during a four period on a Saturday. We had an agreement with a local hazardous waste disposal company, Rineco, to incinerate the drugs collected at no cost to our agency. The success of the event spawned another issue with people wanting to continue donating pills for the days and weeks after the event.

To effectively deal with the intake of pills after Operation Medicine Cabinet it was decided that a permanent drop-off box would be installed during the spring of 2010. The drop-off box, basically a bank night deposit box, was installed in the lobby of our police department to provide easy access 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Not only did the

drop-off box provide a safe and secure place to dispose of unwanted drugs, but it provided a basis for citizens to interact with officers when they stopped by the station. The drop-off box was paid for using drug seizure money so in-effect our local drug dealers financed it. Rineco continues to incinerate drugs that we collect in the drop-box without a cost to our department.

In April of 2010 the State Drug Director's Office approached us about using our department as a model agency. We helped design a Prescription Drug Take Back Toolkit that provided all of the basic information needed to organize a successful event. This toolkit was distributed statewide to all law enforcement agencies to use as a basis for starting drug take-back events in their communities.

May, 2010 the State Drug Director's Office asked us for permission to use our local drug booklet on a statewide scale. We agreed and undertook the task of redesigning the booklet to appeal to a general audience across the state. Monies were allocated from the State Attorney General's Office and the US Attorney's Office for the project. The initial publication of booklets was 5,000 copies and they were introduced in June, 2010 at a statewide school conference by the drug director.

During the summer of 2010 we received information that the DEA was launching a nationwide drug take-back in September. Given the success of our first take-back event our officers were excited about the prospect of spreading the word more and with the help of the federal government this time. Our second event was labeled Operation Medicine Cabinet II in keeping with our original theme.

The state drug director approached us after the DEA announcement about the Benton Police Department designing a website for the take-back event. A statewide website devoted to the take-back was soon born and was operational a month prior to the event. It provided information on the dangers of prescription drug misuse/abuse, resources for those seeking help, and detailed information on when and where they could find the closest drop-off location during the event. (www.artakeback.org)

Operation Medicine Cabinet II involved even more community planning and interaction between groups to help spread the word. We held community action meetings at our police department with health and safety officials, surrounding law enforcement agencies, hospital and pharmacy staff, and other volunteers. We started using social media, such as Facebook, to provide a different avenue to provide information on the event to our community. Our press releases were continually linked to our department Facebook page along with constant reminders about the event as the date approached. Numerous citizens interacted and asked questions through our Facebook page, because of the ease of use and familiarity with it.

It was decided that for this event we would expand the drop-off sites to eight throughout our county and also host a mobile collection site at our local senior adult center. By adding the senior adult center it targeted those in our community who might not be able to make it to a drop-off location, but still wanted to participate.

Operation Medicine Cabinet II was held September 25, 2010 in conjunction with the nationwide take-back. 540 lbs. of drugs were collected in our county and 440 lbs. of that

was collected in our city. The statewide total was over two and a half tons of pills collected and disposed of by the DEA. Our city was the top collection site in the state, taking back more than cities many times larger than our own (i.e.: Little Rock, Fayetteville, etc.).

After Operation Medicine Cabinet II was over we continued working with our local health and safety officials, surrounding law enforcement agencies, hospital and pharmacy staff, and other volunteers to plan the next take-back event. Also during this time we assisted our local Rotary Club with a video about the dangers of prescription drug abuse titled, “We Have a Problem.” The video was mass produced by Rotary International for distribution throughout our state and is also featured on You Tube and Facebook.

During the winter of 2010-2011 it was announced by the DEA that a second national drug take-back would take place on April 30th, 2011. It was decided that we would take a different approach to this event by fostering more of a grassroots movement than ever before. We made contact with the Saline County Ministerial Alliance who agreed to pass the information on the event to all of their 60+ member churches throughout our county. We also decided to incorporate children in the local schools into the program by holding a community-wide pep rally press conference just prior to the event.

For the pep rally we invited cheerleaders and the drum line from the Benton High School to participate. Also invited were the Benton Mayor’s Youth Council who consists of 11th and 12th grade students. The event was held at a local business that that has a large sign that reads, “Benton Proud” and we setup our pep rally center of focus under it. The Arkansas State Drug Director and the Arkansas Attorney General both agreed to attend

the event and help us spread the word about prescription drug dangers. We also unveiled four pill bottle costumes at the pep rally that the Mayors Youth Council students wore to help draw attention from passing motorists. The pep rally was a huge success with a large turnout and television and newspaper media coverage of the entire event.

It was decided that another way to help spread the message was to solicit help from the pharmacies. We decided the best way to help educate people was to go straight to the source where they have their prescriptions filled. We had 8,000 miniature flyers made up announcing our event and our local pharmacies agreed to put them in every single prescription that went out. Additionally, Smith-Caldwell Drug Store provided us with another \$500 to help cover the cost of the flyers and the rest was paid for using drug seizure money.

Operation Medicine Cabinet III was the title given to our third take-back event held on April 30th, 2011. During this event we added one additional drop-off location for a total of nine in our county. We also had assistance from the Mayor's Youth Council students who volunteered to help. They assisted by handing out gift cards and literature, and by wearing the pill bottle costumes near intersections to attract attention to our event.

Operation Medicine Cabinet III brought in 734 lbs. in our county and 512 lbs. of it was collected in Benton. We also held a raffle during this event to reward those in our community who took the time to participate. We gave away three cash prizes (\$100, \$50, \$50) and a grand prize of four St. Louis Cardinal baseball tickets to the July 4th game in St.

Louis. The baseball tickets were valued at \$200 and were donated by a local business specifically for this event.

Assessment

Our first indication that our efforts are working is that there has been a 50% reduction in prescription drug related deaths in our county in 2010 when compared to 2008 statistics (15 vs. 30). This information demonstrates that by raising awareness about the problem there has been a significant drop in deaths in our county as a result. This will require continued monitoring and efforts on our part to ensure the numbers continue to drop.

The 2010 Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Survey (APNA), conducted through the Arkansas State Drug Director's Office, was recently released and it contained information from public school students surveyed from the 6th grade through 12th grade. The survey contained valuable information on the usage rates on a wide variety of anti-social behaviors and mechanisms including prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs. All of the information was further broken down to include county specific data to assist in determining problems areas and to ascertain if prevention techniques were indeed working.

2008 was the year preceding action being taken by our department in combating prescription drug abuse/misuse. During 2008, 15.9 % of students surveyed in our county admitted to using prescription drugs that didn't belong to them at some point in their life.

In 2009 after we started our efforts it dropped to 13.8% using them, and in 2010 it dropped further to 12.5% having used them.

Using the same years from 2008 to 2010, the number of students who misused/abused over-the-counter drugs fell from 7.6% in 2008 to 5.5% in 2010. During this time frame students who admitted to using any drug illegal drug (or prescription drugs being misused) fell in our county from 29.5% in 2008 to 26.5% in 2010. This seems to be a huge indicator that our overall goal has been achieved, but more efforts will continue to be needed.

At each progressive take back event the amount of pills collected has increased dramatically than the previous event which demonstrates we are focusing our efforts in the right direction to make a difference. Communication and community education were the keys to our success and will be going into the future.

The biggest single problem we encountered during this process was the learning curve on how to best communicate our message to our citizens. It cannot be stressed enough the importance of including groups into a project that you otherwise might not consider. This was the case with our inclusion of the Saline County Ministerial Alliance and the Benton Mayor's Youth Council members. Since we forged this alliance with them it has spawned even more interaction between us with more ideas on other projects.

Gaining the support of the local television and print media cannot be overlooked when planning a project of this scope. Perhaps the best avenue to take advantage of a technological younger generation though is the use of social media. Putting out the information on the events on Facebook proved invaluable to helping spread the word, and

it allowed us to put real-time pictures and videos on the site during events. This served as a reminder to our citizens that the event was taking place and it allowed them to see the fruits of our labor.

With a problem such as prescription drug abuse/misuse there isn't much of a problem of displacement involving those who were offending, but there is always the problem of a new issue taking its place. Given the success we have shown to date on this project it will hopefully give us guidance when a new crime trend appears.

We feel that we've turned the corner on the prescription drug abuse/misuse problem in our community, but we also realize that there is more that can be done with this issue. We are going to continue to work with our local community and the state drug director's office to develop new programs and innovative ways to relate the dangers to our citizens.

Key Project Team Members:

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Appendix A

The first two versions of the drug booklet





**PARENTS....
IS YOUR PANTHER USING?**

Brought to you courtesy of:
Chief Kirk Lane, Benton Police Department
Smith Caldwell Drug Store
Christina King, UAMS College of Pharmacy



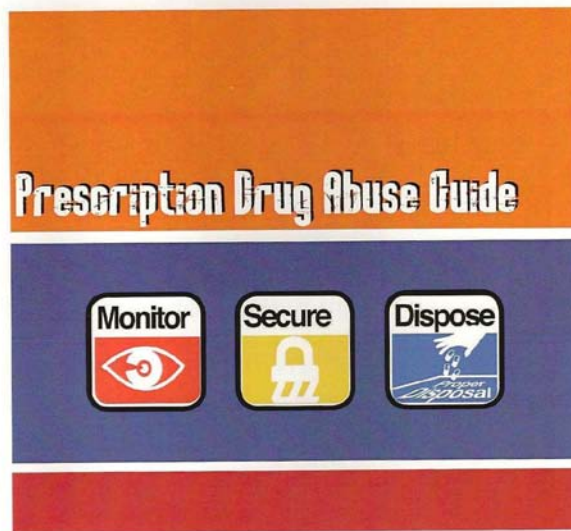
**PARENTS....
Is Your Child Using?**

Brought to you courtesy of:
Saline County Law Enforcement
Smith Caldwell Drug Store
Christina King, UAMS College of Pharmacy



Appendix B

The statewide version of the drug booklet



PRESENTED BY:



Appendix C



Appendix D

Law Enforcement Agencies in Saline County
and the Saline County Substance Use & Abuse
Subcommittee invite everyone to...

www.artakeback.org

OPERATION: MEDICINE CABINET II

NATIONAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG TAKE BACK DAY

Get rid of old meds & PROTECT your family
from prescription drug abuse and misuse!

Turn in your old/unused medications, no questions asked!
In exchange, get a \$5 Walmart gift card while they last.

10 a.m. - 2 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 25, 2010

Drop off your prescriptions at any of these locations:

- Benton's Ferguson's Furniture parking lot off Military Road
- Benton Police Department, 114 S. East St.
- Bryant Fall Fest at Mills Park
- Hot Springs Village, East Gate
- East End - Harvest Foods parking lot
- Alexander Police Department, 15605 Alexander Road
- Bauxite Police Department, 6055 Stanley Circle
- Haskell City Hall, 2520 Highway 229

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Appendix E



Appendix F

Law Enforcement Agencies in Saline County
and the Saline County Substance Use & Abuse
Subcommittee invite everyone to....

www.artakeback.org

OPERATION: MEDICINE CABINET III

NATIONAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG TAKE BACK DAY

Get rid of old meds & **PROTECT** your family
from prescription drug abuse and misuse!

Turn in your old/unused medications, no questions asked!
In exchange, get a \$5 gift card while supplies last.

10 a.m. - 2 p.m., Saturday April 30, 2011

Drop off your prescriptions at any of these locations:

- Benton—Ferguson's Furniture parking lot, Military Rd
- Benton—Bank of the Ozarks—Alcoa Exchange
- Benton—Police Department, 114 S. East—DROP BOX
- Bryant—2203 N. Reynolds Rd, BNC parking lot
- Hot Springs Village—East Gate
- Alexander—Police Department, 15605 Alexander Rd
- Haskell—City Hall, 2520 Highway 229
- East End—2032 Arch Street—Harvest Foods parking lot



Appendix G



Appendix H



Appendix I



Office of the State Drug Director

#1 State Police Plaza Drive Little Rock, AR 72209
501-618-8690 FAX: 501-618-8641

May 26, 2011

2011 Selection Committee
Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing
Center for Problem-Oriented Policing

Dear Committee Members:

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to share information with you about our professional relationship with the Benton Police Department, which we are fortunate to call one of our strongest and most outstanding law enforcement partner agencies. It was with great excitement that our office learned that the Benton Police Department is under consideration for the 2011 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing, and we would like to offer our highest endorsement for them to be recognized with this prestigious honor.

Not only has the Benton Police Department been extremely progressive in their own community, but they consistently offer innovative ideas and solutions to problems and then freely share this information for the benefit of our entire state. As a single agency, their contributions to our collective efforts to prevent and stop prescription drug abuse have been second to none. Although the examples of their leadership on this issue are copious to the extent of making it impossible for full inclusion, we would like to share a few which we believe well-illustrate the tremendous impact they have made.

The ongoing prescription drug abuse prevention community education and take back programs built by the Benton Police Department are excellent models not only for Arkansas, but also for law enforcement nationally. Even before the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration launched the first national prescription drug take back initiative, Benton had already hosted an immensely successful event. Their mobilization of the entire City of Benton to address prescription abuse and disposal issues has been nothing short of amazing, and they have rallied all their businesses, health agencies, civic groups, and other organizations in efforts to ameliorate prescription abuse issues in their community.

Their programs have been so effective, complete, and successful that the Benton Police Department was asked to author a Prescription Drug Take Back Toolkit for the benefit of law enforcement across the state. Thanks to them,

this guide was developed and has now been distributed to thousands in our law enforcement community. Despite having freely "given away" their secrets to success to all in law enforcement and despite having a smaller population than many Arkansas cities, their commitment and hard work has resulted in them being our state's single law enforcement agency leader in the amount of prescription drugs collected in both the September 25, 2010 and the April 30, 2011 DEA-sponsored nationwide take back events.

Last year, the Benton Police Department has become one of the first law enforcement agencies in Arkansas to offer its citizens a permanent, legal, and environmentally-sound program for disposal of their unneeded medications. Our office has been advocating for installation of prescription drop boxes in all counties, and again it was no surprise to us that the Benton Police Department led the way.

The Benton Police Department has been tremendously generous with their time, resources, and talents, and has enthusiastically provided leaders for several state-wide initiatives, including a workgroup which developed newly-enacted legislation establishing an Arkansas prescription drug monitoring program and a coalition which plans and executes our state's prescription drug take-back efforts. Each and every time a need arises, the Benton Police Department has been there to meet it. For example, when our coalition needed a website for the take back event, Benton developed one, provided it free of charge, and continues to administer it to this day. (www.artakeback.org). Additionally, the Benton Police Department produced a prescription drug identification guide targeted to parents in their community that was so well-done that our office, the Arkansas Attorney General's Office, and the U.S. Attorney's office co-opted it and have been providing it to adults all across Arkansas.

In our experience with the Benton Police Department, we have become accustomed to anything they endeavor to do being successful. We admire their dedication, persistence, and efforts in the multiple causes that we share, and due to their ever-present commitment to excellence, we will continue to welcome them in leadership positions of any efforts in which we are involved.

If our office can be of any assistance in your evaluation of the Benton Police Department's candidacy for 2011 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented, please contact us and we will gladly provide it to you.

We would like to again express our strongest support for the Benton Police Department receiving this honor. It would be very well-earned.

Sincerely,



Fran Flener
Arkansas Drug Director



Steve Varady
Policy Coordinator