

IVRPD and Gauchos for Recovery Educate Community on Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention with Generation Recovery Event

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On April 29 in Anisq'Oyo Park, Isla Vista Recreation & Park District and UC Santa Barbara Gauchos for Recovery held the Generation Recovery event, which celebrated the latter organization's tenth anniversary, educated the community on overdose prevention, and promoted harm reduction. Generation Recovery was the second of four events in the second-annual IVRPD Spring Concert Series.

"I like to think of [harm reduction] as parallel to sex education," Frank Chavez, the overdose prevention and harm reduction intern for Gauchos for Recovery (GFR), a subset of the UCSB Alcohol & Drug Program. "Instead of condoms, we give fentanyl test strips and Narcan."

And give them out they did: gone by the day's end were over 250 free overdose prevention kits, containing two fentanyl test strips and two Narcan dispensers. Fentanyl is up to a hundred times more potent than morphine and, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [over 150 people](#) die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids like it; test strips can detect the presence of fentanyl and help people avoid consuming it. Meanwhile, Narcan is the brand name for naloxone, a medicine that reverses the effects of opioid overdose.

"Even if you don't use drugs yourself, it's always good to carry Narcan on you, because you never know if you might see someone just faint and collapse," Chavez said. "That could save their life."

Attendees who picked up a free overdose prevention kit automatically entered a raffle, whose prizes included gift cards from Inspiring Sobriety and Doing It Sober. Between each of the five band sets—which comprised Michael Seitz, Acacia, French Cinema, Lemon Generation, and The Bad Neighbors—a member of GFR explained to audience members the symptoms of overdose and demonstrated how to administer Narcan.

Event activities included a mechanical bull, Jenga Giant, cornhole, and a free clothing swap by Isla Vista Trading Post. Fifteen vendors sold crafts in the makers market and five organizations tabled, including the Isla Vista Food Co-op (IVFC).

"We know that IV gets a lot of bad rap [and] a lot of attention for being a party school, for being irresponsible with substance abuse," Ylianna Castro, the IVFC outreach manager, said. "However, we believe that our community is strong, and we have events like these to prove that we're here for all our community members no matter what—there's no judgment."

"We just want you all to be healthy, to have access to groceries, and to have access to the resources that can help [you] out," she continued.

Bea Pearson, a UCSB fourth-year art history and anthropology double major and an attendee of the event, appreciated GFR's efforts.

"I think, especially on a college campus, you can't just be preaching full sobriety," she said. "I think keeping people safe is the number one priority."

Brian Kwong, a UCSB second-year environmental studies major and a nicotine cessation director of UCSB Life of the Party, agreed with the value of choice.

“Everyone has their own relationship with substance abuse. Some people choose to be sober; some people choose to not be sober,” Kwong said. “You’re an adult: we’re not in the place to tell you what you can and can’t do.”

“And I think this event, to me, is a reminder that—especially with recent events—it’s just important to make safe choices and to be educated in the choices you make,” he continued.

According to Chavez, the “recent events” that Kwong referred to were difficult to manage: despite all that GFR does, it can’t get to everyone.

“There’s been a couple of recent overdose deaths, and that’s been pretty hard for us to deal with, since we feel like it’s our responsibility to really step in and prevent those deaths.” Chavez said. “We have saved many more lives—a lot of lives that were unreported to us. But those were some of our biggest challenges that are still affecting us today.”

Monthly, GFR gives out 350 overdose prevention kits, and one out of every sixty of those kits will save someone’s life, Chavez said. But budget constraints have limited GFR’s reach; he said that, ideally, the organization would be able to consistently distribute 500 kits per month, with peaks of 750 or even 1,000.

“When I give a presentation to a sorority, there could be a hundred girls in there, and I only bring four to eight kits. And they can only have one for each house instead of anyone being able to have individually to carry,” Chavez said. “The university could be increasing the budget to make sure all these students are safe.”