

Neighbors to combat crime with Web site

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HUNTINGTON — Three weeks ago, about 100 people attended a roundtable discussion to share ideas on how to eradicate drugs and crime in Huntington.

Now, a community-based group is working to ensure that one of those ideas becomes a reality.

The Neighborhood Institute, the umbrella agency for Huntington's 13 neighborhood organizations, has formed a committee to establish a Web site that will provide information on and links to law enforcement agencies, community policing programs and drug-rehabilitation services in the Huntington area.

The goal of the Web site is to consolidate all crime prevention and drug rehabilitation programs, whether they be church, government or community based, under one computerized roof, said John Belcher, a member of the Neighborhood Institute and president of the West Huntington Organization. That way, it will be easier and more discreet for someone wanting to report criminal activity or seek help with substance abuse problems, he said.

"You're only as effective as the tools you have in your toolbox, and fighting drugs and crime is no different," Belcher said. "When you

have the tools you need to do a job, it goes a lot faster and a lot smoother."

Many people who attended the roundtable discussion Jan. 19 at First Baptist Church recommended forming a network of churches and neighborhood groups so services don't overlap and a wide range of people are served.

Belcher said rather than sit and ponder the idea, he began contacting computer service companies to see how much it would cost to create a Web site.

Database Network Administration, a Charleston-based technical services company, has offered to build and maintain the Web site for free, Belcher said.

The Rev. Paul Willis, pastor of First Baptist Church, said the Web site is a foundation for ridding the city from drugs and crime. But the efforts can't stop there, he said.

The pastor has made several unsuccessful attempts in the past to get church and community leaders involved.

"If we think this problem will go away by placing it at the doorstep of the police department, then we're living in a false utopia," Willis said. "We have individual responsibilities of removing these problems."

Willis recommended conducting three or four roundtable discussions a year and printing a directory of crime prevention and drug rehabilitation services for those who don't have access to a computer.

The committee will issue a report about the content of the Web site to the Neighborhood Institute at its March 8 meeting, Belcher said. "The site has to be two-fold," he said. "If you pluck someone out of a drug-filled environment, you have to provide them with a way to recover. You just can't pull them out of that lifestyle and leave them hanging."