

Communities That Care: Community implements measures to change issues affecting youth

BY JEFFREY GDOVIN

February 25, 2015

Whether you think of the football fans, the vibrant downtown life, the shadow of Old Main or any other icon that shapes State College's image, it is what lies beneath these symbols that many seem to ignore. Perhaps it is due to Happy Valley's pristine image that makes people reluctant to reach out for help, or that many have recently moved for jobs and don't have an established support network.

As for issues among youth, they often may feel overwhelmed or pressured due to the university looming over their future. Fortunately, this community has recognized these issues and responded with many helpful programs.

One of the more troubling concerns is the rise of drug overdose deaths in Centre County, increasing from six in 2010 to 16 in 2013. An influx of heroin into the community has left many families feeling lost.

The Community Help Centre seeks to address this issue with a program designed to help parents of children who suffer from addiction. The program, launched in January, is designed to provide a support group for parents similarly situated. The four, two-hour group sessions cover substance-abuse education and processing the guilt that parents often feel. For more information, contact the Community Help Centre at 237-5855.

The Straight Talk educational programs for parents and Candid Conversations are excellent opportunities for parents to learn how to manage challenging issues their children face, such as relieving stress and anxiety, drugs and alcohol, and eating disorders. Straight Talk is co-sponsored by the Jana Marie Foundation, State College Area School District, the Centre County Youth Service Bureau and Communities that Care. Jana Marie Foundation founder Marisa Brown said Straight Talk is "opening parents' eyes to the issues and giving them the tools to talk to their kids." Candid Conversations is a series of videos designed to help parents with "recognizing and addressing serious problems related to our children's mental, emotional and physical health." These videos, and additional information on Straight Talk, can be found at www.janamariefoundation.org.

Families who are struggling and want to move forward can access the YSB's Family Group Decision Making program. Founded 12 years ago, Family Group is "a practice that brings families together to develop a plan to ensure that children are cared for and protected from future harm." According to Family-Based Division Director Christine Bishop, Family Group is "about helping families develop a plan so that they stay in control." By bringing together the "family group," which may include parents,

pastors or anyone else close to the child, the YSB can empower them “to create a unique plan to address concerns ... with the ultimate goal of assuring safety.”

With such a strong and devoted community, it should be no surprise that it has risen up and taken on the various challenges it faces.

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From Centre Daily Times, 2/25/15, http://www.centredaily.com/2015/02/25/4618083_communities-that-care-community.html?rh=1