Monroe Community Coalition begins second year, seeks community input via survey

By: Chris Hendrickson  November 25, 2014  Monroe News News  1168 Views

The Monroe Community Coalition celebrated its first birthday this summer and is ramping up for a productive year two.

The coalition is a grassroots volunteer organization that was formed to help reduce the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse, especially among the youth of Monroe. The group works to comprehensively identify and mitigate community risk factors often associated with underage drinking and substance abuse.

The coalition utilizes an empirical approach to analyze data, and tries to focus on proven methodologies to promote positive and healthy changes in communities.

The coalition meets on the second Thursday of each month from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at the Monroe School District’s Administrative Building on East Fremont Street in Monroe. “Anybody is welcome to come and see what we’re doing and see if they’re interested in joining our efforts,” said Monroe resident Cherie Matyas. Matyas currently has four children enrolled in the Monroe School District.

The group consists of parent volunteers, along with representatives from the faith community, the Monroe School District, the Monroe Police Department, the YMCA, Compass Health, Cocoon House and others.

The coalition is funded via the Community Prevention and Wellness Initiative (CPWI), and must achieve adherence to a specific set of criteria in order to maintain its funding. The CPWI utilizes monies obtained through a federal substance abuse grant, which is purposed to help establish coalitions across the state. Thus far, research indicates that prevention strategy can be an effective model for reducing underage drug and alcohol use.

The CPWI reports that 11,000 fewer students statewide used alcohol in 2012 compared to 2010, along with several other similar findings.

Currently, the Monroe Community Coalition is actively seeking participants to take a Community Prevention Wellness Initiative community survey, which is an anonymous survey designed for adults age 18 and over.

“We had the survey last year, as well, so we’ll keep doing it every year to hopefully see that the work we’re doing is changing things in a positive way,” said Matyas. “Our first year we were trying to figure out what needed to be done and we created a strategic plan, which you can actually see online if you go to our website.”

Last year, 182 people participated in the survey. This year, the coalition is hoping for at least double that number. The survey provides invaluable insight and also helps to further guide the coalition’s efforts as they seek to better understand how the Monroe community perceives underage drug and alcohol use and abuse.

“If there are a lot of adults and parents in the community who don’t think it’s a big deal, then we need to educate them that it’s not healthy, and about all the problems it could lead to down the road,” said Matyas.

When developing their strategic plan, the coalition also used data from the healthy youth survey given by the
Monroe School District, zeroing in on the answers given by both 8th and 10th grade students.

Thus far, the coalition is working to implement programs meant to facilitate awareness and prevention, including programs like Healthy Alternatives for Little Ones, also known as HALO. The HALO program provides a curriculum to teach young children how to become more health-minded.

The Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities program provides a strategy to help parents in culturally-diverse families reduce substance use and violence within their families. The program encourages parents to commit to raising their children in a violence-free and health-conscious atmosphere.

The coalition has also been able to fund Student Assistance Program Specialist Sandra Olson’s position at Park Place Middle School. She will be working to coordinate additional intervention strategies at the middle school.

They’ve also implemented the “Talk. They Hear You” campaign, which has been made possible through a collaborative partnership with Galaxy Theatre in Monroe. To help accomplish a broader level of community awareness about drug and alcohol prevention, the theatre plays advertisements which advocate for increased communication between parents and children.

Initially, Matyas attended the coalition meetings because she was asked to represent her church. But once she got involved, she recognized the importance of the work and quickly understood the value of a group like the coalition.

“I want my community to be better and safer for my children and to know that we’re working together for the same cause,” said Matyas. “That we have an interest in their health and well-being.”

For more information on the Monroe Community Coalition, please visit the website at: http://monroecommunitycoalition.com/. To take the survey in English, please visit: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MONXON. To take the survey in Spanish, please visit: https://es.surveymonkey.com/s/MONXSP.

The coalition is hoping to receive responses to the survey by December 15.

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