

Coalition forms to reduce teen drinking and drug use in Monroe

By: Kathie Savelesky July 25, 2013 Briefs 4067 Views



By Margaret Bashour, Monitor. Underage drinking is the leading cause of injury and death among teens, and a coalition is forming in Monroe to try to keep teens safe from alcohol and drugs.

This April, the city of Monroe was approved to receive funding by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) in order to form a coalition to prevent underage drinking and substance abuse. Funding is part of the federal Substance Abuse Prevention and

Treatment Block Grant and Washington State's Prevention Redesign Initiative. The aim of the coalition is to reduce the impact of substance abuse on Monroe's youth, families, and neighborhoods.

According to the DBHR, preventing underage drinking is its highest priority because it is so deadly to teens. Launched in 2011, the Prevention Redesign Initiative was adopted in 13 Washington counties, including Pierce and King, in its first year. Now in its third year, Monroe is one of three Snohomish county communities chosen to participate.

One of the factors that helped get funding approved for Monroe was its track record for successful collaboration, said Prevention Specialist of the Snohomish County Human Service Department Joe Neigel II.

He was pleased with the robust turnout at the coalition's first meeting last Thursday.

"This is obviously a very committed community," he said.

Among those in attendance were representatives from the Monroe School District, the Monroe Police Department, and members of the faith community. The diverse group also included employees from other local, community-based centers, like YMCA, Seamar, and Cocoon House, an emergency shelter for homeless teens.

Both Mary Myers, Assistant Director at Monroe Public Schools, and Deputy Chief Ken Ginnard of the Monroe Police Department agreed that the issue of underage substance abuse in Monroe is not just an issue for schools or law enforcement, but a community-wide issue that should be addressed by leveraging all of Monroe's community resources.

Neigel, who applied for the Prevention Redesign Initiative on behalf of Monroe last year and was appointed as coalition coordinator, led the meeting last week by challenging everyone to reflect on their own core values as representatives of the community.

Some of the recurring themes that came up were "integrity" and "family." This was the basis for forming the coalition's mission statement and commitment to the Monroe community to prevent underage substance abuse.

Neigel also asked members to share past experiences with coalitions to identify what techniques have been successful or not when launching community efforts such as the Prevention Redesign Initiative. The resounding answer was having a plan that involved tangible, measurable, and focused action items.

The coalition's goals in subsequent meetings will be to develop the leadership structure and a detailed strategic plan.

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One of the first steps in planning will be to assess the community and data. The aim is to get a realistic and meaningful interpretation of Monroe's current situation in order to use its resources most effectively. In response to recent coverage from some local media sources, the group wanted to make it clear that city was not chosen to participate in the initiative to prevent underage substance abuse as an answer to a problem specific to Monroe.

"This is not about sensationalizing the data," said Myers.

The project is an effort to be proactive about the health of the community and will hopefully showcase Monroe's unique ability to come together towards a common goal. As a matter of fact, funding depends on it.

"If the coalition goes away, so does the funding," said Neigel.

Funding from the Prevention Redesign Initiative provides enough resources for training, technical assistance and staff, which will include a full-time Prevention/Interventionist at Park Place Middle School. Neigel's job is to guide the coalition in selecting members in the Monroe community who will respond to the plan's needs.

With over 25 counties currently in their first and second year in the program, the state already has a framework for developing the structure of the five-year plan. Neigel's other job, however, is to help the coalition figure out Monroe's identity and what framework fits.

More information about the Prevention Redesign Initiative and other prevention services can be found on the DSHS website at <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dbhr/dapreventionservices.shtml>.

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ONE COMMENT



Terry Miller

July 25, 2013 at 4:32 pm

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