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## LISA Inc. to survey Southington teens on drug use, prevention



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By Jesse Buchanan, Record-Journal staff



**SOUTHINGTON** — A non-profit will hold focus groups to learn how young people believe substance abuse can be prevented.

"We want to hear directly from them what we can do to help them stay away from drugs and alcohol," said Kim Selvaggi, executive director of LISA Inc. "What do they need to say no to drugs and alcohol?"

LISA stands for living in safe alternatives. The group received a \$25,000 grant for youth intervention efforts in November from the Bradley Barnes and Leila Upson Barnes Memorial Trust, which is administered by the Main Street Community Foundation.

LISA Inc., which has offices in town, is working with Southington's Town-Wide Effort to Promote Success, a drug and alcohol abuse prevention group.

The federal grant that funds STEPS limits its efforts to prevention. LISA Inc. will work on intervention.

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Selvaggi said her group is building a substance abuse program and realized they needed feedback.

“So many people forget to ask kids what they need and they know, so we’re going right to source,” she said.

The focus group will take place Tuesday at Southington Community Cultural Arts, 93 Main St., from 1 to 3 p.m.

Selvaggi said they’ll “of course” have food for the teens. They’ve notified Southington High School families and have posters around town to advertise the group.

A program for Southington youth could be up and running by the fall, according to Selvaggi.

Chris Palmieri, a middle school assistant principal and STEPS president, said his group and LISA Inc. have been successful in partnerships, including training teachers to recognize the symptoms of substance abuse.

He was also pleased with LISA Inc.’s efforts, which include intervention for children using marijuana.

While drug and alcohol use among youth is an issue, Palmieri said his group and others have made “great strides.” STEPS conducts a survey every year among 7th, 9th, and 11th graders about the use and perception of risk for various behaviors. Palmieri said the trend has been encouraging.

“There’s a need to educate people of the risks, the dangers of substance abuse,” he said.

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