

Youth Services and LISA, Inc. create substance abuse program

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STAFF WRITER

SOUTHINGTON - With the aid of a \$25,000 grant from the Main Street Community Foundation, Southington Youth Services' STEPS Coalition and local nonprofit LISA, Inc. have created a new intervention and recovery program to tackle substance abuse.

The program, called the "1-2-3 Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Program" targets town teens. Research data collected by Southington Youth Services over the past seven years regarding marijuana use by local teens established the need for more preventive intervention methods for local youth.

The 1-2-3 Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Program aims to improve Southington's capacity to prevent adolescent drug use, intervene early, and offer recovery assistance by supporting the families affected by use.

The main components of the three-part program include:

nNew prevention strategies for Southington educators to become more knowledgeable on different substances and how to establish an environment that will increase drug resistance skills among students.

nImplementation of a new intervention program that will identify substance-using adolescents and offer an evidence-based intervention model through the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

nExpansion of the Southington's Hope and Support Group which provides support to parents whose children struggle with addiction or who are in recovery.

"Our program coordinator will be meeting with individuals to determine what best would help them; it is very specialized," said Mercedes Sherman, director of human resources at LISA, Inc. "After that, the individual will meet in a group setup to talk about what is effective and what will make it so they will no longer use marijuana.

"Unfortunately, there is a greater acceptance for use of marijuana in society in recent years, which makes it harder for kids to understand the message that it is a gateway drug. Studies also show that our brains are not fully developed until our early 20s and that use of drugs, especially marijuana, will slow adolescent ability to become high-functioning."



Brian Johnson Staff LISA, Inc. Executive Director Kim Selvaggi (left), receives the Executive Director Award from Elizabeth Hyatt at the Southington Chamber of Commerce's annual dinner. Hyatt was the executive director of the chamber at the time and now works for LISA, Inc.

Sherman said local teachers are being instructed on how to recognize signs of trauma in their students. Trauma, she said, makes it so that they are more likely to begin using drugs.

“Teachers spend enough time with their kids where they understand their typical personalities,” added Liz Hyatt, of LISA, Inc. “They may be able to recognize warning signs and intervene before they start using.”

“The STEPS Coalition has been working hard for the past 10 years to make substance abuse prevention a priority and develop relationships within the Southington community,” said Christina Simms, director of Southington Youth Services. “We were absolutely thrilled when we were given this unique opportunity to create a partnership with LISA, Inc. With this new partnership, we are able to continue our work with prevention but also help individuals that may need early intervention with substance abuse and offer support to families coping with a substance abuse addiction of a loved one.”

Simms added that many parents “couldn’t be more thankful” that they can now meet more than once a month as a support group and talk about shared experiences.

“We are grateful to the Bradley Henry Barnes & Leila Upson Barnes Memorial Trust at the Main Street Community Foundation for awarding this grant to fund this exciting new initiative for Southington,” said LISA, Inc. Executive Director Kim Selvaggi. “Joining forces with the Southington STEPS Coalition to solve this problem is exactly the type of community work that we want to do more of.”

“This partnership began because Kim, our executive director, recognized how much more we are being supported in Southington since we came here two years ago,” added Sherman. “We wanted to do something as an agency to support another local organization as a way to acknowledge that support.”

STEPS is a Southington based coalition run through the Southington Youth Service Bureau that seeks to prevent and reduce drug and alcohol use among all residents.

The mission of LISA, Inc. is to provide safe, supportive, empowering programs and services for vulnerable young people that facilitate healthy development, supportive relations, positive social and cultural experiences, exploration of spirituality, academic and vocational success and the development of meaningful life skills.

During the first year, the two organizations estimate that the 1-2-3 Prevention, Intervention and Recovery Program will reach 92 Southington residents, including 50 educators, 18 youths, and 24 adults whose children are using drugs or are in recovery.

For more information on LISA, Inc., call 203-879-9233 or visit lisainc.org.

For more information on Southington STEPS, call 860-276-6285 or visit southingtonsteps.org.

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