

Supporting drug-free communities

By Kaija Swisher Black Hills Pioneer | Posted: Thursday, September 29, 2016 11:30 am

SPEARFISH — To support its mission to “mobilize the community to promote a positive, healthy, and drug-free youth,” the volunteer-driven, nonprofit Spearfish Community Coalition (SCC) continues to provide programming for substance use prevention and youth leadership development in year two of the second, five-year \$625,000 Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Programs grant.

"The Drug-Free Communities Support Program make a vital difference at the community level – reaching out to people where they live with the help they need to prevent substance use," said Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Principal Deputy Administrator Kana Enomoto. "SAMHSA is honored to join the Office of National Drug Control Policy in working with community coalitions across the nation to create healthy and drug-free environments for children, youth, and families."

According to DFC Program data for 2014, an estimated 3,800 young people per day between the ages of 12-17 used drugs for the first time in the preceding year, and high school seniors are more likely to be current smokers of marijuana than cigarettes. The program data also showed that 17 percent of high school seniors nationwide in 2015 reported binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row) in the past two weeks.

"Recognizing that local problems need local solutions, DFC-funded coalitions engage multiple sectors of the community and employ a variety of environmental strategies to address local drug problems," the program website states. "Coalitions are comprised of community leaders, parents, youth, teachers, religious and fraternal organizations, health care and business professionals, law enforcement, and media. By involving the community in a solution-oriented approach, DFC also helps those youth at risk for substance use recognize the majority of our Nation's youth choose not to use drugs."

Locally, the SCC's main focus is on substance prevention and youth leadership development in middle and high school students.

"While the SCC mainly targets all of the middle and high school age kids, we also include messaging and prevention initiatives towards parents, businesses, elementary age children, and college age students," Melissa Currier, SCC executive director, said. She listed some of the events and activities that the SCC organizes and supports, including the Downtown Friday Nights ID Tent, Middle School Youth Leadership



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The Spearfish Community Coalition is in year two of its second, \$625,000, five-year Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Programs grant. The coalition's focus is on substance prevention and youth leadership development, like the team-building event pictured at Spearfish Middle School.

Pioneer file photo by Kaija Swisher

Conference, the Youth and Family Resource Guide, LifeSkills Prevention Curriculum, Red Ribbon Week, and more.

The grant will assist with these projects, which impact many area youth. For example, Currier said, Red Ribbon activities take place at all Spearfish schools; the Youth Leadership Conference has typically 100-120 per year from all local middle schools; the LifeSkills Curriculum is given to all students in Creekside Elementary and Spearfish Middle School; high school students receive lanyards or backpacks every year with drug/alcohol/tobacco free messaging; the SCC provides drug-free giveaways at Safe Trick or Treating at the rec center; volunteers check anywhere from 700-1,200 IDs at every Downtown Friday Nights event; and the SCC loans their ID Scanners to various organizations (including Black Hills State University) to use at their events to help reduce underage drinking.

“Our activities are completely volunteer run,” Currier said, adding her thanks to everyone who helps to make these events possible. The coalition currently has 134 members, one paid staff, and many partners in the community. Currier added that additional volunteers are always needed: if you or your organization would like to become involved, contact spfccdirector@gmail.com or (605) 717-1417.

When asked her hope for the continued grant funds the SCC receives, Currier said, “We hope that we continue to see a decline in substance use in our youth.”

The SCC currently uses the nationally recognized Pride Survey in grades 6-12 to track the statistics for substance use in middle and high school students.

“The survey is given annually and is completely anonymous,” Currier said. “Based on the information collected in this survey, there has been a reported decline in use of substances, as well as an increase in the perception of harm of substance use, over the past six years that we have received the DFC grant funding.”

Full survey results are available by requesting a copy through spfccdirector@gmail.com. “Without the support of our community, our organization would not be successful in prevention initiatives,” Currier said, thanking the coalition’s volunteers, supporters, and partners.

For more information, visit spearfishcommunitycoalition.com.

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