

Letters To The Editor

Somerset County unleashes power of collaboration

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One of the benefits of working in several counties is the ability to witness and experience how individuals and organizations work together for the betterment of their residents and communities.



At the United Way of the Laurel Highlands, we get to experience this first hand due to our work and responsibilities in both Cambria and Somerset Counties.

One glaring spotlight is on how Somerset County uses the power of collaboration, especially in the critical area of drug and alcohol prevention programming, to improve the lives of their youth and future of the region.

The results being achieved in Somerset are impressive, and are a blueprint for others to follow. All 18 risk factors measured show a significant reduction, 48 percent on average, in risky behaviors including, binge drinking, marijuana usage, prescriptions abuse, and many others. They are moving quickly in the right direction!

This does not happen by chance, or by adopting short-term feel good approaches; but with a vision that includes open collaboration with all stakeholders welcomed, implementing evidence based programming proven to deliver measurable results, and a long-term focus of funding to scale and sustainability.

Somerset County has all the ingredients for success. An inclusive and transparent County Drug & Alcohol Unit (referred to as the Single County Authority – SCA), a respected and effective program provider in Twin Lakes Center, engaged and receptive school districts, unwavering

support by Somerset Hospital and the Somerset County commissioners, with strong leadership throughout those listed.

Molding all of these ingredients is Drug Free Communities; a large and diverse coalition of Somerset County non-profit, government, hospital, school, law enforcement, state legislative, district attorney, faith based, and business representatives; all working together for a drug-free Somerset County.

The United Way of the Laurel Highlands is proud to be a partner with all of these collaborative organizations and individuals.

Their success has caught the attention of many outside the region as evidenced by the recent commitment by the University of Colorado, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, to provide funding for Botvin LifeSkills Drug & Alcohol Prevention Programming throughout all Somerset County school districts through 2022.

This will now be nine years in which the University of Colorado has provided funding. And Somerset County is the only county in the nation to be afforded that funding opportunity. We again are proud to partner with the SCA, Twin Lakes, Lee Initiatives, and the University of Colorado to braid funding which allows continued expansion of the Botvin LifeSkills Training program with a focus on long-term sustainability.

Somerset County's inclusive and collaborative approach is paying off in many ways. To learn more about their results visit our website at www.uwlaurel.org/youthdrugandalcoholprevention