

RALLY

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CTA held its first coffee and conversation session recently at the Grand Cafe in downtown Farmington. Michaelson said the core group of parents who attended first set some ground rules.

"This is not a setting of blame, but one of education and support," she said.

Coalition plans efforts

BY JONI HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington/Farmington Hills Call to Action Community Coalition will unveil a number of new initiatives in 2003, aimed at specific sectors.

According to Executive Director Estralee Michaelson, the Coalition is on the verge of releasing a video created as a follow-up to last year's highly successful seminar on recognizing addiction in the workplace.

"We thought about another forum for the business sector, but decided why not produce a video instead, because business people are so busy," she said.

Presenters will be available to any business owner or manager who wants to hold an in-house seminar after seeing the video.

Leaders in the youth sector will start work on a video that deals with the legal consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. Michaelson said the focus will be on the difference between educational law and criminal law — the difference

between school and community consequences.

"I get so many questions on the (school) side of conduct, discipline and juvenile court issues," Michaelson said, adding 47th District Court Judge Marla Parker will participate in the project.

"Parents don't realize that once their kid turns 17, there's a difference in the law," Michaelson added. "Getting treatment for kids beyond 18 is difficult, because they're an adult."

The coalition also hopes to promote a resource guide and to find ways to avoid duplication of services and use those resources most effectively.

"Too many of us work in a vacuum," Michaelson said. "If we unite, we'll become more streamlined."

Additional community and school forums are planned, on the topic of drug use in the schools. Michaelson also serves as Safe/Drug Free Schools Director for Farmington Public Schools.

"When your gut is gnawing at you, you really don't want to look at the big picture," she said. "There is so much shame revolving around parenting issues. As soon as a kid violates the rules you've set down, it's easier to deny. It's less painful to deny."

Family therapist Jacquelyn Vincenti, MSLLP, of Farmington Hills-based Davis Counseling, has seen the same thing in 18 years of working with families.

"My concern is I think parents are afraid of over-reacting, particularly where marijuana is concerned," she said, adding kids who are found to be using harder drugs like heroin and cocaine most likely "started to experiment fairly early."

Parents who suspect their child is using can get a urine or blood test, but heroin stays in the system only three days,

while marijuana traces can last up to 30 days — so a test might not be enough, Vincenti said. "I don't think it's an over-reaction at the time to do an evaluation."

She suggested setting up an evaluation with a licensed therapist who has experience in dealing with substance abuse. In one recent case, a mother brought in her son who had admitted using heroin, and Vincenti immediately referred him for in-patient treatment.

"Heroin is a hard addiction to kick," she said. "They have to be detoxed off the drug at a center or hospital."

Vincenti was surprised to read about a heroin overdose death in Farmington, as she hasn't seen that drug in the community for several years. Typically, she said, kids will smoke it a few times, and that's how they get started.

Often, they don't think they're going to be the stereotypical addict, because they're not injecting the drug intravenously.

"In the kids I've worked with, typically there were signs," she said. "Hollows under the eyes ... they tend to look pale, there's not a whole lot of emotion. They're often described as 'walking dead.'"

That's what baffled Starling's family and friends, as he didn't show obvious signs of drug abuse. He played football and took advanced coursework, even tutoring older students. His parents described him as "kind, intelligent and fun-loving." They also acknowledged his drug use may have been more than they believed, but was probably less than what has been rumored.

Vincenti believes kids need to be made more aware that simple experimentation isn't

simple at all. She'd like to see more opportunities for them to meet with people in recovery, who can talk about what their life was like.

"We tend to think drugs and alcohol don't happen in Farmington," Vincenti said. "This impacts all communities."

She urges parents whose children are caught even with cigarettes at a young age to "frank out" a little earlier. "These are some things that are signs. These are kids you have to watch. You're not over-reacting."

Vincenti also noted kids who are using heroin are often too ashamed to reach out for help.

"We have to get kids to understand the concept of addiction, that it's a disease," she said. "This person didn't say, 'I want to grow up to be a heroin addict.' There is a progression."

TEACHERS

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Florists and the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Nominations can come from students, parents, school administrators or community residents who have contact or knowledge of a teacher's classroom activities. To nominate a teacher, please send the teacher's name, school address and the school's telephone number along with a statement of no more than 200 words telling us why this teacher

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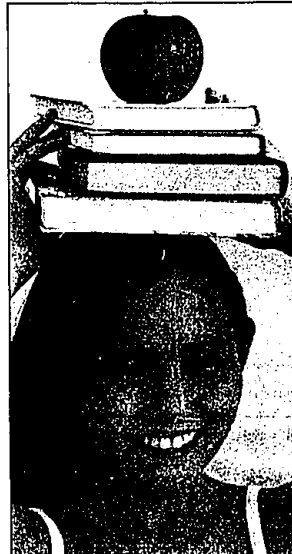
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