

Working Together Coalition to prevent alcohol, drug use among area students

Working Together: A Coalition for Safe and Healthy Communities is among 161 newly funded county coalitions across the nation to receive a Drug-Free Community (DFC) Grant.

Over the next five years, \$625,000 will be awarded for prevention and reduction of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana abuse and misuse among young people in Cass County.

Kelly Felton recently presented a program about a coalition of communities working together for safe and healthy communities. She said students have been surveyed and are becoming involved, and parents are networking to stem the abuse. Three out of 14 area businesses have been found guilty of selling to minors.

The Coalition meets the second Thursday of each month at 1:30 p.m. at the Walker Area Community Center Rotary Room.

"Evidence shows the communities receiving DFC funding have lower instances of

youth using tobacco, alcohol and marijuana," said Gil Kerlikowske, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. "These efforts will include working in the Northland Community, Walker-Hackensack-Akeley and Pine River-Backus school districts. We will hold a community coalition meeting in each of these three school districts to discuss what we can do to prevent our youth from using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs."

Here are a few of the strategies currently being working on.

- Working with law enforcement to implement the Zero Adult Providers (ZAP) philosophy and alcohol compliance checks with on- and off-sale establishments.
- Implementing an alcohol and drug prevention curriculum into each school district.
- Starting a parent network and educational opportunities for parents.
- Changing the norms of community regarding alcohol, tobacco and drug use.

- Providing alternative activities for youth to do within each community.

Felton said the solution is in the Community.

"We know that we can't make change without having the entire community's help. Your help and support is the most valuable thing that we have."

To learn more about the coalition, call Felton at (218) 330-8129 or kelly@workingtogethercoalition.org.

The next community coalition meetings are scheduled for the following dates.

- Walker-Hackensack-Akeley: Feb. 11 at 1:30 p.m. at the Walker Area Community Center.
- Pine River-Backus: Feb. 17 at 2 p.m. at the Backus City Hall.
- Northland Community School: Feb. 24, at 5 p.m. at the Depot in Remer.



Kelly Felton presented a program about Working Together: a Coalition for Safe and Healthy Communities. Photo by Terri Fierstine