

N.H. Boys & Girls Clubs offer prevention programs

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Adam Urquhart A range of different prevention programs are being offered at all New Hampshire Boys and Girls Clubs, including SVBGC.

MILFORD- Across New Hampshire, Boys & Girls Clubs are offering prevention programs to kids in the midst of a nationwide opioid epidemic.

Monica Gallant, director of prevention services at the Souhegan Valley Boys & Girls Club said, *"We hear about treatment for adults, but who's thinking about the children? And these programs specifically target children."*

From Portsmouth to Milford, from Nashua to Lisbon, all 43 locations and nine chartered clubs are collectively collaborating on implementing these new programs.

“Funding for prevention has a better return than funding for treatment. Getting to the kids at this age is really a critical factor, and we’re all doing good work,” Executive Director at SVBGC Mike Goodwin said.

As it is, New Hampshire is one of the top ranking states nationally for overdose deaths, and the different programs offered at clubs across the state are working to turn that statistic around.

Programs offered at SVBGC include CAST, or Community Action for Safe Teens, and Y.E.S., or Youth Empowerment and Service, which targets youth in grades six through 12.

“The Souhegan Valley Club is the home of the CAST Coalition, which is a youth substance use coalition. One of the most important things to know about CAST is that it’s a collaborative effort of more than 65 community stakeholders and agencies,” Gallant said.

Those stakeholders and agencies include schools, the faith community, recovery support agencies and more.

Some outcomes of the Coalition include Y.E.S. and the Children’s Resiliency Retreat. The retreat is hosted monthly at the club, serving children impacted by loved ones substance use, for children in grades one through eight.

“We just piloted that program in January, but on a larger scale, when considering other clubs in the region working on this issue, Nashua has the Camp Mariposa program, which is an overnight program serving kids impacted by addiction,” Gallant said.

In a statement, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua, Norm Bouthillette, said the Nashua Club offers many programs that work to help kids get connected with caring adults, cope with grief and give them tools to avoid misusing drugs. Programs implemented at that club include, Positive Action, Smart Moves Prevention Programs, Teen Resiliency Camp,

Parenting Wisely and Camp Mariposa. Camp Mariposa is a year-round mentoring and addiction prevention program for youth ages 9 through 12 who are impacted by the SUD of a family member or the loss of a family member due to overdose.

In a statement, Bouthilette said, *“These children especially deserve a place to feel safe and connected as well as a strong support system to help them reach toward a bright and healthy future,”* adding that, *“I’m honored to be part of this panel and speak to such an important issue.”*

He recently joined the Congressional Opioid Prevention Panel.

All clubs in the state are collaborating together on this issue, while some clubs have their own specific programs.

Another program offered at SVBGC is called Smart Moves, which the Boys & Girls Clubs of America’s developed in response to four major problems impacting many of the youth in the nation, including alcohol use, tobacco use, other drug use and teenage pregnancy.

“About three years ago, Boys & Girls Clubs of America partnered with Positive Action, which is an evidence-based program for prevention programs,” said Richard Lowney, president of the New Hampshire Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs.

Being evidence-based, the program provides analytics necessary to measure outputs of impact, and they also make the prevention program age appropriate.

“What you do with first-graders for the message of prevention aren’t the same tools and techniques needed to get the same impact in an eighth-grader,” Lowney said.

Gallant said the Positive Action and Smart Moves programs are part of DHHS funding, which also provides an online parenting program called Parenting Wisely, which is offered by three clubs in the state.

Goodwin said Positive Action and Smart Moves programs are kind of curriculum-based, where there is a learning component with staff who are

trained on how to run the programs. However, he said through these programs, they're measurable outcomes. Kids take a pre- and post-test to indicate how they've progressed, and where they stand from start to finish. He said this is a statewide effort between all the clubs, and also said, *"In order to have a huge impact there's no other way to do it other than collectively."*

Gallant said by engaging the youth voices, they're in turn helping them identify what the issues they're facing are. Some concerns she's heard from kids in the programs are mental health, SUD in the community, parental SUD, death, social media issues and suicide issues.

"We're really focused on the mental health. If we can address mental health, then we can address substance use, because we also ask them why kids are using alcohol, marijuana or any other substance, and the majority say it's for a coping mechanism," Gallant said.

Lowney said there's a lot of issues here, and they're not providing all the solutions, rather knowing where to refer families to be provided additional care and support, whether that's working with the school system, mental health organizations or other partners.

The Boys & Girls Club in New Hampshire formed in 1906, starting in Manchester.

"So, we've been here a long time. We can't stay that long without cooperating, that's the New Hampshire way. We have to collaborate," Lowney said, adding that, *"There's not a lot of taxes up here, but we do have a lot of people who care about the community and support it."*

Lowney said clubs in New Hampshire operate under more than \$20.5 million a year, but they're not a government-funded organization, rather a community-based funded organization. Lowney said there is 157 board members statewide, which include business and community leaders, who are aware we have an opioid crisis and issues with our children.

“They raise the money and put it in the hands of trained professionals to solve the problem,” Lowney said.

Aside from board members, in New Hampshire the clubs have 110 full-time employees, 204 part-time employees, 812 volunteers who assist in providing program services to youth and 167 additional volunteers to assist in providing management, administrative or general organizational support. Clubs in New Hampshire serve more than 28,000 youth each year.

“Collectively, this year, over 500 kids will go through both programs, Smart Moves and Positive Action, statewide,” Goodwin said, adding that, *“That doesn’t include the Resiliency Retreat or Camp Mariposa.”*

Nationwide, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America annually serves 4 million youth through membership and community outreach in 4,300 club facilities.

“We’re kind of on the frontlines. We know we’re in the dark, and we’re going to light our own candle ... but we need more than a candle to go after this,” Lowney said.

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