

Spotlight on the Acton Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth

Preventing Risky Behavior in Adolescents

By Beth Farley, ABUW Volunteer

Wellness checks, vaccinations, ‘what to expect when...’ books. Such are the resources for keeping our little ones healthy. But, as they grow, things change. Physical health, while still an issue, can be subject to involvement with drugs, alcohol and violence. Stress, bullying, and self- image can all affect the mental health of our adolescents.

Enter ABCHY.

The Acton Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth (www.abchy.org) strives to promote positive youth development and prevent risky behavior in adolescents. This non-profit organization was formed in 2007 with a challenge grant from ABUW. Representatives from the nine founding agencies comprise ABCHY’s Board of Directors. This ensures open communication and coordination of resources in identifying adolescent & family issues, giving direction to those needing help, and working to educate and empower parents.

The recipient of another ABUW grant in 2010-2011, ABCHY has aggressively pursued their charter. Jan Stewart, ABCHY outreach coordinator, cites three major areas that the organization is working to address; substance abuse, youth violence and mental health and wellness issues. “The input and support from the A-B Regional School District, High School Principal Callen, A-B Counseling Department Chair, Stephen Hitzrot, and others, have allowed ABCHY to develop a plan for informing and equipping parents with the tools to deal with such issues,” stated Ms. Stewart.

Toward that end, ABCHY has been working on a variety of programs and methods to get the word out, including presentations, parent workshops, therapist listings and surveys. In the fall, ABCHY sponsored a well received forum featuring Dr. Michael Bradley titled, *Loving Your Teen Without Losing Your Mind*. The presentation gave insight, hope and suggestions for helping our teens grow into strong, confident adults.

ABCHY hosted a presentation on bullying and cyber-bullying on Wednesday, February 9th at the RJ Grey library. The panel focused on prevention and intervention strategies.

On March 15th, ABCHY will sponsor a showing of the award winning documentary, *Race to Nowhere*. The film highlights the culture of extreme pressure and high expectations faced by today’s teens. A panel discussion will follow the film.

As Jan Stewart stated, “The need for a central organization with the time, energy and resources to coordinate and communicate between the available resources and the parents of adolescents is critical.”

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