

Tenafly enlists grant to fight drug, alcohol epidemic

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(Photo: Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com)

TENAFLY — On the heels of a survey that found alcohol consumption among teens in the Tenafly School District to be higher than the national average, Tenafly is fighting back against the drug and alcohol epidemic.

The district is using a five-year federal grant of \$125,000 to run educational events in the school and community. The first event will be a community-wide wellness event on Jan. 29 at ZingCycle, a fitness studio on Piermont Road, which is aimed at developing awareness of healthy living.

"Students are under a lot of stress from a variety of sources," District Assistant Superintendent Barbara Laudicina said. "We want them to turn to positive coping mechanisms."

Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 deaths among underage youth each year, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC also reports that youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience social and legal problems, alcohol-related injuries and car crashes, and are more likely to abuse other drugs.

The district applied last year for a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant to address the issues raised in the Pride Survey, conducted by the district in December 2015 and interpreted by Katherine Roberts, a Columbia University professor of health and behavior studies.

Over 34 percent of the district's student population participated in the survey, which focused on attitudes toward drug and alcohol use. The surveys are voluntary and anonymous but are only administered to those whose parents give consent. The survey serves as a baseline for information, Laudicina pointed out.

"It is conceivable that we will want to repeat this survey in subsequent years so that trends or changes might be better identified," Laudicina said. "It is a starting point that helps to inform our practices regarding programs and education."



Tenafly High School on January 4, 2017. Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com (Photo: Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com)

The survey results, released in August, showed alcohol use and binge drinking to be higher than the national norm among the district's 10th-graders and 12th-graders. but it was typical of other suburban communities, Roberts said.

Pride Surveys was created in 1982 by professors at Georgia State University and Western Kentucky University to help local schools measure alcohol and drug use through the use of student surveys. The Georgia-based company has conducted over 70,000 surveys since 1982. "The goal is to identify self-reported student behaviors, which in the end helps inform where money is spent programmatically so that it can have the greatest positive impact on the student population," said Jay Gleaton, CEO of Pride Surveys.

The survey also found that marijuana use is higher than the national norm among Tenafly's 12th-graders. The district's 8th-graders and 12th-graders said they perceived alcohol to be the easiest substance to get hold of while 10th-graders reported marijuana was easier to obtain.

Asked whether they had consumed one or more alcoholic beverage within the past 30 days, 56 percent of the district's 12th-graders who participated responded positively, compared to the national average of 35 percent.

In response to a question asking if they've ever consumed five or more glasses of beer or liquor within a few hours, 20 percent of Tenafly 10th-graders responded yes, compared to an 11 percent national average, and 49 percent of the 12th-graders responded yes, compared to the national average of 17 percent.

The survey found that use of heroin and prescription drugs among district teens was relatively low. Roberts recommended that Tenafly continue to be vigilant with respect to alcohol and marijuana and that strategies are needed to reduce their use, particularly among the older grades.

The discovery sparked concern among district officials who were moved to action. They applied for the grant and formed a coalition — dubbed OCAY (Our community allied with youth) — to combat substance abuse in the district. Among the strategies raised so far are workshops and educational programs for the school and community. In addition, the district may try to bring yoga into the classrooms to help students be more mindful and learn relaxation techniques.

Laudicina said she's enthusiastic about being able to help students navigate their way through the teen years.

"We hope to use the grant to help students make good choices. There's a lot of pressures on kids," Laudicina said. "We want to give them alternatives in decision making."



Tenafly High School on January 4, 2017. Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com (Photo: Tariq Zehawi/NorthJersey.com)

Where to go for help

Addiction Recovery Program: <http://bergenhealth.org>, 201- 336-3330. Offers information and referral for assessment, outpatient services and intensive outpatient services. Also offers detoxification services, residential treatment halfway houses and self-help groups.

2-1-1 Addiction Hotline: www.nj211.org. Provides free, personal help to anyone trying to navigate the human and health services system, government assistance programs and local community resources in their struggle with substance abuse issues.

The Center for Alcohol and Drug Resources: www.tcadr.org, 201 740-7069. Provides substance abuse education, information and referral information to Bergen County residents and schools. Many of the services are provided free of charge.

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.njaa.org, 800-245-1377. A self-supporting group that is available everywhere. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about a drinking problem.