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National Prevention Week: Highlighting drug-abuse prevention

National Prevention Week events highlight substance abuse and mental health topics.

CANTON With summer vacation on the way, local schools and advocacy groups are taking their drug-prevention message to students and the community at large.

Sunday was the official start of National Prevention Week, an annual event that aims to increase public awareness, and action, on substance abuse and mental health issues.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration sponsors the event each year during the third week of May so that schools can stress prevention before the summer break, a time when young people are more likely to try marijuana, cigarettes and alcohol.

The big message is “having a safe summer, making good choices,” said Frances Gerbig, health and wellness manager of Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery.

“It’s truly a reminder that prevention doesn’t take a vacation,” Gerbig said. “As students have more free time on their hands, we need to be more vigilant and make sure that we have things to keep them safe.”

Heroin and opiates have become a concern around the state and locally, but National Prevention Week also touches on marijuana and tobacco use, underage drinking and suicide prevention.

“It’s critical that we keep in mind that all of these things are inter-related,” Gerbig said.

Chalk it Up!

This is the first year drug-prevention advocates with Lake Community Cares will hold National Prevention Week events.

Lake Community Cares formed in 2014 after the deaths of several young people in the township from heroin and opiates.

The group will distribute crisis text line information at the high school, and is sending informing throughout the community about drug drop-off boxes, ways to safeguard medication in the home and information on prevention resources in the area.

On Tuesday, Lake Community Cares is asking everyone in the community to wear a blue shirt to promote the theme “Strong as one, stronger together.”

On Wednesday, the group is asking businesses, schools and residents to write positive messages on their sidewalks, driveways and parking lots in chalk.

State leaders have recognized drug prevention and education as the best options for tackling Ohio’s opiate epidemic, and spring is a good time to advance that message, said Debbie Marshall, chair of Lake Community Cares and a Lake High School counselor.

“It’s around prom, it’s around graduation, it’s around our seniors going off to college,” Marshall said. “It’s also a time when we have found we’ve lost a lot of our kids, once in they’re in the late teens and early 20s.”

Middle school push

Like the Lake Township group, the Sandy Valley Drug Awareness Initiative started in 2014 after that community saw an increase in drug overdoses.

The Sandy Valley group will hold an assembly Thursday for Sandy Valley Middle School students to discuss prescription medications and marijuana. The assembly will include Magnolia police and a pharmacist who will discuss the dangers of over-the-counter medications.

Students who are becoming teens and young adults need to realize they’re not alone in making healthy decisions, Sarah Nelson, the initiative’s executive chair.

“They have an entire community standing behind them to help support them with the healthy decisions,” Nelson said.

Sandy Valley Drug Awareness Initiative will also hold its monthly meeting 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, at Magnolia Town Hall.

Steps of Change

On Saturday, Ohio Change Addiction Now will hold its “Steps of Change” event at the McKinley Monument.

Ten women whose children were addicted to drugs, primarily heroin, founded Change Addiction Now three years ago.

The group advocates for treatment and criminal justice reforms, including Good Samaritan laws that give immunity to persons who call 911 to report an overdose.



Cindy Koumoutzis, of Lake Township, is a founder and the director of C.A.N.'s Ohio chapter. She said this is the first time "Steps of Change" is being held in Stark.

The event begins at 11 a.m. and will include a mile-long walk, a memorial to overdose victims at noon and speakers, including state Sen. Robert Sprague, R-Findlay, who has sponsored a Good Samaritan bill.

There will also be training on how to use Narcan (naloxone), a drug that reverses opiate overdoses, treatment information and boxes where people can donate summer items such as sunscreen and bug spray for the homeless and others in need, Koumoutzis said.

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For more information

Ohio Change Addiction Now

www.changeaddictionnow.org/ohio.html

Sandy Valley Drug Awareness Initiative

www.facebook.com/svdai

Stark County Mental Health & Addiction Recovery

www.starkmhrs.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov/prevention-week

<http://www.cantonrep.com/article/20160516/NEWS/160519502>

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