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## \*Drug coalition wants 'norms' changed

*Substance abuse and drinking are targeted here*

By Ryan Winslett  
Times Reporter

According to Fountain Hills Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition organizer Carole Groux, you can be the best parents, with the best kids, in the best schools, in the best town, but if you live in a polluted pond, you're going to get polluted.

This idea of environmental cause and effect has served as a backbone for the coalition's mission to help clean up illegal drugs Fountain Hills and on Tuesday, July 13, Groux brought that mission to the weekly Rotary Club meeting.

"Our goal is to fight substance abuse," Groux said. "We believe if you can fight it when the kids are young, you can fight it even better when the kids get older."

Groux and her fellow coalition members have spent the past six months spreading their message between local clubs and organizations to educate residents about the threats of substance abuse and underage drinking.

According to Groux, reaching a community is the only way to create change.

"We've seen prevention strategies change over the past 10 years," Groux said. "We've learned that reaching out just to the kids does not work. There's more to



**Carole Groux, of the Fountain Hills Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition, visited the local Rotary Club to talk about recent and future efforts to change social norms and help guide local youths away from destructive behaviors.**

it than that."

According to the coalition's environmental strategy, all facets of the community must be reached to have any real effect.

"You have to reach out to the community," Groux said. "We have to reach the kids, the parents, law enforcement, regular citizens and the environment itself."

According to a survey conducted among local stu-

dents, 50 percent of those surveyed said the number one source of alcohol in Fountain Hills is getting it at a party.

Currently, the coalition is working with local law enforcement in hopes of creating and eventually passing a social host ordinance, making it the responsibility of the homeowner if underage consumption occurs within a residence.

"We believe passing a

social host ordinance can help cut down on those parties," Groux said. "This is just one of the ways we're trying to change the norms."

It's these social norms, according to Groux, that must be the ultimate target of "change." Using smoking as an example, Groux demonstrated how, over time, such a large task can be accomplished.

"I'm not knocking smoking. I know it is a tough habit," Groux said, stating that, over the past two decades, laws have been passed and steps have been taken to literally change the public perception of a harmful product.

"I think we can all agree that smoking today is treated differently than it was 20 years ago," Groux said.

"That's changing social norms."

Such changes, according to Groux, are needed on a local scale with regard to substance abuse and underage drinking.

"Fountain Hills is generally higher in alcohol and marijuana use in eighth, 10th and 12th grade compared to state-wide and national statistics," Groux said.

"But don't panic. That is generally the case in rural towns with more desert and washes for these activities to take place."

With this in mind, Groux said she and the coalition will continue to work to tackle the problem from every angle and educate residents about what is being done.

"The good news is, it can be done," she said.

## Coalition launches two projects

### Geared to help parents

To help battle local substance abuse and underage drinking, the Fountain Hills Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition announced two programs geared toward parents.

The first is "Safe Homes Network" of Fountain Hills, a loose alliance of parents who pledge to keep their homes free of underage drinking and parties.

The second is "Staying Connected with Your Teen," a series of classes for parents of teens.

With the Safe Homes Network, participants pledge:

- \* To not knowingly allow youths under 21 to consume or use alcohol or illegal drugs at their home, property or gatherings at other locations.

- \* To provide reasonable adult supervision for parties of underage youths at their home.

- \* When out of town, to now knowingly allow children to host parties at the house involving underage youths.

- \* To welcome and encourage contact from other parents whose children are gathering at their home.

#### Stay Connected

The first 12 parents who sign up for a session of "Staying Connected with Your Teen" will receive \$100.

There is a total of 10 hours in the workshops.

The program is being funded through a grant awarded the coalition by the Governor's Office for Children, Youth & Families - Division for Substance

Abuse Policy.

Karen Whalen-Bayne of the coalition said the "Staying Connected with Your Teen" program teaches parents and teens skills to improve communication.

She added that the coalition selected this program because it is a science-based prevention program that is grounded in rigorous research from a variety of disciplines.

Families who participated in the program showed improvement in five critical areas -- prevention of substance abuse, improved family discipline practices, improved family supervision skills, improved family bonding and reduced family attitudes favorable to anti-social behavior.

The program consists of:

- \* Real life strategies to increase bonding, reduce risk factors and increase protective factors resulting in a more effective relationship with your teen.

- \* Ideas for parents to supervise their teen while reducing arguments and accusations about invading your teen's privacy.

- \* Techniques to assist parents with setting family policies on health and safety issues.

- \* Tools and methods for effective family problem solving.

"Things start to change with kids once they enter their middle school years," said Whalen-Bayne, a re-

tired educator.

"This is a very proactive, practical program. It's not just about alcohol. A major emphasis is keeping alive those relationships with your children."

The first sessions will start in mid-August. Others will be held in September, October, January, February and March.

All sessions will be conducted in the Fountain Hills Unified School District Learning Center.

To sign up or for more information, contact Whalen-Bayne at (480) 639-0519 or e-mail her at [karob@cox.net](mailto:karob@cox.net).

The coalition also will organize and host a underage drinking symposium to be held here in September.

A \$2,260 grant from the AZ Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention will help fund the symposium.

The goal is to get 300 parents and 100 high school students to attend. The prevention coalition's mission is: "Through community-wide collaboration, Fountain Hills will work together to reduce substance abuse among youths ages 12-18, and, over time, among adults."

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