



AMPLIFY

Avon YSAB/ LPC / COC Meeting

November 17, 2021 6:30PM

GoTo meeting – Avon Youth Services

Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Suzi Alexe, Youth Service Coordinator

Christine Pescatore, Administrative Analyst, Social Services

Lisa Gray, RSS, Founder & Executive Director, A Promise to Jordan

Lauren Lee, Avon High School Student

Makena Logan – Avon High School Student

Officer Jason Reardon Avon Police Department, Community Officer

Marisa Hicking, Teen Librarian, Avon Free Public Library

Heather Toyen, Avon High School Counselor

Deb Steremberg, Parent/Community Member

Maria Mazzicato, Community Member

Lori Stanczyc – Parent/Community Member

Meeting called to order at 6:32pm

I. Welcome and Introductions - Communication from the audience (limited to five minutes)

- **Suzi Alexe** – started introductions and let everyone know the meeting is being recorded to assist with the preparation of the meeting minutes.
- **Suzi Alexe** – explained how the Youth Services Advisory Board in combination with the Local Prevention Council, whose main mission is to combat substance abuse and help with mental health is composed and run. There are members that are appointed to the board from the Republican and Democratic parties, and school administrators such as guidance counselors, principals as well as community members/parents, join the board, and Avon middle school and high school students also attend meetings. The board meets four times per year during the school year, typically in October or November, January, March and May. The board discusses/hosts programs for positive youth development, local prevention programs, and other topic/issues effecting Avon youth. We work with the schools to bring programs such as evidence based substance abuse prevention programs and wellness programs

II. Updates on previous programs –

- **Suzi Alexe/Marisa Hicking** – At the beginning of the school year, there was a high school student that had gone missing, which we held a program titled Introduction to child trafficking in CT. The program was held virtually on September 21, 2021, and presented by Melissa Garden, MS., DCF Court & Community Liaison. Officer Reardon also was a part of the program. The program was well attended and we received great feedback.

III. Updates on Current Programs

- **Special Guest, Lisa Gray, RSS, Founder & Executive Director, A Promise to Jordan.**

A Promise to Jordan is based out of Simsbury, CT. it was founded in July 2018. Lisa founded the organization because on June 30, 2018 she lost her 24 year old son to an accidental overdose at their home, he had struggled with addiction for 9 years. He had overdosed 13 times prior and was saved by someone administering Narcan, but this the last time was alone, and died from an overdose of heroin that was laced with fentanyl. As Lisa said good bye to him, she promised him she would keep fighting to save other individuals and families from the devastation that is brought on by the disease of addiction. The mission is to raise awareness to the problem of substance abuse disorder, particularly in small communities, where many think substance abuse does not happen and also help erase the stigma on substance abuse and mental health disorders. They help people access quality treatment when they are ready and give hope that recovery is possible.

Much of what they do is educational programs, such as, the connection of ADHD and addiction later in life, Narcan training, and the use a CRAFT mythology to help families convince their love one that they have an addiction and seek treatment. They also do grant funded programs, currently have a program that offers up to 20 hours of life coaching services to those recovering from opioid use disorder.

Also have funding for programs on the opioid crisis. 2020 was the worst year on record, primarily due to the pandemic, which brought on substance abuse and mental health issues. The U.S. saw a nearly 30% increase in overdoses in 2020, and the State of Connecticut saw a nearly 15% increase.

A new problem that has been ramping up in the last few years is counterfeit prescriptions. These are prescription that are created in an illegal drug lab and made to look like Zanax, Percocet, and Oxycodone, these are being sold primarily online to unsuspecting teens who think they are buying a pill that will help ease their anxiety or experiment with drugs. These are not teens that are drug abusers, they are usually trying for the first time and what they are getting contains fentanyl, in some cases 100% and it is killing them. Officer Reardon said that he has not seen any case of this in Avon, but has heard of cases in training that he has attended.

What A Promise to Jordan's grant funding is hoping to do is to reach out to all 5 public high schools in the Farmington Valley and offer to launch a campaign in the high schools to educate students and parents on counterfeit prescriptions. They can do anything the school is comfortable with, such as in person presentation, brochures, posters or emails.

Officer Reardon would like to further speak with Lisa regarding the issue that in the Farmington Valley, parents are more incline to go to a soccer game than they are to a meeting and he would like to find a way to change that, so that information can be shared and resources can be used.

Marisa asked what the intent is to sell pills with fentanyl, is it to make money or is there intent to do harm to people? Lisa responded, fentanyl is cheap to manufacture and it is easy to obtain and make a quick buck. Their hope is that they their pill will make someone who is suffering from a mental illness or a problem feel better quick and they will come back for more and be a frequent customer. Not every counterfeit pill will kill someone, some may have none and some may have a deadly amount.

- **Thanksgiving and Winter Basket Programs (Suzi Alexe, Christine Pescatore, Jim Martino)**

These are annual events that assist people during the holidays with a Thanksgiving meal and holiday gifts. The Italian Club with the help of Avon Police also donate and deliver holiday baskets, they have doubled their

efforts and are now serving 30 families.

- **Holiday Card Making.**

This program started out as Valentine's Cards made by the schools and delivered to Senior Citizens and has evolved since Covid-19 started to the making and delivery of seasonal and holiday cards. With the help of the library, the community, makes the cards, the library collects them and Youth and Social Services delivers them to local nursing homes, cancer centers and rehab facilities. Valentine's Day cards will continue to be made by the elementary schools. If anyone knows any places that would like the cards please let us know.

- **Understanding and supporting transgender and non-binary youth. Virtual presentation on Nov. 18th at 6:30pm. Presented by Tony Ferraiolo, CPC, Trans Youth Advocate/Trainer/Author. (Suzi Alexe & Marisa Hicking)**

Will be presented via the library's zoom account. For more information reach out to Suzi or Marisa. There have been multiple emails from the library regarding the program. Shirley Moy also put information on the program in the schools bulletin. Currently there are 30 zoom accounts signed up, and some have multiple participants. The program will not be recorded at the presenter's request. We are proud to be presenting this program during Trans Awareness Month.

IV. Input from Student Leaders regarding topics that concern Youth

Lauren Lee from the AHS Mental Health Awareness Club. They are currently working on a survey that if approved will go out to the students and staff. The goal is to discover what changes/improvements the students and staff would like to see in the high school's mental health climate.

Makena Logan added that mental health is a big focus as many students are experiencing stress after a tough year with the pandemic and the academic workloads. She feels that getting the students voices heard on mental health as well as substance issues will allow the school to take a more holistic approach at assisting students, parents and faculty.

Social Media trends. Lauren brings up great points. Social media can be a great resource to find help for mental health and other issues. It can also be detrimental, stigma is spread more and terms are thrown around. Deb Steremberg asked Lauren for an example. Khloe Kardashian – Khlo-C-D how Khloe keeps her clothes and makeup insanely organized, which is on Pinterest and YouTube. This slogan can be associated with the mental health condition OCD. An example of something said in school, oh I am so OCD and when asked if they

struggled with OCD they said no, it's just a joke. We need to stop the trivializing of mental illness and raise awareness.

V. Avon Police Department Update and JRB

- **Partners in Prevention / Truancy / School Refusal Behaviors (Officer Reardon)**

No current JRB cases. The few truancy cases have been resolved.

Officer Reardon is looking into possible participation in the upcoming Winterfest Celebration.

VI. Community of Concern/ Local Prevention Council – Updates

- **No tobacco/vaping campaign (Suzi Alexe, AHS PTO)**

The local prevention councils has been given funds to strictly address vaping. The PTO from the middle and high school are interested in this. Suzi has a speaker that is a tobacco prevention specialist from Southern Connecticut State University, Victoria Adams. Her program, consists of college students speaking to the advisory council at the high school and middle school and hopefully the program will be brought to the student body. This program will help with assisting youths to stop vaping/smoking. With nicotine being highly addictive it is not enough to just ask a student to stop vaping/smoking when they are caught on school grounds.

We are hoping to have this completed by the end of the year.

- **Drug take back day.**

Allows people to dispose of their unused medications in a safe manner. It is held at the Avon Senior Center. They drive up and put the medications in a box, there is no questions asked. The goal is to keep the unused medications out of people's homes and the hands of persons who they do not belong to. The next event will be held in April 2022, Officer Reardon and the AMS Leo Club will be participating, Youth Services will be providing brochures and giveaways. The police department looked into to getting a drug take back box at the station, but the location of the department is not easy to find and access. They are looking into other options of locations for a box that are safe. The alternative would be to have a second take back day.

VII. Open conversations

Officer Reardon spoke about the event that is being put on December 3-5, called Avon Winterfest. He is hoping to be allowed to participate, his idea is to have a food drive to benefit the Avon Food Pantry and Gifts of Love.

From Avon Winterfest website: Avon Winterfest 2021 is an inaugural event created by **Bottoms Up** - a 501(c)(3) public charity supporting patients and families with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis *and Dom's Coffee Shop* - a European-style coffee shop in the Farmington Valley providing high quality beverages and world-class customer service in a gorgeous atmosphere. *Proceeds will be in support of Connecticut Children's Gastroenterology Department and Connecticut GI, PC, both serving the Farmington Valley and surrounding towns.*

Avon PD will be doing a toy drive on November 26th in front of Walmart.

Suzi is still working with Susan Mitchell at the horse rescue. We may have a meeting there in warmer weather. Anyone interested in programs can contact Suzi. They are also looking for volunteers. Deb's daughter attended a few programs and now she volunteers and loves it.

Suzi asked for funding from the American Rescue Program funds to fund programs at the horse rescue, which will be open to all ages through the Town once approved.

Officer Reardon will try to assist anyone who is doing a charitable event to advertise, possibly posting it on the Avon PD Facebook page.

Maria Mazzicato is an administrator for the Avon, CT Parents Connect Facebook page, please reach out to her if you have a community event that she may be able to post to the page.

VIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:50pm

Next meeting: January 2022 Date TBD