

Action for the Betterment of the Community

Report on accomplishment to date. Discuss any obstacles/problems that have been encountered and actions taken towards their resolution.

Over four years ago the Action for the Betterment of the Community (ABC) Coalition received the Drug Free Communities Grant. ABC has been in existence, originally as an advisory board for the Safe and Drug Free Schools Office with the Meade School District, and later as a prevention coalition for the community of Sturgis and the surrounding area. It has been a 501c (3) for over 10 years. Currently it is an active coalition that successfully incorporates the 12 sectors. Monthly coalition meetings see over 20 community people in attendance (compared to 5 members in attendance years ago). Monthly meetings usually include a program in an area of interest, or a coalition member sharing their program or expertise. Coalition members were also surveyed to determine the levels of satisfaction and areas for improvement regarding the coalition. ABC has a Board of Directors of 11 members.

The coalition has actively applied for, been granted, and successfully implemented several grants, including a tobacco prevention grant and local grants which support some aspects of the Red Ribbon Campaign, recognition events and other community activities.

ABC, partnering with other agencies and counties, identified community strengths and concerns through the Community Needs Assessment. ABC also sponsored speakers that addressed specific identified needs, such as Jackson Katz on the impact of the media and violence.

Besides the increase in membership, the implementation of several grants, and the identification of community concerns, over the past three years, the ABC Coalition has accomplished much:

- The strong commitment to promote community cohesion, healthy lifestyles and positive experiences for both coalition members and citizens of all ages is evidenced by the monthly meeting where coalition members share either resources/information or concerns. It is not unusual for a concern to be shared, and other coalition members help act on it. For example; when the Sturgis Food Bank announced how barren the supplies and shelves were, coalition members reached out to implement or announce food drives; when concerns were expressed that the after-school program at the local community center was not able to provide needed services to all children, ABC partnered with the community to help fill this need; when a concern surfaced regarding the inappropriate business practices effecting our youth during the annual motorcycle rally, ABC was able to lend support in addressing the concerns.
- Providing education to coalition and community members is one of the personal goals of ABC. Speakers on topics such as internet safety, drug prevention, media and violence, poverty, gang awareness, pregnancy prevention and illicit drugs (including marijuana) have been offered.
- Addressing an identified concern, via school surveys, of students riding in a car with someone who was driving under the influence, ABC has sponsored DUI/DWI checkpoints and server compliance checks and education. Besides reducing the response number of students at risk, a goal is to reinforce the

message that driving while under the influence will not be tolerated in our community.

- Offering a resource to teenagers, via the internet (and in booklet form to local students), has been well-received according to anecdotal comments and the number of 'hits' indicated on the website. Efforts are underway to determine how many users are from within the region.
- ABC has promoted the prevention message through various ways: during pre-registration at the schools; during holiday/event activities such as Halloween Fun Night, Making Christmas Memories, Sturgis First Night on New Year's Eve, Summer Sizzle, and at a booth during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

ABC has helped the Sturgis community and surrounding area achieve measurable results in strengthening the positive factors that exist in the community. In some situations, without the support of ABC, the programs or activities would be quite limited or would no longer be continued due to financial constraints. ABC's support of these programs has usually resulted in a stronger and more visible program and an increased collaboration between school or community groups and ABC. The following is a list of the programs:

- The annual Red Ribbon Campaign has grown with the involvement and support of ABC. Not only has the kick-off ceremony grown in size of persons attending, but a variety of activities helps to promote the prevention message in the community and the school. The various activities include decorating fences, offering a community-wide breakfast, providing red ribbons to schools and community members, sponsoring a poster/billboard contest, providing car magnets with a prevention message, networking with businesses to offer a treat to those wearing a red ribbon, and sponsoring a parade to kick off the week-long campaign.
- The Peer Helpers Program is a program that uses trained youth as mediators and 'peer helpers'. It was officially begun at the high school in the Spring of 2007 through the efforts of a high school counselor and the Safe & Drug Free Schools Office of Meade School District. Almost thirty sophomores and juniors were trained to be peer helpers.

Within five weeks of the Peer Helper program beginning, their skills in problem solving and conflict resolution were utilized approximately half a dozen times, resulting in no need for administrative involvement. This attests to the fact that this program was accepted by the students, which is a critical component in making a program such as this successful.

In the fall of 2008, the ABC Coalition endorsed the Peer Helper program. Since then, the involvement of the program has grown school-and community-wide: assisting Freshman and new students transition to the high school, working as mentors for Special Needs students, working as "guides" during parent-teacher conferences and other parent nights, helping with activities at elementary schools, and helping with ABC-sponsored activities such as Halloween Fun Night and Making Christmas Memories.

Even though the Peer Helper program is not designed to be a substance abuse prevention program, it has grown large enough and successful enough for some members to form a smaller “sub-group” to address concerns, such as SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving).

- About five years ago the Meade School District received a state grant to implement a character education program. This involved a collaboration between the school and the community. One of the results of the grant, was to produce an annual “Character Speaks” calendar that was given to all families with students attending school within the district; additional calendars were available for community members at large. Each month corresponded to a certain positive character trait, with about six quotes of the trait scattered throughout the particular month.

The calendar seemed to easily accomplish two goals:

(1) Since the school district and the Sturgis community is comprised of a large rural area, the calendar served to connect the school/community in a very positive way. (2) Teachers used the character trait of each month as a teaching tool, with monthly assemblies held in some schools highlighting that particular month’s trait. When the grant monies ended, the school district felt this was such a worthwhile endeavor that it was continued. Two years ago budget constraints forced the district to discontinue the calendar. ABC was able to continue the calendar in the same manner as the school district had. They also sponsored the monthly television commercials that were made and shown during the original grant.

The calendar now includes posters drawn by students for the Red Ribbon Campaign and for a tobacco prevention contest. Besides quotes, it also includes prevention “facts” to counteract some of the misinformation that students receive via their peers and the internet. It also includes a resource list with phone numbers of both school and community numbers. It is now partly sponsored by the school district through a grant they received.

The area-wide enthusiasm, positive feedback and the promotion of the “Character Speaks” calendar has made this a “tradition” in the community, made possible only with the support of the ABC Coalition.

- The school district has surveyed their students in the past years regarding at-risk behaviors. Budget cuts caused annual surveys to decrease. ABC has been able to collaborate with the school district and provide a survey to fit the needs of both the school and the coalition.
- Relational aggression has become an increasing concern in schools, especially with the proliferation of cell phones and the internet. Two years ago, a mother-daughter relational aggression dinner was offered to Sturgis sixth graders. As the concerns of this issue has increased, ABC sponsored two school counselors to attend a training on relational aggression. Their in-depth training allowed them to offer a more detailed mother-daughter “retreat”, with future dinners and “retreats” planned annually.

- To address the Community Center's concerns about some youth in their after-school program, ABC offered the 'LifeSkills' program. This program is facilitated by a counselor to help address some of the children's more complicated issues.