

Healthy Start Goes to Washington

By Jayma Shields

About one year ago, I was encouraged by our Grant Evaluator to apply for a Federal “Drug Free Communities” grant. Since I had been at the helm of Healthy Start for less than a year, I thought to myself, “We don’t stand a chance for this funding.” But, the grant writer and I “went for it;” put our nose to the grind stone, and busted out a decent grant application. I then drove it down to Willits and had it over-nighted to Washington D.C. I left Willits thinking, “We’ll see about that.”

A few months ago, I was contacted by Mike Thompson’s office, congratulating us on receiving the Drug Free Communities grant that we had applied for. I about hit the floor. Turns out, Laytonville Healthy Start/ Harwood Memorial Park were 1 of 10 grantees from the state of California, and 1 of about 80 grantees throughout the United States. We were officially notified by the “Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration” about one week later, indeed confirming we had been awarded the grant.

Since Healthy Start is a first-year grantee, we were obligated to attend a conference held in Washington D.C., the first week of December. Joanie Potter and I attended on behalf of Healthy Start and our team or “coalition” as the project requires. During the conference, we were inspired by the stories of other coalitions throughout the United States who had the same passion that we do for creating a safe community. We heard from representatives of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, a part of the Executive Office of the President. We heard from experts in the field of positive community building, substance abuse prevention and coalition building.

Throughout the conference the message was clear, “You can not do this work alone!” Which is why I need our community’s help. The goals of this grant and project are: reduce substance abuse among youth, create a safe environment for our youth, work with the schools on substance abuse prevention information, host awareness events for parents and the community, and work with our local law enforcement and government to ensure policies are in place to prevent youth substance abuse. Specifically, our project seeks to address prescription drug, marijuana, alcohol and tobacco abuse among our community’s youth population.

We know from research that it is important to target youth and their parents to prevent youth from abusing drugs. From an agency standpoint, we know that prevention is cheaper than intervention, and prevention is cheaper than treatment – which is Healthy Start’s motivation. We want to continue to create a place in the community where we talk openly with youth about substance abuse, and encourage them to make healthier choices. But, we can’t do it alone. If you are a parent, grandparent, family member, community member, senior citizen, business owner, teacher, or anyone for that matter, we would love for you to give us your energy, thoughts, ideas and support.

If you are passionate about making our community a safer, healthier place where our kids can grow up without abusing drugs later in life, we are all doing our jobs. I welcome your

feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at Healthy Start during normal business hours. Our phone number is 984-8089 and my email is jaymashields@pacific.net.

I sat in workshops with passionate community members from all over the United States recently in Washington D.C. I learned that, although, we may not live in Kentucky, Florida, Ohio or San Diego, that communities across the United States are battling drug abuse. One thing was clear, no matter where we live, we are part of a community somewhere, and if we want our community to be healthy. There is no time like the present to make a positive change.