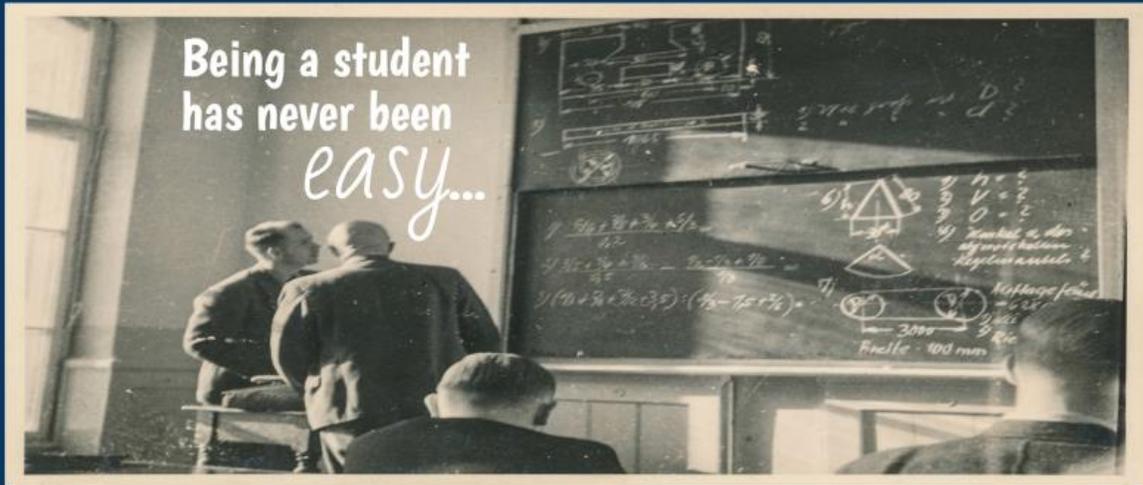


7th Judicial District – Community Dialogue



Being a parent has never been tougher.

The dangers of social media. Prescription and illegal drug abuse.
A national epidemic of school truancy.

Our Kids. Our Future. A Community Conversation.

Our Kids, Our Future. A Community Conversation was held on Monday, May 2, 2016 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at St. Cloud Technical High School. The event was a collaborative effort of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, Stearns County Judges, Stearns County Court Administration, Independent School District 742, Stearns County, Stearns County Attorney's Office, Stearns County Community Corrections, City of St. Cloud Police Department, FBI Minneapolis Citizens Academy Alumni Association and the Minneapolis Division of the FBI. The meeting facilitator was Seventh Judicial District Judge Frank Kundrat.

Community Dialogue Overview

Community Dialogues take place in each of the state's ten Judicial Districts in partnership with the District's Equal Justice Committee (EJC), the Minnesota Judicial Branch's statewide Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ) and the local community to ensure equitable treatment for all individuals in the court system.

A Community Dialogue's purpose is to:

“Create a public forum for community members to describe their experiences and discuss ideas for advancing equality and fairness regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected.”

Judge Frank Kundrat and St. Cloud Technical Principal Charles Eisenreich consulted with their respective management teams and identified truancy, drugs and social media issues as topics currently being faced in Stearns County that community members may value learning more about through a community conversation. A planning committee was formed that included: Judge Kundrat, Charlie Eisenreich, Matthew Engelking, Nick Henderson, Greg Boelter, Sargent Jesse Douvier, George Lock and Marcia Setrum.

Major Themes of the Session

- School Truancy
- Teenage Chemical Abuse
- Social Media Dangers

School Truancy

Assistant Stearns County Attorney Matthew Engelking addressed the topic of school truancy. He reviewed truancy caseloads and explained the Truancy Mediation Program. The goal of the program is to address and resolve truancy matters before filing a formal petition in District Court. Informational meetings are held twice a month at the Stearns County Service Center in Waite Park. Students with three or more days of unexcused absences are invited to the meetings. In 2015, 411 people attended a truancy session in Stearns County. The objective of the meeting is to explain to students and families the consequences of risky behaviors and to try to keep individuals out of the court system.

During these informational sessions, a child will sign an attendance agreement. Agreements are monitored for 90 days. If the child is successful, the case will be closed. If the child continues to have unexcused absences, the matter will be referred to District Court for further sanctions. If court intervention is needed, both the child and the family must go to court.

Truancy may seem like a small issue but it is far from being small. Often truancy is a key indicator that the child is engaged in behaviors that are not beneficial. Truants are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy, criminal activity, gang activity, substance abuse and failure to complete education which impacts job prospects and earning capacity later in life.



Teenage Chemical Abuse

Greg Boelter, Stearns County Community Corrections Juvenile Unit Supervisor, outlined the chemical abuse trends and drugs currently facing Central Minnesota as they relate to Stearns County Community Corrections. Common uses in Central Minnesota are alcohol, marijuana, prescription medicine and synthetic cannabinoid. Use of any of these items may result in a delinquency petition filed in District Court. Delinquency is a juvenile criminal matter. As of May 2, 2016, there were 330 children involved with probation in Stearns County.

Marijuana is the most commonly used drug. The new trend is marijuana wax, which is a concentrated form of marijuana. It provides hallucinations and out of body experiences that are much stronger than smoking a marijuana leaf plant. Another widely used substance by youth is alcohol. According to the Minnesota Department of Education's 2013 Minnesota Student Survey, ninth graders indicated that they obtain alcohol from home, friends or parties. Twelfth graders most often obtain alcohol from friends, at parties or have older friends purchase on their behalf.

People are often misinformed about prescription drugs as they often believe they are safe because they were prescribed by a doctor. Young people are finding unused medicines and taking them, selling them to others, and/or combining them with other drugs. The audience was advised to take unused drugs to an appropriate drop site so as not to fall into the hands of an unintended user; that is anyone who is not the person for which the prescription was prescribed.

Synthetic cannabinoid is also known as "K2" and several different names. The drug mimics the effects of marijuana but creates an intense bodily response. The drug can be life altering and life changing. K-2 may cause nausea, anxiety, hallucinations, heart problems, and many other serious medical and life-threatening conditions.



What can parents do to combat illegal substance use in youth?

- Role model a healthy life style
- Build meaningful relationships with youth
- Monitor activities and privileges
- Regularly communicate
- Repeat expectations
- Reach out for support
- Rally around successes

Social Media Dangers

The presenters of this topic were Jessica Harstad and Kathy Hotakainen. Ms. Harstad is the Vice President of the FBI Minneapolis Citizens Academy Alumni Association where she leads the group's initiative on Social Media and Internet Safety presentations for students and adults. Kathy Hotakainen is a Community Outreach Specialist for the Minneapolis Division of the FBI. She handles outreach to East African, Somali, Liberian, Hmong and Muslim communities and leads the FBI Minneapolis youth programs

Increased Access to the Internet

Children are starting to use electronics at a much young age than in the past. Almost anyone can use a cell phone. Parents need to be aware and should review resources such as NetSmartz (<http://www.netsmartz.org/Parents>) to be informed about the dangers facing youth on the internet. There is a great amount of inappropriate content available on the internet. Once it has been seen, a person CANNOT unsee it.

Types of Social Media

Currently, more adults than youth use Facebook. Youth have moved on to Instagram and Twitter because they are faster. Social media is just like high school; it is all about popularity. Each site wants to be the most popular. Adults need to teach the children to use the web sites appropriately. Most kids do not even know what they are looking for. Many do not go looking for inappropriate content. If your child comes across something, do not panic. This may shut

down your child and make them feel ashamed. Take this as a learning opportunity to have a conversation with your child about what to do if this happens again. Additionally, be cautious as to what they post on the internet. Many universities and businesses use social media to screen applicants for schools and jobs. Make sure that there are expectations and rules for social media usage. Discuss that personal information should not be shared.

An example given during the presentation shared the story of a young man who was excited about receiving his first credit card. He posted a full picture of the card which contained the account number, making his account available to the entire world. Lesson learned: Stop and think before you post.

Sexting

Sexting is a major issue with school age kids ages 12-14. This issue is defined as sending a text message with some sexual image in the text. Often it is used as a way to impress a crush. The consequences are anything but impressive. Messages may be used to humiliate, bully, blackmail the sender and can lead to school discipline and police involvement. The effects can go beyond the sender and receiver; there is an 88% chance a post will appear on an adult porn site. People pay big money for child pornography. The resounding message to youth is do not send them and if you get them, delete them immediately. Do not keep them on your phone. If you are found with a sext message, you can be charged with possession of child pornography. If you forward it, it is considered distribution of pornography. The consequences may be that a person will need to register as a felon.

Another recent phenomenon is “revenge porn” which involves the distribution of sexual images when a couple breaks up. When addressing these issues, talk about consequences of this behavior, discuss healthy relationships, talk about how images are easily seen online, and remind youth to never forward inappropriate images/texts and to always report it.

Youth’s Access to Adults

Kids are finding relationships online where adults may offer alcohol or money for something in return. This has become to be known as “grooming.” Clues that grooming may be happening is if youth are receiving expensive gifts, calling unknown numbers, rejecting family and friends, getting upset when not online or minimizing the screen when near adults. The person stalking them may make them afraid of their responses. This happens to both boys and girls so it is important talk to kids and create good healthy relationships with them. If something does not look or feel right, report it.

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology. It usually occurs using social media. Cyberbullying spreads faster and is often more dangerous in that in a few seconds a person’s life can be ruined. An example is the YouTube video: *Amanda Todd* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ej7afkypUsc>. The situation started when teenager Amanda Todd had an inappropriate picture taken of her that was shared on social media. The situation forced her to change schools but the picture continued to follow her. She attempted suicide twice. She then created the YouTube video and shortly afterward, took her own life.

Beware if the child or young adult stops using the computer or cellphone, acts nervous when reading an e-mail, seems uneasy about going to school, or withdraws from friends and family. How to help? Save the evidence. How to prevent it? Set rules, set expectations and set consequences. Know who you are talking to.

The evening ended with a discussion about a case that involved over 175 victims from the Twin Cities. Boys thought they were talking to a new girl in the neighborhood. The predator would approach the boys via social media and ask about their friends. He would send pictures of other women found on the web and ask the boys to send him pictures back. Possible technical options to help protect your child/young adult include: installation of monitoring or filtering software, exploring built in security features of your device, downloading security apps, consulting with your cell provider and researching options for alternative mobile devices.



Summary

The purpose for the event was to educate parents about truancy, chemical abuse and how the two are often interrelated to each other as well as to provide information of the dangers of social media. Over 100 individuals participated in the event. Interested parties approached the presenters after the session inquiring about individual matters and questions.

Individual feedback forms indicated that the social media information was the most helpful. If the session would be replicated, the suggestion was to dedicate more time to social media.

Additionally, it was recommended to have handouts available in other languages, specifically in the language of the people in most attendance; in this case, the Somali language.

Resource materials that were made available to participants:

- The Truth About Drugs
- Drugs: Shatter the Myths
- Additive Substances Effects and Withdrawal Symptoms
- Eight Warning Signs Your Child Could be Addicted
- Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens
- Heads up: Stop, Think, Connect
- Net Cetera: Chatting with Kids about Being Online
- The FBI's Child ID App: Putting Safety in Your Hands
- FBI-SOS Como tomar medidas para prevenir delitos contra menores
- NetSmartz Workshop: Educate. Engage. Empower
- NetSmartz Tech Tips
- Living Life Online
- Sextortion Affecting Thousands of US Children

If questions or for more information, please contact:
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