



# **BROOKFIELD CARES**

Promoting social and emotional wellness in our community.

brookfield-cares.org

## **Brookfield Cares Annual Report: 2014**

### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to inform the public about Brookfield Cares and its efforts to address at-risk behaviors of our youth in order to limit the need to experiment with Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco. The coalition has made many changes over the years and this is an effort to explain the coalition as we know it today. The coalition began many years ago as the Brookfield Substance Abuse Coalition that was primarily run by an employee of the schools. Its efforts were focused on drug use in the schools and making parents aware of the issues. As this coalition progressed it was decided to take it out of the school and expand its efforts as the issue of substance abuse impacts the entire community. The coalition began to meet at Town Hall and the Chief of Police became the Chairman. The coalition began to interface more directly with the Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse (HVCASA), the umbrella funding arm for 22 separate Local Prevention Councils.

HVCASA sponsored many training sessions for the coalition and representation on Brookfield Cares was expanded to include variety of community based organizations, and constituent groups. The coalition began to adhere to some principles developed by the Search Institute, a group that has prepared surveys on attitudes and behaviors for thousands of students across the country. The coalition began to interface closely with the schools to administer the surveys to the 8<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The survey has been administered 3 times since 2009 and the results are explained later in this document.

As the coalition progressed it was determined that our primary concerns were the health and welfare of the community as a whole. To accomplish this, the coalition became Brookfield Cares. Simultaneously a separate group established themselves to address suicide prevention issues. Several members of that group — The Brookfield Coalition for Suicide Prevention (Brookfield ACTS) — were also members of Brookfield Cares. Ultimately Brookfield Acts rolled into Brookfield Cares as both groups had similar goals of educating the public about health and at-risk issues. As the group expanded it was decided to apply for 501 C 3 status. The First Selectman insured that the group was officially sanctioned as a town entity and authorized the Town Attorney to pursue Charity Exemption status. As of this time all pertinent documents have been sent to the IRS for approval.

### **Mission and Purpose:**

Our mission is clear:

*Brookfield Cares is a community based organization dedicated to promoting awareness and education by focusing on the impact of substance abuse, depression, suicide, and other public health concerns.*

We continue to work to reach the entire community on issues that have an impact on our daily lives including addiction, drug and alcohol use, and suicide prevention. In this regard we make an attempt to work with all elements of the community through their representation on the coalition. We have structured a variety of programs to capture individual group attention. The more the community can be informed the more healthy our community will be.

## **Events/Programs**

Brookfield Cares continues to provide dynamic speakers to the public on topics that are important to our communities well-being. One such speaker was Chris Herren, a well-known sports figure who ended up addict to drugs . His presentation before a crowd of 800 was impactful, with several folks came forward asking for rehabilitation assistance.

We have had other speakers work with schools not only to make presentations to the students but to the parents as well. We have established a red ribbon week where the High School and Middle School pledge to be drug free. Students and teachers alike actively participate in this during the week.

Another event that we participate in and sponsor is the annual Parent University, hosted in Newtown, CT. This event fills up a Saturday with speakers on a variety of topics that are germane to parents. While parents are in class, students from Brookfield High School assist in watching over the children that have accompanied their parents. Lunch is served to all that attend by volunteers.

## **Search Institute Surveys**

Since 2009, we have administered 3 surveys to students in grades 8–12. The surveys are designed to provide quantifiable input that help us:

- Focus on strengths, supports, and skills that young people need to succeed and overcome challenges.
- Measure intangible qualities that really matter for youth development and education.
- Provide easy-to-understand, actionable information results that can help engage others in your work and increase your impact in the lives of young people.

- Bring young people's own perspectives and experiences to your planning.

One of the most striking findings is the early age that drug and alcohol use begins in some of our youth. Survey results show that our children are beginning experiment with these substances as early as age 11. As students get older, the percentage exhibiting at-risk behaviors increases:

- 53% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report using alcohol within the last 30 days.
- 32% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report getting drunk within the last 2 weeks.
- 31% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report using marijuana in the last 30 days (an increase from 23% in 2011).
- 21% of all students responding said they rode in a car where the driver had been drinking in the last 12 months.
- 5% have sniffed or inhaled substances to get high in the last 30 days.

The surveys also reveal information about mental health related behaviors:

- 14% have engaged in eating disordered behavior
- 21% report being frequently depressed and/or has attempted suicide

There is a wealth of data that the surveys provide, including what our youth feels positive about as well as what they think is negative. Brookfield Cares continues to work to determine what we can do as a community to increase the positive assets of our children, while minimizing the negative.