

#KnowPublicHealth



Bringing the Substance Abuse Problem to Light through an Interactive Exhibit

Issue: After substance abuse was identified through the Clayton County Community Health Needs Assessment, a group of community partners discussed the problem and implemented a unique approach to educate its citizens about the issue. Clayton County VNA, the local public health agency, coordinated the project to create an interactive, traveling exhibit of a mock bedroom with drug abuse items. Collaborators included the Clayton County Sheriff's Office, Family's Helping Hands, 5C Coalition, Substance Abuse Services of Clayton County, and other community volunteers.

Taking Action: Law enforcement compiled a list of items that could be an indicator of drug use. Time and monetary donations allowed the group to purchase these items and construct an enclosed



space made from PVC pipe and fabric. The mock bedroom contained a bed, bookcase, night stand, dresser, clothes stand, hamper, desk and lounge chair. Standard items (e.g., books, clothes, shoes, rugs, bedding, writing utensils, laptop and mouse, video games, school binders, hygiene items) were donated by community members. Once all these items were in place, indicators of drug abuse were placed around the room.

A town hall meeting was held to give community members an opportunity to walk through the exhibit, interact with the items, and engage with knowledgeable professionals for any questions. Following

this successful event, the partners decided the exhibit should be shared with other counties across the region. This prompted the purchase of an enclosed trailer (with donated funds) to store the exhibit materials. The partnership has increased awareness of the initiative with community sponsors and

promoted the exhibit at school functions, city gatherings, or special organizational meetings. With mobility of the exhibit, the program can be available regionally to area partners to increase awareness and provide community education about drug use. The community partners have used the exhibit at several schools and health fairs in Clayton County as well as other counties as far west as Emmet County with great response from the public.

Impact: The exhibit has been well received and a valuable community education resource. Adults and parents who have toured the mock bedroom report the exhibit has really opened their eyes about drug abuse, especially among youth. This gives parents knowledge and confidence that empowers them to talk to their children about drug abuse. The exhibit also has increased community understanding of the true dimensions of the problem. By leading this collaborative effort, public health carries on the Iowa tradition of caring for people and communities.

