



Coalitions play major role in a community

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In every community, there are wide-ranging issues like texting and driving, bullying and teen pregnancy need to be addressed regularly.

Often receiving little fanfare, groups of citizens in Northwest Oklahoma serve on local coalitions to try and deal with those issues and make a difference in the community.

"They're made up of everyone from interested community members, business owners, professionals, schools and healthcare facilities," said Tandy Keenan, who is the prevention director at the Northwest Center for Behavioral Health. "They come together to address issues within the community."

With such a broad number of issues that need to be addressed, Keenan and Woodward Area Coalition volunteers have outlined some priority problems that need to be tackled.

"Right now, some of our priority issues are the non-medical use of prescription medications, underage drinking and dealing with hunger," she said. "Bullying is also a big issue."

To help determine whether an issue is a priority in the community, the coalition often conducts surveys and gathers statistics before trying to find solutions to the problems.

"It kind of depends on the resources in the community," Keenan said. "Sometimes it's parent and teachers pulling together, sometimes there's funding available to target an issue specifically."

Other area coalitions in Northwest Oklahoma and the Panhandle include Woods County Coalition, Harper County Turning Point Coalition, Beaver Partners in Progress (Beaver County), Texas County Coalition and Cimarron County Coalition.

Even if you can't obligate a lot of your time on a coalition, Keenan said any little bit helps.

"There's not any attendance obligations, but it helps keep people in the loop," she said. "The more resources you have at the table when you're discussing an issue, the better off everyone is."

Most coalitions meet routinely at 12 p.m. every month, according to Keenan. For example, one may meet on the third Wednesday of every month, while another may meet on the last Monday of the month.

Attendance at the Woodward Area Coalition varies, but there's usually a group of anywhere from 10 to upwards of 30 people that actively participate.

"I think some of the biggest benefits is learning from each other and knowing what's out there," said Keenan about getting involved. "You might be aware of an issue or are seeing something in your kid's school and coming to the coalition and addressing that you find out that's something we're working on or have talked about."

For more information about local coalitions and meeting times, you can contact the Northwest Center for Behavioral Health's Regional Prevention Coordinator at 580-571-3240.