

Posted May 17, 2016 | By Mary O. Esparza—mesparza@civitasmedia.com

## Organizers seek a healthy community

National Prevention Week 2016 kicked off Monday as a national health observance to teach more people about substance abuse and promote mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

The Wichita Mountains Prevention Network or WMPN aspires to create an atmosphere that fosters esteemed and valued youth, inspire a positive view of the future for youth and families, provide quality and comprehensive health education for all youth and families, and build inclusive community partnerships to build assets.

To encourage healthy living and decision-making, the WPMN is working with the Jackson County Community Health Action Team or JCCHAT and the Jackson County Substance Awareness Committee or JCSAC, to educate the public, provide local resources and reduce substance abuse in Jackson County.

Prevention of underage drinking and alcohol misuse is one of the week's themes.

In 2014, Jackson County had 61 driving under the influence arrests, 58 drunkenness arrests and 10 liquor law arrests, according to a crime report. In the report, nationally 4,700 people under the age of 21 died from homicides, suicides, car crashes and drowning related to drinking alcohol.

It is a problem shared by all communities, but is also preventable.

The JCCHAT and JCSAC seek improvement in Jackson County by implementing what they call evidence-based strategies.

Other groups helping to prevent the negative effects of alcohol abuse include the Wichita Mountains Prevention Network-Regional Prevention Coordinators or WMPN-RPC, the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services or ODMHSAS and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA.

Alcohol compliance checks are a tool to identify alcohol establishments that sell alcohol to underage youth. WMPN works with the police to take undercover youth out and attempt to make an alcohol purchase. These youth use their real underage ID and do not trick any server into selling.

The majority of underage drinkers reported their use of alcohol occurred either in someone else's home or their own home. Teaching others about the social host law is another strategy of the subcommittee.

The social host ordinance states that "no person shall knowingly and willfully permit any individual under twenty-one (21) years of age who is an invitee to the person's residence, any building, structure, or room owned, occupied, leased or otherwise procured by the person or on any land owned, to possess or consume any alcoholic beverage or any controlled dangerous substance in such place."

Another strategy is to train establishments that serve alcohol to help clerks and servers know the correct way to properly ID individuals purchasing alcohol. The goal is to reduce opportunities for minors to purchase alcohol and to limit over service to adults.

The identified strategies are only a few of the plans discussed by the coalition. The choices people make and their daily conversations are key to preventing substance abuse and promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being, to create positive change.