

DRUG FREE COMMUNITY FUNDS SOUGHT BY BENNINGTON COALLITIONS

On April 27, ACT (Alliance for Community Transformation) invited Bennington community members to tour the refurbished Armory belonging to HAYC3, a non-profit organization located in Hoosick Falls NY. HAYC3 is not just the armory. It identifies itself as a community-building non-profit. The objective of the tour was to introduce Bennington to the concept of a group focused on assisting many community factions realize their goals. Aelish Nealon, HAYC3 Director, emphasized the importance of saying yes to the community. “Yes” may be recruiting volunteers, assisting with press releases or developing pamphlets.

Approximately fifteen Bennington folks attended the tour of the HAYC3 Armory. Included were representatives of the Mt. Anthony Middle School, Mt. Anthony Union High School, Southern Vermont Career Development Center, Vt. Health Department, VT State legislators Bill Botzow, Kiah Morris and Rachel Fields, and Bennington’s Economic Development director, Mike Harrington.

Rachel Field commented on the event by saying, “What a beautifully transformed space! I was not only impressed by the physical space, but was especially impressed at the emphasized role of community buy-in/involvement. We as community members will take pride in the community that we ourselves build. This not only invites the young professionals into the community, it gives those young professionals who grew up here an anchor to stay”.

Kathy O’Reilly of the VT Health Department is leading the groundwork for after school programs at the elementary level. During the discussion portion of the tour, she became aware of work being done by Mount Anthony Middle School’s principal Tim Payne and sixth grade teacher, Chris Maguire to procure a grant for five years of after school programs at the middle school level.

Bill Botzow, chairman of the Economic Development Committee of the legislature, stated, “I need to look at Economic Development in the light of Community Development”.

Three SVDCDC students, Mariah Spencer, Maddie Carpenter and Andrew Hall accompanied Wendy Klein their Co-op/Employability Skills teacher. Mariah is currently a co-op member of ACT. She is working on expanding ACT’s social media presence for Bennington teens as well as investigating a teen “hub”. The three teens brought enthusiasm to table regarding teen involvement in the Bennington community. Andrew Hall said, “We want to be in the community” As a sophomore, Maddie Carpenter brings sustainability to teen involvement with ACT. ACT will be working with students to further their goal of a teen “hub”.

ACT (Alliance for Community Transformations) filed an application for the Drug Free Community Grant processed by the Office of National Drug Control Policy on March 18, 2015. The Southshire Substance Abuse Coalition is but one alliance working with ACT . Southshire’s mission to “ work with school-age youth, parents, and community members to identify problems and take steps to reduce drug abuse in the Bennington community” works perfectly with ACT’s Drug Free Community Grant’s focus on community coalitions. If the Grant is awarded to ACT, it will bring \$125,000. each year to Bennington for a possible 10 years. Both groups are composed of 12 sectors of our community. Those sectors include the following: local government, school, business, media, faith, youth, parent, law enforcement, youth-serving, state government, civic/volunteer, and healthcare.

The Alliance for Community Transformations (ACT) has been in the community for 16 years. The Bennington County Regional Commission's Healthy Community Design Program now sponsors ACT's role in seeking the Drug Free Community grant. Kiah Morris is ACT director. HAYC3 director, Aelish Nealon, has guided ACT through a Mentoring Grant awarded to HAYC3 from the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The focus of the grant is to assist community efforts to provide drug free activities for Bennington's young people.

Just as HAYC3 started with very little funding, ACT is moving forward to forge new alliances between youth supporting groups, agencies and organizations while waiting to receive word in late August on the DFC grant recipients. Everyone associated with the drug free youth centered goals is very excited about the potential community participation. The end result is that ACT will continue to serve Bennington community alliances whether or not the Drug Free Community Grant is received. The alliances will further ACT's commitment to Bennington youth.

ACT will announce a meeting date for a coalition meeting. In line with the goal of transparency, anyone interested in participating will be welcome to attend. For information regarding ACT, please contact, Kiah Morris, Director of Alliance for Community Transformation c/o Bennington Regional Commission 111 South St. Suite 203 Bennington VT phone [802-442-0713](tel:802-442-0713) Ext 9 or email kmorris@bcrcvt.org