



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
Supported By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



March 3, 2010 – Healthy Relationships

Thomas King Kistler is a Centre County Judge. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

I have been presiding in Centre County's Juvenile Court for the past 10 years. Children in our Court come from all five of Centre County's high schools and come from many different backgrounds. Each child, and each case, carries its own unique set of circumstances and challenges facing the child and the community as a whole.

In the Spring of 2009, it suddenly struck me that a large number of young girls appearing before me were pregnant, and that their pending pregnancy interfered with our ability to properly treat the drug and alcohol and other problems that these young girls had as no placement facilities would accept expectant mothers.

After discussing the particular cases and the general trends with the Centre County Probation Officers, who spend time in each of the five high schools, I became alarmed at not only the teen pregnancy issues that exist, but the general teen "promiscuity" trends that are developing. I immediately sent a letter to the administrators of all five county schools, to treatment professionals, to police departments, and to many other interested individuals so that we could come together as a group to discuss the developing crisis in Centre County regarding teen promiscuity and sexuality.

Out of that initial effort has grown the Centre Alliance for Healthy Relationships (CAHR), which has been working in earnest since the summer of 2009 to try to put into place strategies and programs to combat this rising challenge for the young people of Centre County.

The CAHR group has brought together concerned and active members of the legal community, the social services community, the faith-based community, and the educational community in an effort to develop specific strategies which will assist in reaching our goal of promoting healthy relationships between children and preventing behavior which leads to overt promiscuity and unplanned pregnancies. The CAHR group has determined that a multi-front approach will allow for our message to be carried to involved children, and those who affect the decisions of involved children in hopes that we can affect and change that behavior before there are tragic and irreversible consequences.

Many teenagers today feel peer pressure regarding the style of their dress, the choice of their music, the acceptable level of sexual or intimate contact, and other matters that are beyond the understanding of those of us from an earlier generation. Any coordinated effort to confront the challenges faced by these children of tender years, must not only involve a message directly to the children, but also a message to parents, relatives, grandparents and others interested in the welfare of these at-risk children.

I have been thrilled by the devotion and enthusiasm of school administrators, social workers, the church community, and those around me in the court system to find real and concrete answers to these changing moral values that we all see around us.

CAHR will continue to strive toward a message which can be taken to all of the citizens of Centre County in an effort to isolate our children from detrimental and destructive messages and to re-instill in them a solid foundation of healthy morals and values so that they can concentrate and focus on the joy of their adolescence.

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