

PRESS RELEASE
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State Grants Target Risky Youth Behavior

State College — Initiatives to bring local communities closer together and discourage young people from choosing risky behavior are slated to receive additional financial support from the state.

Centre County Communities That Care, which serves the county's rural areas, is scheduled to receive a grant of \$975,000 over four years to support programs for parents and children.

And Centre Region Communities That Care, which serves State College and the surrounding municipalities, will receive a \$77,000 grant over four years to fund a substance-abuse prevention program and a health program for middle school students.

Surveys of school children and other collected data were used to identify which problems the communities are dealing with and which programs would help the most.

Communities That Care is a model developed by two professors at the University of Washington to help communities prevent problems such as drug abuse, violence, and teen pregnancy, said Brian Bumbarger, a research assistant at Penn State's Prevention Research Center.

"We're talking about reducing the risk among a generation of kids, so when they are a generation older, they won't exhibit the same poor outcomes the current generation has," Bumbarger said.

The state grants, which will start in this fiscal year and run for four years, are coming from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. In 2001-02, the Commission awarded \$10 million in grants to research-based prevention programs, spokeswoman Alison Delfite said.

Pennsylvania has 128 Communities That Care programs in 58 counties. The state is considered the leader in the nationally recognized program, Delfite said.

The Communities That Care model has identified 19 factors in four groups that affect behavior—risk factors in the community, the school, the family, and the child,



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Bumbarger said.

In Centre County, which is home to programs in the Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, and Penns Valley area school districts, the risk factors identified as needing attention are family management, favorable parental attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior, academic failure, low school commitment, and individual or constitutional factors.

The state grant to the county Communities That Care program will support Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, a curriculum that helps children deal with their emotions. PATHS is already in some area elementary schools, and the goal is to have it in all elementary schools in the three districts, Bumbarger said.

The grant will also support Parents Who Care, which offers parents videotaped lessons about working with their children from "how to get your children to do homework," to "how to monitor a teenager's whereabouts without creating rebelliousness," Bumbarger said.

"Some of the risk factors that appeared to be the most prevalent are parents not supervising or monitoring their children's behavior," Bumbarger said.

The Centre Region grant will pay for substance-abuse prevention through the LifeSkills Training Program for middle school students in the State College area. For sixth graders, the grant will also support Growing Healthy, which addresses children's emotional and social development, said Claudia Hutchinson, community mobilizer for the region's Communities that Care.

The risk factors identified in the Centre Region were: transition and mobility, low neighborhood attachment, family management, constitutional factors, and lack of commitment to schools.