

Prescription for a Beautiful Relationship: Northern Area Alliance and Eyetique Help to Create a Drug-Free Vision of the Future



This month two highly-visible Wexford organizations are partnering to raise awareness about the very serious, yet sometimes under-publicized effects that drug addiction has on communities. The Northern Area Alliance Against Highly Addictive Drugs and Eyetique are determined to reach out to local families who are affected by illicit drug use and also to help prevent drug abuse from occurring in the first place.

The guiding force behind these ongoing efforts is the non-profit organization best known as the Northern Area Alliance. In an unfortunate call to action, the Alliance was formed nearly three years ago in response to the tragic cocaine-related death of a local high

school student.

Alliance Executive Director Debra Kehoe says, "It served as a wake-up call that highly addictive drugs were becoming a serious threat throughout our region." As a result, superintendents representing twelve southwestern Pennsylvania school districts signed a resolution to combine their efforts and address this growing problem.

Today, the Alliance serves the parents and students of Avonworth, Deer Lakes, Fox Chapel, Hampton, North Allegheny, Northgate, North Hills, Pine-Richland, Quaker Valley, Shaler, Mars Area and Seneca Valley.

The Northern Area Alliance has three primary objectives: The first is to raise awareness.

Debra hopes to accomplish

this by forming and establishing solid partnerships across the community and then working together toward a common goal.

Katie Bulger, manager of the Wexford Eyetique, helped to initiate this partnership with the Alliance. "I agree that there needs to be awareness," says Katie, acknowledging, "the sad thing is that people are not always aware of what is around them."

"In the past, so many of us have attempted to do something about the problem independently, but it just hasn't worked," notes Debra. "We really need to unify an entire community."

She feels that this unity has already been accomplished in a number of ways. One example is the Alliance's student leadership program: Representatives from the schools



meet on a monthly basis, serve as role-models for their peers and participate in various Alliance presentations.

Another example is the Alliance's partnerships with local businesses. "We need to make the business community aware that this is a problem, because it also affects them. This is why I am very grateful to have the opportunity to work with Eyetique," says Debra. "It is going to send a message that partnering together can definitely increase awareness about the [drug] problem in our communities."

Norman Childs, Eyetique president, follows a similar philosophy when explaining his company's interest in outreach and partnering. "We really like to go into the

communities where we open stores and work with different organizations there. We feel that it's important to help them in any way we can."

The second objective of the Alliance is to provide education. "I strongly believe that we need to tell parents what they need to know well before they ever need to know it," says Debra, noting that early detection and prevention are the keys to conquering the drug problem. "We're finding that kids are experimenting when they're nine!"

As a parent of a young child, Katie is already concerned. "I don't want [drugs] in the community. I have a two-year old who will be in

school someday."

Since the obvious solution is to inform parents early, the Alliance has established partnerships with local parent-teacher groups. Says Debra, "Last year, we spearheaded a program for parents of fifth-grade students in Pine-Richland, and we will be rolling to other school districts in the north this coming year." In addition, the



Alliance hopes to someday (provided they can obtain the proper funding and support) offer online education programs.

The last objective of the Alliance is to offer support. A prime example of this objective is the Alliance's relationship with UPMC Passavant and the Parental Stress Center. They have a family support group called the "Bridge to Hope" that meets with a trained addiction specialist and facilitator every Wednesday, from 7-8:30 p.m. In the future, the Alliance plans to offer a toll-free help-line and a community resource and support-programs directory.

"It's remarkable how far we have

come," says Debra, noting that the Alliance depends upon financial contributions from our community. "But it is very important that we continue to make the community aware that we are here for them, and we also need them to support us."

Explaining his company's dedication to community support, Norman says, "Eyetique doesn't just want to take, we want to give back to the community as well." In an effort to help local charities, Eyetique sponsors a fundraising event four or five times a year.

On Saturday, September 24, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., the Wexford Eyetique will host an exclusive eyewear "trunk show," in which a representative from Theo designs will showcase every frame in their collection. It's a fun opportunity to see every piece, have some refreshments and treat yourself to a super-stylish set of specs for a great cause – a portion of the day's sales will be donated to the Northern Area Alliance. For more information about this fundraising event, call 724-940-5300 or visit www.eyetique.com.

Always in need of volunteers, the Northern Area Alliance holds public meetings in the Ross Township Community Center on the fourth Thursday of every month. For more information, call 724-612-5554 or visit: www.drug-alliance.org. Donations can be sent to: Northern Area Alliance, P.O. Box 1131, Wexford, PA 15090. ❖