

Red Ribbon Week Kick Off Address
October 23, 2014

One year ago I stood at this event with the burden of a heavy heart. Our focus was still on trying to understand the scope of pain and suffering wrapped around the inhuman totality of our substance abuse problem. The numbers are staggering – 93 confirmed dead, and counting. Overdose transports and emergency room traffic that boggles the mind. It was and still is to some extent, difficult to define and control all of the influences that contribute to this predicament we find ourselves in. Most people believe drug abuse will be woven into the fabric of our culture forever – and they are probably right.

Does this mean we abandon ship in the heat of the storm?

We are the trustees of a generation of kids that face challenges and hardships we never had and the emotional weight they carry around is incomprehensible. More information, more technology, more health concerns-EBOLA (Just the latest, and scarier than ever), more obesity, more billionaires, more bullying, more, more, more...and sadly, more drugs. But, Is there more Help? Understanding? Money? Opportunity? Support? Is it any wonder the kids are developing their own coping skills? Losing themselves in cyber space and turning to drugs that are more powerful than ever? Is it really that hard to comprehend their lack of fear and adulation with death?

In the face of these harsh realities, significant change has happened in Wallingford this past year. The Coalition for a Better Wallingford has partnered with agencies and organizations throughout town to help identify and fill the needs of this new generation we have responsibility for. Parents are talking. Teachers are talking. Town agencies are talking. Business owners are talking. The clerics are talking. This is the first step.

Some have even committed to upgrade their education with a better understanding of today's kids by committing to the Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification Course being offered next month. This includes Guidance departments throughout the school system. Organizations like Little League and The Academy of Dance and Music are revisiting their mission and now support the kids in making healthy choices. The Coalition, with significant help from Youth and Social Services and Wayne Barneschi of the Trail of Terror now offer a monthly Bereavement Group, a weekly Hope and Support Group and a weekly Teen Activity group called the Count Me In Club. All health classes now have a drug education curriculum embedded at every level K-12.

Is this going to solve our problem? No, it's just a start. This may be the single biggest challenge we have ever faced. Not until every citizen of Wallingford owns their piece of this will we begin to get ahead of this. When our kids and young adults are getting high on life and striving because of the challenges they face head-on. Wallingford is a shining star, with dedicated and hardworking people. The Coalition IS the people of Wallingford and to those that walk away from a tough problem, I can only say that you must not have grown up here. Watch us work. Change is on the horizon.

To stay in touch with our activities, please visit our website @ cbwlfld.org. Thank you.