



# Reaching Out

## Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Fall 2009



### Spotlight on Teen Drinking

#### What is SPF SIG?

Norristown received a Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG) to assist our youth in staying safe and alcohol free.

In order to achieve this goal, CTC has joined with the community, the police department and other organizations to tackle the problem of underage drinking in the Municipality, as well as East and West Norriton.

Initial efforts included trainings offered to the owners and staff of establishments holding liquor licenses. Attendees were provided with information on how to prevent youth under 21 from purchasing alcohol.

The following establishments have already taken advantage of this offering: **Uptown Roos' House Tavern, Collette's Tavern, and American Legion Post 39.** Additional trainings will follow.

## Truancy: Whose Problem Is It?

By Willie Ellison, MSW, LSW, Parent Education Facilitator

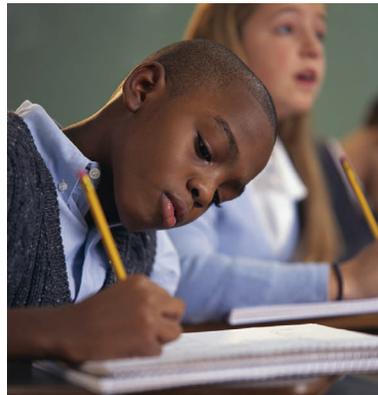
During the sixties and seventies, bloody battles were fought to secure the right of a quality education for all Americans. Despite the landmark decision brought to us by *Brown vs. The Board of Education* (1954), that had not yet become a reality in our country. Due to the heroic efforts of many, all individuals regardless of creed, color or religion now have access to decent schools.

Nevertheless, we are experiencing a crisis even greater than the one faced by Civil Rights warriors. It is the **"cancer of truancy."**

While education provides an opportunity to level the playing field, with alarming frequency, this has become an opportunity lost. The harsh reality is that "in the global, high-tech-driven economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, young people without college degrees, professional certificates, licenses, specialized training or language skills will find precious few jobs that pay decently" (Bill Maxwell, *The Times Herald*, March 31, 2009).

Who is responsible for devaluing education? More importantly, who's going to fix it? All

signs point to the importance of parents and schools working together to empower our youth to take full advantage of their educational opportunities.



Research tells us that children who are experiencing school failure in late elementary school often enter a downward spiral that impacts middle and high school. For this reason, teachers and parents are using their knowledge of learning

styles to deliver information in ways that allow it to be received by all children.

We are also recognizing that while the three R's of education, **Reading, Writing, Arithmetic**, are crucial to success and contribute significantly toward IQ, emotional intelligence (EQ) also plays a role in our children's lives. Children with high EQ's have character traits such as perseverance, self-confidence, self-discipline, punctuality, the ability to communicate, social responsibility, conflict resolution and more. It influences not only educational attainment, but employment status, wages, smoking, truancy, teen pregnancy, involvement in crime and the quality of health as well.

(*Truancy continued on page 4*)

# Excuses! Excuses! Excuses!

By Oglatha S. P. Ingram, MSW, Parent Outreach Specialist

We have all heard it before: “I don’t feel like going to school today.” “School is so boring.” “My teachers don’t like me anyway, why bother?” While children throughout the centuries have tried to “play hooky” from school for a day or two without any damaging effects, and all of us have hoped for that elusive snow day during the winter, chronic absenteeism can be detrimental.

“Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure” (National Center for School Engagement). So how do we get past the excuses and help children want to go to school? Most authorities will say that the answer lies within the work of parents: parent involvement at home and school.

There is research that supports the notion that students whose parents are actively engaged in their school experience do well academically, socially and vocationally. Those kinds of student achievements move across racial and socioeconomic lines. As you read other articles in this issue of *Reaching Out*, you will learn ways to become an involved parent so that you can increase your child’s desire to attend school and perform well.

But what if your child has to be absent from school because of illness or any other appropriate reason? Are you aware of how to excuse your child’s absence? **Call the attendance clerk at your child’s school.**

Explain the reason for the absence and then **send an explanatory note to the school upon your child’s return.**

Also know that your child’s school follows a Truancy Process to manage **unexcused** absences:

- ◆ **After the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> unexcused absences occur, notices are sent home alerting parent/guardian of the absences and informing parent and child of consequences if more absences occur.**
- ◆ **After the third unexcused absence occurs, the parent is notified by letter and asked to participate in a Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP) meeting with the offending child and a representative from the child’s school.**
- ◆ **If a fourth absence occurs, a citation will be issued to the parent and/or child. The parent is then required to attend a court hearing. At the hearing, the parent may be found guilty and issued a fine of up to \$300. However, if the parent is found to have taken every reasonable step to ensure the attendance of the child, the fine will be placed under the child’s name.**

Parents, let’s not let truancy happen here in Norristown!



Commemorating the 100 year efforts of The NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), President Barack Obama recently spoke to an audience of thousands about personal responsibility and the importance of achieving an education despite barriers or challenges that may be in the way. He spoke about the huge role parents must play in encouraging their children to excel:

*“Let’s put our kids to bed at a reasonable hour, attend parent teacher conferences, read to our children, help them with their homework... We have to say to our children, yes, if you live in a poor neighborhood, you will face challenges that someone in a wealthy suburb does not. But that is not a reason to get bad grades, that’s not a reason to cut class, that’s not a reason to give up on your education and drop out of school. No one has written your destiny for you. Your destiny is in your hands and don’t forget that. That’s what we have to teach all of our children. No excuses! No excuses!” (President Barack Obama, July 2009)*

# How Do You Help Your Children Succeed in School?

By Alissa McBride, MSW, Community Prevention Coordinator

## R

**Reinvest in your child's education.** Are you busy, being pushed and pulled in many different directions? Have you, at one point or another, been disappointed in the educational system? Find a way to rise above those challenges as study after study proves that parental involvement is the single greatest determinant of a child's success in school.

## E

**Encourage your child to enjoy learning and find their academic strengths.** Inspire them to become life-long learners. Fan the flames of their curiosity by exposing them to books, zoos, museums and other resources in areas that interest them. Let them know that it is okay to try and fail. Put their quality papers up on the refrigerator. Show your pride for their efforts.

## S

**Strengthen family bonds.** When children feel needed, necessary, loved and genuinely part of a family, they not only perform better in school but make better behavioral choices as well. Eat dinner together, have a family game night. Make the time, whether it's 15 minutes at the bus stop or 20 minutes folding laundry together, to truly listen and connect with your child.

## P

**Prepare for success.** Help your child be fully prepared for school each day. Ensure that they get eight hours of sleep, eat a nutritious breakfast and have access to a nutritious lunch. Set aside quiet time for homework completion. Check it for quality and accuracy. Assist your child in developing a routine, such as packing their backpack each night and placing it by the door for efficient morning retrieval. This will facilitate peaceful mornings and minimize the chance that they forget important items that they may need.

## E

**Engage in the school community.** Attend open houses, conferences and other school events. Get to know your child's teacher, counselor and perhaps even the school librarian. Communicate regularly with school personnel regarding any issues or concerns that arise. Get to know your child's friends and their parents. It takes everyone to create a positive learning environment for our children, one that involves working together rather than blaming one another.

## C

**Communicate the importance of learning.** Send the message that working hard in school is a family value designed to provide them with the best possible future. Show your child that even adults, such as yourself, continue to enjoy learning. Read together, discuss current events and other topics of interest to you. Provide examples of how education and learning enriches lives and open doors.

## T

**Take back our schools.** Remember that parents are the single greatest determinant of their child's success in school. We cannot be a passive part of this process. We must be actively involved in our children's lives, their school, and their educational community in order to enhance their opportunities for success.

**Who can find the time to keep up with their kids lives?**

**[www.FindYour25thHour.org](http://www.FindYour25thHour.org)**

Norristown Area  
**Communities  
That Care**



**for Youth**

KEEPING YOUTH  
SAFE  
&  
DRUG FREE

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**Communities That Care (CTC)** is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

For more information, visit our website at [www.NorristownCTC.org](http://www.NorristownCTC.org).

*(Truancy continued from page 1)*

In his book "Emotional Intelligence," Dr. Daniel Goleman indicates parents play the largest role in developing these traits in their children.

Fathers are specifically needed for the fight against the "cancer of truancy." While mothers are clearly important to their children's academic success, research tells us that when fathers are also involved children do better.

But what does it mean to be involved in your child's education?

**Commitment:** Attend home and school meetings, back to school nights and conferences, provide homework help, establish education as a family value, have discussions regarding higher education.

**Responsibility:** volunteer at your school, make time to assist with projects.

**Be present in your child's life:** Spend quality time talking about and supporting all educational efforts. Kyle Pruitt, author of "Fatherneed," describes the paternal role as "responsible for the socialization/life skills of children, he prepares the children to go forth in the world and achieve."

In a related study by psychologist Martin Hoffman, it was shown that boys with strong father identification scored higher on measures of internal control and conformity to rules. Providing our children with these skills will certainly go a long way in the fight against truancy.

It is important to note that positive father involvement is associated with the development of pro-social and positive moral

behavior in both boys and girls. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and avoid high risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and criminal activity than children with uninvolved fathers.

To improve the education and overall well being of America's children "we must restore responsible fatherhood as a societal norm in our communities" (Father Facts, National Fatherhood Initiative).

Let us join together to show our youth that education is not only a right, but a privilege.

