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■ OTTAWA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Drug use targeted

Program seeks to prevent youthful meth abuse

By SONIA AHUJA
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A collaborative effort to address the problem of methamphetamine and other substance abuse by adolescents and teens in Franklin County is getting a boost from a small grant.

A state grant in the amount of \$1,700 awarded to the Franklin

County Mental Health Clinic and the USD 290 Ottawa School District will go toward several projects designed to help raise community awareness of the problem of substance abuse by young people in the county.

The issue of meth use in Franklin County was thrust into the spotlight nearly three months

ago following the arrest of a 12-year-old Ottawa girl who apparently gave a fellow Ottawa Middle School student methamphetamine that made her ill.

The Ottawa School District will use \$1,000 of the grant to pay for Ottawa Middle School students'

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computer access to an educational program that teaches children 11 to 13 how to deal with situations involving drugs, Anita Poe-Wiley, OMS social worker, said.

The 15-session, self-directed computer course will enhance the school's health curriculum, the school social worker said.

The course is an interactive game which, Poe-Wiley said, for example has the students take a cab ride to another part of the city.

Actors then set up a situation that students must react to.

Poe-Wiley said the students will be able to monitor their progress to see whether their attitudes toward alcohol and substance abuse changed over the course of several sessions.

She said she thinks the interactive game is a good learning tool for middle school students.

"Children learn in a variety of ways, and this interactive program is another way to deliver information to students."

The remaining \$700 of the grant will be used by Franklin County Mental Health Clinic to help start a multi-agency coalition to begin dealing with youth substance abuse issues in a collaborative manner.

"We want to be able to utilize the services we have more effectively," Glenda Young said. Young is the coordinator of substance abuse services at the Franklin County Mental Health Clinic, 204 E. 15th St.

Before the arrest at the middle school, county mental

health officials and Community Corrections staff last fall began meeting to address issues relating to youth substance abuse.

A community awareness task force is necessary, Diane Drake, director of the county mental health clinic, said Tuesday.

"The first step in combating this problem is for the community to understand that youth substance abuse is a large problem," she said. "Families are often blind to the fact that there are adolescents and teens using

methamphetamines and other drugs."

Drake said that collaboration among different agencies will help deal with the issue because it will increase knowledge of the it. The goal of the task force, she said, is to promote an ongoing community wide response to effectively deal with problems that the production, distribution and use of meth and other drugs cause for area residents.

The project will lead to increased awareness of the impact of illicit drug use with

an emphasis on the growing problem of meth in the community, she said.

The task force also will be able to identify the immediate needs of the community for its adolescent population regarding drug abuse problems and further development of services and resources to help meet those needs, Young said.

Money from the grant will go toward having four or five community meetings and trainings with area educators, mental health professionals and law enforcement within the next year, Young said.

A one-or two-day training event for educators, law enforcement, mental health professionals and community corrections will be set up to increase the knowledge-base of those in the coalition. Young said she and several others in the community will share the knowledge they gained from after participating in the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project's Community Methamphetamine Prevention Training program.

"The training would be geared more toward educators since they are on the front line," Young said.

Another goal of the task force is to promote the development and implementation of a local chapter of the Kansas Retailer Meth Watch Program.

The program was designed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Bureau of Investigation and a team of Kansas retailers to curtail drug lab activity by limiting the accessibility of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine containing products, which are ingredients in making methamphetamine. The program also raises the general awareness of the methamphetamine lab problem in Kansas.

The Meth Watch program involves employee training, signs that put criminals on notice and lets good customers know the store is taking steps to reduce the production of meth, tips on strategic product placement to deter theft and working closely with local law enforcement, according to the KDHE's web site.

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