

SAFE presents training in Why Try program

Posted: Tuesday, August 5, 2014 9:11 pm



SYLACAUGA – Improving the lives of people in Talladega County is the goal of the SAFE Family Services Center, and a training session it presented last week aims to help in that effort here and throughout the state, said SAFE Executive Director Margaret Morton.

“This was an amazing opportunity that we had to bring that training to Talladega County,” Morton said of the Why Try program.

“The Why Try Program is a strength-based approach to helping youth overcome their challenges and improve outcomes in the areas of truancy, behavior, and academics,” according to the website of the National Dropout Prevention Center. “Youth are taught social and emotional principles through a series of 10 pictures that teaches a discrete principle. These visuals are then reinforced by music and physical activities.”

Representatives from Talladega County Schools, Sylacauga City Schools, the Sylacauga Police Department and agencies all over Alabama learned about the principles of the program, as well as how to apply them in dealing with students, but also in dealing with people of all age groups.

“Just from the response we received, everyone felt this course is a very effective way to reach people all across the age span,” Morton said. “There are a lot of relevant strategies to meeting the needs of students and adults.”

Though it was developed as a youth resiliency program, its principles can be used to train and support the capacity of people to make right decisions for themselves, tearing away the labels society places on people, frequently as a result of their own previous decisions, Morton said.

“People who were trained there went away with the knowledge that this is going to help,” she added. Started in 1996, the program is based in Orem, Utah, and has been proven to help young people in areas of learning disability or emotional disturbance, low achievement, retention, poor attendance or lack of effort in school, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center website.

“Students who completed the Why Try Program showed significant improvement in GPA, had fewer absences than the control group, and showed significant reduction in number of failed courses,” the website said, citing data collected from outside experimental studies, at the school and district level and at the state or organizational level.

Morton said the Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement plans to implement Why Try in its after-school programs including BRIDGES. Leaders Dorinda Waldrop, Gail Posey, Lecia Whiteside and Phyllis Wesley have been trained to facilitate the implementation.

“Why Try has been used in one-on-one counseling, in juvenile detention centers and in the incarcerated population,” Morton said. “We’re looking at other areas where we can take these tools we have and use our common message about how we deal with young people. We want to create more protection around that young person and give them the tools and the desire to make right decisions.”

She pointed out that the program fits hand-in-glove with other projects operated by SAFE, including one called Turning Point for which SAFE recently received a grant from the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention.

“Why Try has the capacity to interface with what we are doing across the board, from birth to death,” Morton said. “It’s such a relevant approach. This is about identifying all of the strengths in an individual and the strength in numbers. We all benefit if we learn the skills to work together and build trusting, healthy relationships.

“I’m excited to see how it takes off and the difference it makes. That’s where the rubber meets the road.”

She said the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is working to create an evaluation plan for the program.

She said the trainers who presented the program in Sylacauga included one of Why Try’s co-creators.

“They are very excited about opportunities here in Alabama,” she said.

The seminar was presented at the B.B. Comer Memorial Library, and Morton expressed thanks to Library Director Dr. Shirley Spears, systems librarian Nelda Vogel and the library staff, as well as the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce for providing gift bags for the participants.

“Everyone was totally impressed with the facility, and the library staff was so gracious,” Morton said. Spears returned the compliment.

“It was a powerful conference. They’re talking about finding solutions to help people’s lives by encouraging them to try. I think SAFE and the library are wonderful examples of how it pays to try. It took a lot of trying to establish them and sustain them.”