



Belmont Wellness Coalition Receives Five-Year Drug Free Communities Grant Renewal from ONDCP and CDC

Belmont, MA — September 21, 2023— The Belmont Wellness Coalition (BWC), a program of Wayside Youth & Family Support Network’s Multi-Service Center in Watertown, is excited to announce that it has been awarded a five-year extension of the Drug Free Communities grant from the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Belmont is one of the 160 communities nationwide to receive this prestigious grant in the current cycle.

The grant renewal recognizes the tireless efforts of the Belmont Wellness Coalition over the past five years in its commitment to reducing youth substance misuse through collaborative community efforts. Lisa Gibalerio, Program Coordinator/Public Health Educator at Wayside and a long-time Belmont resident, stated, “This funding is a recognition by the federal government that Belmont, through the establishment of the Belmont Wellness Coalition, has worked diligently over the past five years and is poised to continue the work of reducing youth substance misuse through collaborative community efforts.”

Over the past year, the Belmont Wellness Coalition has initiated various community-oriented programs. These include Narcan training for Belmont residents, a webinar on Understanding Teen Mental Health, a workshop at the Chenery Middle School addressing suicidal ideation, informative sessions for high school parents on the Massachusetts Social Host Liability Law, and guidance to prevent teen substance misuse.

The BWC works closely with the School Department in administering and analyzing Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data. This biennial survey covers Belmont Public school students in grades 7 through 12, addressing crucial topics such as youth mental health, substance misuse, stress, screen time, sleep, and bullying. Gibalerio emphasized, “This data is integral to all the work that we do in Belmont. It informs our programming for both families and youth.”

BWC’s outreach initiatives include hosting a monthly parenting group, the creation of twice-monthly prevention-centered educational videos, tip sheets and resources posted to social media and on the website, as well as offering workshops on a wide variety of prevention related topics. The BWC also oversees a peer group at Belmont High School called Student Mental Health Advocates.

Founded in 2017, the Belmont Wellness Coalition unites parents, youth, community leaders, clergy, local business representatives, school department officials, and town employees to work collaboratively toward the Coalition's mission: using education and empowerment to reduce substance misuse and promote healthy choices and positive decision-making.

The BWC holds virtual monthly meetings and welcomes new members interested in supporting their mission. For more information about the Drug Free Communities grant or the Belmont Wellness Coalition, please contact Lisa Gibalerio, MPH, Public Health Educator at lisa_gibalerio@waysideyouth.org.