

Safe Homes Pledge connects Island families

By Janet Hefler
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Over the next few weeks many Island households will receive information about a new program. Based on a Safe Homes Pledge, it is designed to provide middle school and high school students with a network of homes where they can socialize without exposure to underage drug or alcohol use.

The network will be created through the efforts of the Dukes County Health Council Youth Task Force (YTF), which plans to mail Martha's Vineyard Safe Homes pledge documents to about 1,100 Island households in connection with students in grades 7 to 12.

Safe Homes is a drug-prevention program that gives parents and guardians the opportunity to join together by signing a pledge to provide their children with safe environments where they can socialize, free of underage use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

"The notion of a safe homes pledge is a wonderful idea," Superintendent of Schools James Weiss said last week. "This would signify to people in the community, here's a place where I can send my child or my child can go, because these are middle-school and high-school kids, and I know they will be safe and there won't be drugs and alcohol. And that's a very important message."

Information about the Martha's Vineyard Safe Homes Pledge was included in a packet Island schools mailed to middle school students last week, according to YTF program coordinator Theresa Manning. Preparations are under way this week for a mailing to Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) students. Envelopes are provided for returning signed pledges to the YTF office.

The Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School will provide the Safe Homes pledge documents to parents and guardians during planning meetings before school starts.

In cases where a student's parents reside at different addresses, both will receive the information, Ms. Manning said.

The Martha's Vineyard Safe Homes Pledge asks parents and guardians to agree they will not allow alcoholic beverages or other drugs to be served to minors at parties or activities in their homes. Pledge signers also acknowledge that they are aware of civil and criminal offenses associated with such actions.

The pledge also asks parents and guardians to agree to actively chaperone all underage parties and activities in their homes, alert other parents and guardians about any child who is or appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol in their homes, and welcome such notification about their own children. They also agree to remove all unused prescription drugs from their homes.

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By checking a box on the bottom of the form, parents and guardians allow their contact information to be shared within the Safe Homes network.



"You know, when kids are little, when they're in kindergarten and first grade, the parents talk a lot with each other," said Mr. Weiss, who also serves as a YTF member. "By the time kids get in junior high and high school, they don't want their parents talking. So this is a way of kind of helping that dialogue, and saying to parents, you don't have to worry about this."

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