

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Issue 9 • September 2020



Supporting Health - Preventing Harm

Who We Are

The **Ventura County Behavioral Health Department** provides mental health and substance use treatment services. VCBH plays an important role as an integrated component of the Ventura County Health Care Agency. We provide support for individuals and families who are in crisis; people considering suicide; or those struggling with mental illness, substance use, or both.

Prevention Services works upstream to reduce alcohol and drug-related problems in our community. Initiatives are aimed at limiting harms related to impaired driving; underage and binge drinking; marijuana and vaping, especially as it relates to harms to youth; prescription drug abuse; and addressing health disparities among vulnerable populations. A primary goal is to delay the onset of first use of alcohol and or other drugs by youth. We collaborate with schools, parent groups, government agencies, medical partners, law enforcement, community-based organizations and more.

Access to Substance Use Treatment Services

VCBH provides a continuum of care for substance use and addiction problems, with six locations and access to a range of treatment services for achieving and maintaining recovery. If you believe you or a family member may be struggling with addiction, talk to your healthcare provider or call the confidential 24/7 Access Line: 1-844-385-9200.

During these challenging times, we want to continue our communication with you about our prevention work. Alma Ixta and Erika Fernandez are our Community Services Coordinators. They help to educate parents, families and the community about the risks of alcohol and drug misuse and abuse.

Featured Agency: Friday Night Live

The Ability to Adapt is Key

Every issue we feature stories of individuals and agencies that are making a difference in their communities during this time of COVID-19.

With the 2020-2021 school year now well under way, those on both sides of education - educators and constituents - now face new challenges. In an effort to maintain a safe environment and protect the physical health of all students and school staff, all Ventura County K-12 school districts elected to implement a fully remote, distance learning model.



With the health and well-being of the people who fill our schools in mind, the basic model of our public school system has been completely disrupted. Many who have worked in education may recognize that much like a large freighter on the ocean, education is not often a system that can quickly or easily pivot. Systemic change within the educational system can be a years-long process. However, educators as individuals are often well-known for their ability to adapt. Adapting lessons to a change in weather, adapting activities based on the number of students in attendance, and adapting teaching strategies to accommodate a student's preferred learning style. In education, the ability to adapt is key. And these days, ever-present. Adapted graduation ceremonies, adapted lesson plans, even adapting one's own comfort level with technology to be able to continue serving our students.

In my role within Comprehensive Health and Prevention Programs, the important youth development work that we oversee is heavily reliant on youth making positive connections with peers and school staff. These caring relationships, along with high expectations and opportunities for participation, have research behind them to show the incredible potential for improved outcomes for youth - especially those who hail from challenged or under-resourced communities. This, of course, begs the question: if connections are so key, how is this accomplished during these challenging times? At a time when for everyone's safety, we must physically disconnect from those outside of our household bubble.

Back in March, 2020, when schools across the state closed for, what was then, an indefinite amount of time, the California Friday Night Live (FNL) Partnership office immediately sprang into action to develop and provide resources to us in the field, to adapt (there's that word again!) the program's entire model into a virtual environment. Ventura County FNL staff and those from all across the state, went into what was essentially a virtual platform boot camp, to learn the ins and outs of the many platforms available, as well as how to utilize the many functions they offer to make meetings fun, engaging, and meaningful.

What was also immediately clear to the statewide FNL field, was that the youth we work with thrived on the connections they have made. And to just completely remove those connections from their lives, was likely not something that would promote continued positive outcomes for participating youth - for some their FNL chapter might have been one of the few places they could go and experience positive, caring relationships, and opportunities for leadership. Thus, the virtual chapter meeting and continued engagement of youth was developed. In Ventura County alone, over 120 youth continued to meet with their FNL chapters in a using virtual platforms to continue the great work they provide to their schools and communities. Like everything else, it just had to look a little different.

For this new school year, our office is committed to continued training for FNL Chapter Advisors to help them in engaging their youth participants, and providing adapted strategies to allow them to maintain the incredible youth development project work our youth have provided all across Ventura County. Stay tuned for even more great work from these young leaders.

Gabe Teran, Operations Specialist, Friday Night Live
Comprehensive Health and Prevention Programs
Ventura County Office of Education
www.vcoe.org/fnl



Message from Alma: Goopy, Cheesy Lasagna

Kids in the Kitchen

Sometimes we just need to be creative and find ways to have fun. Many of us continue to work from home while balancing raising children, and in my case, Adrian.

I find myself allowing him time in front of the tv, phone, or tablet, so I can get some work done. I can't help feeling guilty for the increase in screen time during the day. For this

reason, I started cooking with Adrian, to create learning experiences that help develop his motor and language skills. This took me back to when I was a Family Development Educator with the Early Head Start Program and led cooking activities with parents and their kids.



Our first cooking adventure was making lasagna together. Adrian was very engaged, helped to layer the pasta, meat, ricotta cheese, and sprinkle mozzarella to cover the meat and sauce, and then repeat the process. And he is only three years old! Once it was done and out of the oven, he wanted to see what it looked like. He seemed so proud of what he did! And it was delicious! He made sure that grandpa and his “Tio Joey” (Uncle Joey) knew that he cooked lasagna with grandma!

It was also the first time he was eating lasagna and I think that because he helped make it, he was excited about trying it, instead of like other times when I introduce a new food he is hesitant to try it. I truly think this was a success. He now loves cooking with grandma and he also pretends to be cooking while playing “imaginary play” which is a very healthy way to play. Who knows, I may be preparing him to become the next big chef!

What are some new activities you can try out with your children?

Learn more:

Covid-19 Parenting

wellnesseveryday.org/images/covid-19/Covid-19-Parenting.pdf

Child Development Resources

www.cdrv.org/parent-resources/web-resources



National Recovery Month 2020

Join the Voices of Recovery Celebrating Connections

Strong communities make for strong recovery. Community members - including families, neighbors, employers, educators, charitable organizations, and faith-based institutions - are the backbone of communities that foster recovery among its residents. Research shows that peer support services can provide a valuable approach to guide individuals as they work to maintain recovery.



Each September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), sponsors National Recovery Month. This observance celebrates the millions of Americans who are in recovery from mental and substance use disorders, reminding us that treatment is effective and that people can and do recover. It also serves to help reduce the stigma and misconceptions that cloud public understanding of mental and substance use disorders, potentially discouraging others from seeking help.

The theme for 2020 National Recovery Month is **Join the Voices for Recovery: Celebrating Connections**. Recovery Month celebrates the gains made by those living in recovery.

-Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, delivers a message for National Recovery Month.



Learn more:

National Recovery Month 2020

rm.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

SAMHSA's 2020 National Recovery Month

www.recoverymonth.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/recovery

PARENT TIPS: **Talking with Kids - Teachable Moments**

As we already shared, we love cooking with children. We are always talking about the importance of talking early to your children about the harms of alcohol and drug use.

But sitting down and making the time is hard, and dealing with resistance isn't easy either. When we engage in parallel activities like sports, cooking, or watching tv, it allows an easier flow of



conversation and can make a difficult topic much easier to initiate. Cooking together is just one way to bring up difficult topics and get kids to share while they are focused on a recipe. Try it out sometime! At least you might get some delicious cookies as a result.

- **Remember:** Parents are the #1 reason that kids choose not to use drugs.
- **Start young** and make talking about it a regular habit.
- **Find the right times** for relaxed conversations that won't be interrupted. Try talking while driving, walking the dog or cooking together.
- **Start the conversation** in ways your child can relate to. Comment on media stories and popular culture news. Frame it as a health issue.
- **Listen.** Be patient.
- **Be clear about your expectations** for them to make healthy choices.
- **Ask open ended questions**, not intrusive or blaming. "What would you do if a friend offered you...?" Focus on 'what if' questions and what they could say or do.
- Be informed and answer questions. See the Resources below.

Learn more:

Tips for Talking with Your Kids Campaign

habits.vcbh.org

Stay Connected - It's Easy

If you are looking for resources in the community, check out our websites. We continually add news, tips, latest research, blogs, publications and more.

Ventura County Responds

venturacountyresponds.org

Marijuana FactCheck

www.mjfactcheck.org

Vaping FactCheck

www.vapingfactcheckvc.org

Ventura County Limits
www.venturacountylimits.org

Social Determinants of Health
www.healthequityvc.org

Follow us on Social Media
www.facebook.com/venturacountylimits
twitter.com/vclimits

Coping During Coronavirus, Wellness Every Day
www.wellnesseveryday.org/coping-during-coronavirus

Need Help?

If you or a family member are struggling with addiction, talk to your healthcare provider or call the confidential 24/7

Access Line: 1-844-385-9200.

> [Learn about Substance Use Treatment Services.](#)

Upcoming Events - Join In

We will keep you posted on upcoming events in each newsletter. If your agency is planning any online meetings, please send to us so we can post this.

VC-ASH Meeting, Public Health

September 24, 2020

Contact: Vicky Gonzales, Vicky.Gonzales@ventura.org

SAMHSA's 2020 National Recovery Month Webinar Series

September 2020

www.recoverymonth.gov

Share your Photos

Send us photos of Ventura County scenes and we'll share in future newsletters. As the county continues to adapt, we want to capture the changing landscape of our communities. We will give you credit too!

Photo: Somis Elementary School, Somis, CA - Fall 2020 Distance Learning



Contact Us

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Erika is on leave through October.

Share your stories with us. Want us to feature you and your work in the community? Send an email to Alma!

STAY CONNECTED

