

Group promotes sobriety for youth

By Kyle Lazarus

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The Selma Community Support Network, a local division of the Rural Youth Prevention Project, has ideas galore for its youth council to select to promote sobriety.

The group, funded by a grant through Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, has goals of training a "youth council" to organize and implement projects that address underage drinking.

The support network works with kids and provides resources for the students for events and activities.

"We gather youth with the intent that they choose the direction to promote fun while sober," said Pam Long, substance abuse prevention specialist and the leader of the Selma group.

She said underage drinking is a big problem in communities such as Selma.

Long said the community has been extremely helpful with their group.

Rob Martin is the substance abuse prevention coordinator with Fresno County EOC.

"We give the youth the resources and they choose what projects to go after," said Martin. "Then we try to promote the events. It may not be super fun things to do, but there are things to do in Selma for youth that are productive, other than just be bored and drink."

The Selma Community Support Network includes police staff, city staff and other citizens. It's the only year for the grant, which ends June 30, 2010.

The network gives the youth the opportunity to do more than just promote alcohol safety and sobriety. It gives them a chance to help the community in other ways.

For two months, the youth council planned an event Aug. 22 at Shafer Park. When fewer people showed up than expected, the group donated all of the extra food to a homeless shelter.

Some of the ideas for the youth council include canned food distribution and Red Ribbon week events. The canned food distribution is 9:30 a.m. Sept. 10 at the Selma Flea Market.

For Red Ribbon week, which begins Oct. 17, the support network talked about giving the youth the opportunity to do a public service announcement and a movie night.

Initially the group talked about having a talent show dinner at the Selma Senior Center during the same week, but it was decided that having it during lunch would be more effective.

Also, the Halloween event at Pioneer village was also discussed as a possible event for the youth council to plan for.

Martin said that the youth council has received a look at how a community works and how events are put together. He said the glimpse inside the inner workings has hopefully given the kids an idea about how to continue the program.

"We want to train kids to continue fundraising even without EOC backing," Martin said. "It doesn't take that much time or money, just a little motivation."