

Be a Piece of the Puzzle: Sustainable Change Agents-Prevention That Lasts

By DeAnna Pearl



A young man approaches his mentor of five years and asks if they can talk. The mentor is eager to talk with the young man because she has seen him struggle and then become successful and move on to college. After a few minutes the young man quietly says, "You lied to me." Taken aback the mentor quickly replies, "How did I lie to you?" "You said if I make better choices in my life and lived in my truth it would be easier for me to be a healthy adult." "Yes that is true," the mentor assures him. The young man shakes his head, "The world is not ready for me to live in my truth and stand for what I believe without being criticized for it," he states. Realizing the truth in the young man's words, she began to seeking ways to empower her community to become a safe and healthy place where youth can to make healthy choices on their own.

For years, prevention strategies have attempted to alter the environments in which *individual* children grow, learn, and mature. These are categorized as *individualized environments*. Much of what we have traditionally done in prevention is in this category. As seen in Figure 1, change agents in *individualized environments* may include families, schools, the faith community, and health care providers. Generally, strategies at this level seek to *socialize, instruct, guide, and counsel* children in ways that increase their resistance to health risks.

Specific programs may teach parenting skills to parents or life skills to children, educate parents and children about health risks, communicate rules and expectations, or provide specialized services to youth at high risk. All of these individualized strategies seek to prepare and assist individual children in coping with a world that presents myriad temptations and potential threats to their health and well-being.

Today, a more effective approach has proven to be successful in sustaining community level change. This approach is to attempt to alter the environment

Figure 1 - Individual

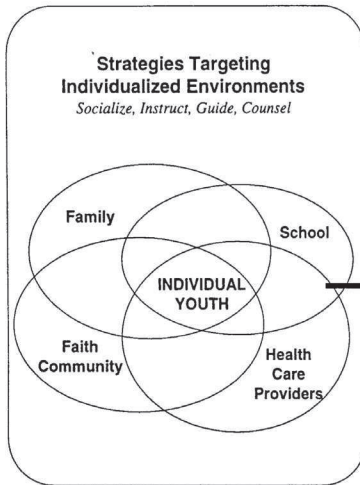
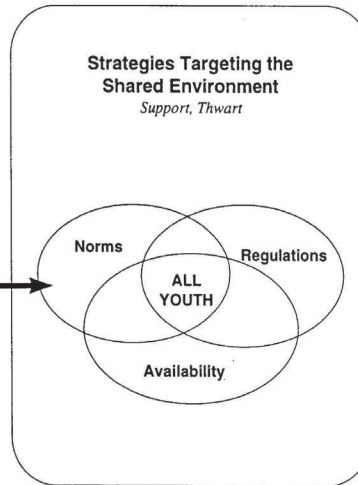


Figure 2 - Community & Environment



in which all children encounter threats to their health-including illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco (*shared environment*). While we can offer a child or family many skills to utilize to help make healthy choices, they also need an environment where making healthy choices are normal. Figure 2 represents the world in which children face and cope with health threats in the *shared environment*. The shared environment can be a neighborhood, town, city, State, or the Nation as a whole. Properly designed and managed, the shared environment can *support* healthy behavior and *thwart* risky behavior for all children, regardless of how well prepared they may be by their individualized environments.

Successful environmental prevention requires a clearly defined purpose that evolves from local assessment of problems. This unifying purpose carries participants past challenges posed by resistance from those benefiting from the current ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs) status quo. Participants must think ahead to assure that the changes attained are supported, enforced and sustained. The focus is on measurable ATOD-related problems such as drug dealing, police incidents, loitering, violence, and public drinking that impose risk, cost, or poor quality of life on the public.

For years, so much time and money has been spent on classroom curriculum, silicone bracelets, Just Say No campaigns and drug free events. Don't miss-understand, these have their place in prevention. However, they cannot stand alone in the education of our children around the use, misuse, abuse and addiction of ATOD. Our combined efforts are to encourage community involvement, mentorship, school improvements, classroom prevention activities, agency collaboration, ordinance development and policy enforcement, family friendly community events, mentorship training, parenting classes and more.

The very mission of the Vernonia Prevention Coalition is to increasing protective factors while addressing risk factors [see Vernonia Voice Feb. 2010 article] by identifying and implementing environmental strategies that work for Vernonia. The VPC partners with other entities such as individuals, churches, city government, police & fire departments, business owners, families, civic and other county coalitions. Interested in knowing more about increasing protective factors or participating in trainings? Please contact DeAnna Pearl at 503-369-7370, DeAnna@vernonia-or.gov or stop by to see her at the Vernonia Community Learning Center office.

To see examples of Environmental Prevention approaches happening in our community go to the Vernonia Prevention Coalition Facebook page.

Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday. Look for our next issue on October 11th.

STORAGE. TOP
Need more room?

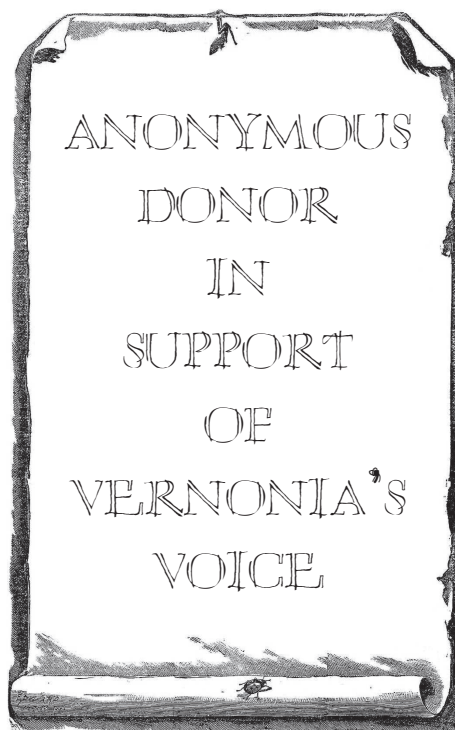
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10-5 Tue-Sat, 12-4 Sun



Senior Center Activities

5-Area Luncheon: Monday, October 31 at the Vernonia Senior Center

the side parking lot door opens at 7:00. Ah, sweet treats!

Connie's Fabulous Breakfasts: Fabulous breakfasts are available to the public on Fridays for a cost of only \$3.50. The event happens at the Senior Center (446 Bridge Street) from 7:30 to 9:00 AM each Friday. Meal price includes a beverage, too. Enter through the side, parking lot door. What a deal!

Week Day Lunches: The Vernonia Senior Center offers nutritious and tasty lunches each weekday for only \$4. These are available to the public, not just Senior Citizens. (Mealtime is noon; late arrivals may not be served.) You can reserve your lunch by calling by 11:15 AM, or further in advance if possible, to assist the cooks as they prepare the day's meals.

Maple Bars available locally! Connie King, the cook at the Senior Center, is making maple bars each day. The maple bars are available to the public, too, and only cost \$1 each. Availability is subject to quantity on hand. You can assure yourself of a good supply by pre-ordering them directly from Connie by calling the Senior Center (503-429-3912) any week day, from 7:00 AM-3:00 PM. Please allow one day lead time for larger orders. The Center's front door opens at 9:00, but

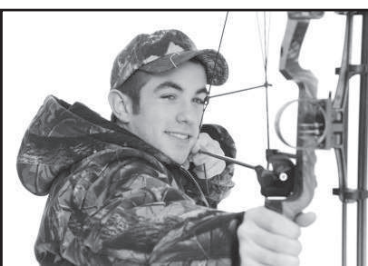
Thrift Store: Bargain prices can be found in Vernonia's Senior Center in their Thrift Store. The retail store is open Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM. The Thrift Store provides funds for the Senior Center's facility and its many activities. Donations can also be dropped off during those same hours, and donated clothes need to be clean and in good condition so they are "sales ready". We are offering half off during the first week of each month. Buy locally and support your local Senior Center.

For after hours drop-offs please contact Pauline 503-429-5810.

Special Days: On the last Wednesday of the month Wauna Credit Union will be serving ice cream. On the last Friday of the month we will serve birthday cake and ice cream to celebrate that month's birthdays.

Membership Dues: Another way to support Vernonia's Senior Center is to pay the \$15 annual membership dues. Checks may be mailed or dropped off at the Senior Center. Anyone 50 and older may join.

Questions? Call: (503) 429-3912




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