



SUBSTANCE ABUSE 2006 Community Commitment Issue

ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES THAT EMPHASIZE STRENGTHS AND STEER YOUTH AWAY FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE, AND WE SHOULD PROVIDE TREATMENT TO THOSE WHO HAVE A SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND/OR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

Prevention, diversion & treatment protect our youth from substance abuse

Access to adequate treatment and prevention services are the best way to protect children and their families from the consequences of mental health and substance abuse problems. Children who are drug-free and who have healthy psycho-social supports are more likely to achieve their educational potential; they are less likely to experience physical harm, become homeless, or have contact with the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.

The number of children, adolescents, and families affected by substance abuse has sharply increased since the early 1990's.³⁷ Unfortunately, the availability of substance abuse prevention, assessment, and treatment has not kept pace with the needs of our youth. Access to substance abuse services has decreased during the past decade because of inadequate insurance coverage, managed care controls, and low reimbursement rates. As well, funding for prevention programs for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice was reduced in 2000 and 2001, and those reductions have not been restored.

Most youth who enter drug abuse treatment do so through the juvenile justice system once they have had a run-in with the law.³⁸ Many other adolescents who use drugs are not identified until their drug behaviors escalate to abuse or dependence, or the severity of other drug-related behavioral problems catch the attention of a concerned adult with both the will and the means for responding appropriately. There are various patterns of drug use among youth who need and could benefit from access to treatment services.

In April 1999, the Department of Health and Human Services released its report to Congress on Substance Abuse and Child Protection. It stated that 11% of U.S. children live with at least one parent who is either alcoholic or in need of treatment for the abuse of illicit drugs. Effective interventions to address concurrent substance abuse and child maltreatment problems in families were considered essential for accomplishing permanency planning and preventing the re-occurrence of child maltreatment or neglect. Substance abuse treatment and supports for the parents, as well as significant substance abuse prevention and intervention for the children in these homes are needed.

Research demonstrates the following benefits of high quality substance abuse services for children and families:

- **Effective assessment & interventions strengthen families, keep children safer.** *Effective assessment and interventions prevent child maltreatment.*
- **Prevention & quality services promote long-term benefits to youth development.** *Children receiving quality substance abuse services are more likely to graduate, be gainfully employed, own a home, and avoid criminal activity.*
- **Health care & criminal justice savings result from quality services.** *The economic benefits of quality substance abuse services are well documented. Each dollar invested in services provides a seven-dollar return in cost reductions; the largest savings are realized in the health care and criminal justice systems³⁹*