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you are like most voters in Colorado, you probably wonder where the nearly $200 million in state revenues are going from the $1.3 billion in cannabis sales statewide in 2016. Some think it is going to our schools. Perhaps you think it is going to help educate youth about the risks of using cannabis when their brains are still developing. Or maybe you think it is going to balance the state budget. In fact, all of those are right.

Locally, there is a new energy in the community and it is all around efforts by community members to work with, engage and support the youth. Tri-County, and these efforts are funded by state cannabis sales tax dollars. Early this year, Tri-County Health Network received a state grant to help develop a community coalition, known as the Communities That Care, to help support youth as they grow up in Telluride.

While the ultimate goal of the grant is to reduce substance use among Telluride adolescents, the program is so much more than that. According to Erich Lange, community engagement support at Tri-County Health Network and a member of the community board, “The Communities That Care process really focuses on what youth are saying about growing up here — what are the great and positive things and what are the challenges, and works with youth and existing organizations to build on those positives and reduce the negative ones.”

During the spring, Tri-County Health Network facilitated several meetings with local leaders and community members to begin to organize the coalition. Elected officials, law enforcement, leaders of youth serving organizations, and the school district, among others, met in April to discuss the challenges facing our community in better supporting our youth. Over 20 leaders committed to being a part of the steering organization for the coalition.

According to Hilary Cooper, San Miguel County commissioner, “This is important work for our community. We want to support our youth as they grow up here so that they can be engaged and productive members of our community — this coalition will help in that effort.”

More than 25 other community members, including parents and staff from the library, school, nonprofits and social services, have met to start forming the coalition. Over the course of 10 hours they worked to understand the issues around prevention, and developed a vision statement for their coalition that embodies hopes for the future. That statement reads as follows: “A community that empowers our youth to be healthy, productive, resilient and engaged.”

According to Emily Osan, a prevention educator at San Miguel Resource Center, in crafting the vision statement the group endeavored to envision “what kind of community and what kind of youth we’d like to see in Telluride in the years to come.” There was a tre mendous feeling that we wanted all youth to have the best aspects of growing up here, knowing that today not every youth has the same opportunities or experiences.

The coalition is in its infancy and it will be working over the next 12 months to identify the issues, analyze what organizations are currently doing to support youth, and identify any gaps that may exist. With youth at the table, it will identify the best evidence-based programs the community should consider to support its youth.

Jenni Ward, a member of the Telluride school board and parent of three children, said the Telluride community is a “great place to raise kids.” Jenni Ward, a member of the Telluride school board and parent of three children, said the Telluride community is a “great place to raise kids.”

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