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Female VO:

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration presents the Road to Recovery. This program aims to raise awareness about mental and substance use disorders, highlight the effectiveness of treatment and recovery services, and show that people can and do recover. Today's program is The Road to Recovery 2015: Substance Use Among Youth and Young Adults: Pathways to Health and Lifelong Success.

Ivette:

Hello, I'm Ivette Torres and welcome to another edition of the Road to Recovery. Today we'll be talking about mental and substance use disorder issues among youth and young adults. Joining us in our panel today are: Robert Ashford, Program Director, Collegiate Recovery Program at the University of North Texas; Sasha McLean, Executive Director, Archway Academy, Texas; Ivana Grahovac, Executive Director, Transforming Youth Recovery, California; Sophie, a young person in recovery and recovery high school student in Texas.

Robert, why is it important that our nation focus on substance use disorder issues and mental health issues within the population of high school and college students?

Robert:

I think it's a great question, first, and I think as we look at the disease of addiction and substance use disorders on the spectrum and then looking at mental health and the co-occurring, there are issues in mental health crises or epidemics in the country that if we're looking towards creating success for our young people as we look towards the future, who's really going to progress into these roles of creating jobs or running companies or being in government if we don't set them up for success for barriers whether it's a disease or a mental health concern. I mean really how are we allowing success to happen without these disorders and diseases are allowing them not to finish school, not to get to college. And if we look at the research, progression from a high school to college to higher education is absolutely necessary to set them up, to make sure they're successful in their adult lives. I mean that alone, the loss productivity, the lack of education, these are issues that deem whether or not we're going to be successful in the future of our country, so it has to be a concern, it has to be a major issue.

Ivette:

Thank you. Ivana, how prevalent is this issue?

Ivana:

There is a rather high prevalence of substance use, misuse and overuse on college campuses. It affects about 30% of the student body, somewhere along the spectrum of substance use disorders.

Ivette:

So in high school what would you say, Sasha?

Sasha:

Every community is different. There are some national norms but what we experience in Houston is an extremely high rate of young people abusing medication, especially prescription drug medication. And we're seeing the onset of use lowering every year.

Ivette:

Sophie, talk to us a little bit about your own experience in high school and prior to you joining a recovery high school. What was that like?

Sophie:

Well, I went to an all-girls Catholic private school my freshman year and even though I wasn't in like the big public school like HIST, part of that down in Houston, the amount of unawareness there and the access that I had to all different kinds of drugs, and I guess just the lack of support in the environment as a whole, just the fear that was associated with anybody talking about that or getting caught. It created an environment where I thought that if I asked for help that meant that I was gonna get punished. And so before getting into recovery and going to Archway which I started my sophomore year, it was everywhere.

Ivette:

What are some of the warning signs that parents and others should be aware of?

Sophie:

For me at least, it was just complete isolation. That was something that I noticed a lot with me and the people that I used to use with. We were isolated. We were very closed off from the people around us at school. We didn't really talk to anybody, we didn't make eye contact with anybody.

Ivette: Robert

Robert:

I think if we're looking at warning signs whether it's substance use disorder or the occurrence of mental health concerns, outside of isolation which is absolutely a huge one for populations across the gamut of young adults and emerging adults whether it's personal hygiene, whether it's isolation or not engaging in these activities that they have for a large part of their adolescence. We see starting to break the rules or these conceptions of what a well-behaved young adult is because they stop, they lose that interest whether it's drug seeking behavior or lack of engagement because of depression if it's on the mental health side, and then we see a transformation kind of overnight in some cases, and in other cases over the course of the adolescent growth of things beginning to change in a negative consequence way. Not all the time, especially on the mental health side but we see the person begin to transform in a way that is not kind of contiguous with what we expect of a normal lifespan of development.

Ivette: Sasha

Sasha:

One of the most common misconceptions I hear from parents is that my kids are playing sports, but their grades are high, they're a part of Boy Scouts, they're a part of all these after-school activities, so it can't be my child struggling with a co-occurring health issue or a substance use issue. Sometimes the warning signs are small—Things like shifting in friend groups, you know?

Looking for peer support out of kind of the normal friendship circle that those students had. Sometimes isolation doesn't have to look significant, like never coming out for family dinner or total avoidance of family members. But sometimes those little shifts are what parents need to be focused on; the little shift of more time away, more time with social media, less time engaging with the family, money coming up missing whether it's \$5 or \$500. I think what we experience as parents, wait for the warning signs to be so big and so significant that their kid could be in grave danger versus paying attention to the smaller warning signs and addressing them when they're small.

Ivette:

Sasha, there are some very, very severe risky behaviors associated with youth and young adults that are engage in substance use disorders. You yourself are in recovery. Can you share some of those risky behaviors?

Sasha:

Oh, absolutely, we're talking about things like promiscuity and students looking for acceptance in their peer group by doing things wild, crazy, looking to make a name for themselves. We've also seen a lot of behavior where students begin to do poorly in classes not because of an ability issue but because of a perception issue around wanting to fit into a culture in their school about what cool looks like and how to fit into the cool group.

Ivette:

Sophie, what are some of the steps that need to be taken to help students so that they're not adversely affected by substance use disorders?

Sophie:

I think that really emphasizing that there is support that we can get at school would make a tremendous difference and I think that teachers, school professionals making students aware that they know what is going on and they know there are lots of different ways that they can help us would make a huge difference rather than just acting like it's not going on or leaving us with the impression that we'll get in trouble.

Ivette:

Robert, what other roles other than what Sophie has just mentioned, can educators and campus or high school community play in really preventing or getting out prevention messages?

Robert:

We need to look at the message that we're sending and not necessarily the content but the way that we're sending that message. We see a movement acting director of the ONDCP, Michael Botticelli, talks quite frequently about this, that we're talking about individuals, humans first with a substance use disorder or with a mental health concern. These things for adolescents and especially young adults continue to happen and by making them feel shamed about themselves we're not preventing anything. If anything, we're sending them further into isolation and not helping. So I think the most important is to talk about it in a positive light.

Ivette:

Absolutely, and when we come back, we are going to continue to talk about how to prevent some of the problems even before they begin, and we'll be right back.

[Music]

Female VO: Pamela Hyde, Administrator, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. US Department of Health and Human Services.

Pamela Hyde:

It's really important to focus on mental health issues and substance abuse disorders for young people especially in high school and college because our data shows us that between about 18 and 25 we have some of the higher rates of substance abuse issues and some of the lower rates of help seeking. We also have pretty high rates of suicidal behavior during that age group. We also know from research that mental health issues in adulthood start before the age of 14 about half of them before the age of 14 and frankly about three quarters of them before the age of 24

Ivette:

Welcome back. Sasha, we've talked a little bit about negative affects, so can we broaden that and for you to really delineate what other negative affects might young people and teens face when they are engaged in substance use disorders.

Sasha:

The consequences are significant for a lot of our young people, including involvement in the criminal justice system, health issues, family issues, peers, social-related issues, a lot of teen pregnancy is created with some of the poor choices while under the influence. So when we talk about long term consequences for young people, they're facing significant challenges.

Ivette:

Ivana, should parents be playing a larger role in what they're saying to their children and what they're doing within the household to address these issues?

Ivana:

Absolutely. I'm hearing we're discussing the perception of outcomes and consequences that youth have as a result of their substance use disorder, and sometimes when a student finds themselves struggling amidst a low GPA, criminal convictions, being kicked out of school and then the opportunity to get sober and get well is presented to them, they may feel that they have dug themselves so deep into a hole that there's no chance of them ever gaining recovery and a place in society. So parents can really do a great part in helping their student with resiliency and being encouraging, supportive and absolutely empowering them to believe in themselves and in their communities, that they can succeed not despite their experience with addiction but because of what they will receive in their recovery.

Ivette:

Absolutely. And, Robert, you are a very active member of young people in recovery and and some of the members of your group have actually gone out and talked to high school students about your own experiences.

Robert:

Absolutely. It started as an initiative that when we look at prevention, are we leveraging not only experience from individuals that lived lifestyles that have been in this but also how do we leverage recovery resources and practices to really prevent. And I think a lot of that is by going

out and telling the realities of it. When we look at prevention messages, a lot of it is here are the negative consequences, here's what could happen, but within the context of that message or the confines we don't talk about the other side; what does recovery look like, here's what's possible, here are some of the access to resources you can go out and find in your community.

Ivette:

Sophie, you are about to graduate from a recovery high school. Tell us a little bit about your experience in that, how that has helped you get your life back together.

Sophie:

Graduating high school, that wasn't even something that I think I'd be able to do or that I thought I would be able to do a couple of years ago. It wasn't something that I wanted to do and now I'm excited to go to college next year. I'm excited to see where my life is gonna end up and I think that having a community and an academic environment, that really, really helped me discover different things about myself and really showed me different ways and different solutions of how I could live my life and how that could be fun and what it could look like. That completely impacted where I'm at today and where I'm going.

Ivette:

Were you skeptical when you first went in, in terms of what this environment would help you achieve?

Sophie:

I was skeptical about changing my behaviors but it had nothing to do with the environment. It had everything to do with me just not wanting to. I would look around me and every kid that I saw there was happy. Everybody was joyful and I was like, I want that but I don't know if I'm willing to do the things that it takes to get there. It was really hard for me to let go of my old behaviors and my old way of thinking.

Ivette:

But that environment becomes so supportive, correct Sasha, that then it just generates the desire, I suspect, for the students to thrive and grow.

Sasha:

Absolutely. You know, traditional high schools tend to be very recovery hostile environments which is why recovery high schools were created because a lot of students were going off to residential treatment facilities, they were experiencing the beginning of hope and recovery and what that would look like. They were feeling inspired and then they would return back to the high school with the same old people and in the same place and were struggling to be the new person they wanted to be in that same old environment again.

Ivette:

And, Ivana, the broader community also needs to play a role, correct?

Ivana:

At Transforming Youth Recovery we believe in a capacity building approach to recovery communities and recovery programs on campuses, and so that means mobilizing the assets, the places in the community that respect recovery by opening more doors for a young person to

build connections, to build relationships, to have positive experiences, the more they will be set up for a successful life.

Ivette:

And when we come back I want to talk about the dynamics of how one goes about to set up one of these programs, we'll be right back.

Male VO:

For those with mental or substance use disorders, what does recovery look like? It's a transformation. It's a supporting hand. It's new beginnings. When does recovery start? It starts when you ask for help and support. Join the Voices for Recovery. Speak up. Reach out.

Female VO:

For information on mental and substance use disorders, including prevention and treatment referral, call 1-800-662-HELP. Brought to you by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Ivette:

Welcome Back. Sasha, how can schools, whether they're high schools—and then I'll go to you, Robert, for the university setting—help to strengthen protective factors so that less students fall to substance use disorders?

Sasha:

I think the biggest thing that schools can do is acknowledge that substance use is happening on their campuses and be willing to address it head on; whether that's inviting young people in to tell their stories to students on their campuses, and I think it's a combination of doing some group work like large scale assemblies but then also the individual connection because I think that's one element that's been lost especially as our high schools have grown larger and larger.

Ivette:

For example, like CADCA?

Sasha:

Oh, absolutely.

Ivette:

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America. They've got a tremendous number of coalitions throughout the country that actually do a lot of prevention work in high schools.

Sasha:

Yes, and I think prevention on the part of student education and then also parent education, offering evening and weekend educational series for parents, offering it in Spanish or in other languages for communities so that we can make sure that all families have an opportunity to know what's happening.

Ivette:

And, Robert, it is particularly poignant the problems that are experienced among college and university campuses. Do you want to talk to us a little bit about that and what can be done?

Robert:

Absolutely and I think to build resiliency to build these recovery protection factors which I think is really kind of not only in finding recovery if a student does have a substance use disorder or mental health concern but also looking at the general student body, so whether its Partners in Greek Life or in the student organization standpoint or athletics. We have to start talking about it and I think to me that's where the prevention message needs to go is we have to start talking about the realities that 40% of college kids are binge drinking. So I think the first thing that needs to happen is we have 4,000 universities in this country, we have a little over 120 Collegiate Recovery Programs that even exist. You have to have a program and a champion that's willing to have those conversations and I think that's exactly where Ivana comes in and what TYR is doing.

Ivette:

So, Ivana, What do these institutions have to consider as they're laying down policies in order to protect their students more from falling into substance use disorders?

Ivana:

So Collegiate Recovery Programs are not really about preventing students from falling into substance use disorders, they're about creating safe spaces where students with substance use disorders can find the support they need to continue to sustain their sobriety.

Ivette:

Very true. But, Robert, does that happen overnight at a university or does the university have to consider what its philosophy is and what its policies are related to the establishment of sober living spaces?

Robert:

I think it doesn't happen overnight and it can in special circumstances where the climate is just right where you have champions that do so. If you look at the ones out of the 120 plus that are successful, it had people like Evana when she was at Michigan or myself at University of North Texas that are champions of the cause that can create that space not overnight but over the course of whether it's three months, six months or a year.

Ivette:

Absolutely. Ivana, talk to us about your own personal experience that Robert addressed.

Ivana:

Absolutely. I was 3-1/2 years clean and sober from heroin use when I entered the University of Michigan to pursue a masters in social work, and I expected that I would have a community of support around me like I did at the community college I went to in sobriety. And when I showed up on campus, there was nobody on campus that I could speak to about my recovery, nobody I could authentically identify with and relate to as a staff person, and there were no meetings on campus specifically for students that were part of the University of Michigan. So I felt very marginalized. I felt like nobody had taken the time to consider that there were students who had overcome significant obstacles to gain acceptance into this wonderful institution. And so for a year I went home every weekend to access my recovery supports and when I felt strong enough, I would come back to class. And after a year of thinking that I was going to fail out

because what right did I have to graduate as a sober student. I realized I was getting straight A's and that's when I said we're not gonna leave campus the way that we found it. And I had found another group of students in recovery and allies for recovery and we formed a student group called Students For Recovery and it became the formal Collegiate Recovery Program at the University of Michigan.

Ivette:

So speaking to that point, Sasha, talk to us about what educators can do to really become part of the solution and to help.

Sasha:

Absolutely. Well, in education a lot of times what happens is teachers and administrators choose to focus on just one area of a young person's development and that's the intellectual development part, and they forget that the social development, the emotional development, all of those things also impact how a student is going to perform academically. So if we're only looking at the one area of what are your grades, how did you do on this test, how did you do on this quiz, and we're not taking a look at how are you relating to your peers, how are you fitting into this community, how do you ask for help, what do you do when you experience anxiety at school, then we're really not having the conversations that we should be having with young people and I think that's what leads to young people feeling low self-esteem at school, feeling ignored, feeling like it's a place that doesn't feel safe, it feels sometimes toxic. I mean I hear young people use that word a lot when they speak about education especially at the high school level, that the environment feels toxic to their mental health, toxic to their recovery.

Ivette:

We'll be right back.

Female VO:

We try to hide our truths about our mental and substance use disorders from the world and sometimes from ourselves. Saying "I'm fine" is a façade. By facing our problems, recovery begins, and we are empowered to speak our truth. Join the Voices for Recovery. Speak up. Reach out.

Male VO:

For information on mental and substance use disorders, including prevention and treatment referral, call 1-800-662-HELP. Brought to you by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Ivette:

Welcome back. Robert, we were talking about success rates earlier, or I wanted to talk about success rates earlier, and I want you to really delineate what your findings are, if any.

Robert:

I think if we look around the country, there's a lot of research that Dr. Alexandre Laudet has done coming out of, from NDRI grants for Texas Tech, starting there and then kind of extrapolating that across and a lot of those success rates nationally hold true that recurrence of use or what is known as relapse, we call it recurrence of use, is much lower inside of these programs; oftentimes less than 6% for students that are involved. So across the board GPA

rates are about 25% higher when you look at retention rates, so much of the LGEPTQ plus populations are about 10 points higher inside a collegiate recovery programs than the averages of the university. That's unheard of. So these programs are not only physically responsible from a business perspective for these universities but then you add in the context of social successful outcomes of saving lives, there's no reason not to have them because they are successful. That's the bottom line.

Ivette:

And, Sasha, for recovery high school do we have similar indicators.

Sasha:

Oh, absolutely and we're in the process right now of gathering a lot of great national data because so many of the recovery high schools operate different. Some are private, some are publicly funded, some are a combination of both. And there are a little over 40 plus high school recovery campuses across the country, and at least at Archway Academy what we've experienced is that 86% of our students maintain sobriety with no recurrence of use through the entire school year and we've got a 96% success rate in our students going to college the fall after they graduate.

Ivette:

So we have much-proven promise in the collegiate program as well as in the high school program. Ivana, if I wanted to start a program, what do I need to do?

Ivana:

It depends if you're a student or a staff person, but there needs to be a champion who is there to cheerlead for the cause of collegiate recovery on campus. We've even seen parents in some communities who have taken up the cause. They've built a compendium of stakeholders that support them in advocating for collegiate recovery on campus and it really starts like a grassroots effort. You have to build your allies, you have to create your mission and you have to reinforce that early intervention is the goal of improved outcomes for treating young people with substance use disorders.

Ivette:

Let's talk about the students because you made the differentiation between parents or someone at the school that has an interest who wants to start a program. But if students wanted to start a program, and I'm sure that within our audience there will be students who really are listening and what is the first step that they need to take?

Ivana:

When I was a student at the University of Michigan, I needed to do some independent study credits for my MSW and so I was able to connect with some staff members who became advisors to a student group that was recovery oriented, and because of the work of that student group and with the students that we attracted it was then able to become a formalized collegiate recovery programming. So going through the route of a registered student organization whose mission is to create a more recovery oriented campus is a great way to get the door open for a formalized collegiate recovery program.

Ivette:

I want to go to Sophie and I want to ask you this. In your view, is there a responsibility for the students who are participating in sober environments? What is the responsibility of the student as they're going through that program?

Sophie:

We have a huge responsibility to reach out to those people and be an icon of hope for them so that they know that it is possible to live a healthy and beautiful lifestyle in recovery as a student in high school.

Ivette:

Very quickly Robert, if someone said we should only do substance use disorders programs and we should keep the mental health over here, you very successfully established an integrated program. What would you say to those doubters?

Robert:

I don't think any of them are doubters. I would say that I think where they come from, their background, may issue a primary purpose kind of focus, and I think there is absolutely a space for that but I think from a university down below standpoint is we look at universities that want to focus on wellness, that want to focus on 360 degree humans. I think we have a responsibility as educators. I'm a student and a program director at UNT, so I would say that you have a responsibility to look at a person as a whole person, and I think some of the programs that may not talk a lot about mental health are integrated and they just don't know it because they accept—like at UT Austin—they accept everybody that comes in. It's such a welcoming environment and the students are co-occurring.

Ivette:

And the fact of the matter is that about 80% of individuals that have a substance use disorder also have a mental condition so we need to really be very, very cognizant of that. Ivana, your final thoughts?

Ivana:

Well, as Executive Director of Transforming Youth Recovery, we are here to support all colleges in building collegiate recovery programs on campus, and we are catalyzing a network of collegiate recovery programs in different stages of establishment and we can connect incoming colleges with more established colleges and really share best practices, toolkits and technical assistance. So please reach out to us.

Ivette:

Okay, very quickly, Robert.

Robert:

I think for the audience that's watching as you look at whether you're a student or an administrator, an educator or family member, these programs are successful. They're changing lives. Not only saving lives but improving the quality of our educational system across the board in long term success. If you want to get involved, look up Transforming Youth Recovery or Young People in Recovery or the Association of Recovery Schools. And thank you for everything that SAMSA and the people in Washington, D.C. have done in advocating to make sure that we are successful in the long term.

Ivette:

Excellent. Sasha?

Sasha:

I think the continuum of care issue is so important especially for young people and a lot of communities have good residential treatment programs and good attentive outpatient programs but there's really not a lot of post treatment, and that's what these support systems are about, collegiate recovery, recovery high schools. It's about making sure that young people have a place for a year or two years after their initial treatment episode.

Ivette:

And they can come and visit you.

Sasha:

Absolutely.

Ivette:

Sophie?

Sophie:

I just hope to see all of this grow so much, especially being a young person in recovery who is benefiting from programs like this. I hope that this continues to grow all over the nations so that other young people who have had similar experiences to mine get this opportunity because it is so rare right now. So I hope that it becomes more of a commonality among collegiate programs, high schools, everywhere.

Ivette:

Thank you and we all wish you all the best in your college endeavors. And I want to thank you for being here. It's been a great show. I want to remind our audience that September is National Recovery Month. Visit recoverymonth.gov to get information, do events and talk to people about the wonderful programs that you just heard about today because those are the types of efforts and initiatives that are going to begin to change the tide in this country.

[Music]

Female VO:

The *Road to Recovery* television and radio series educates the public about the benefits of treatment for mental and substance use disorders as well as recovery support services for individuals, families, and communities. Each program engages a panel of experts in a lively discussion of prevention, recovery, and treatment services and successful initiatives from across the country.