

Prevention

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what's going on and how they may be able to get help," she said.

"Mental Health First Aid for Teens," is comparable to a first aid course on how to wrap a bandage but it is mental health first aid for teens and their friends, Faldetta said, adding she hopes to have the program in every high school in the next two years, so 75 percent of students are trained in mental first aid.

The opioid crisis is not going away and there has been a change in the type of opiates.

"Right now, what we're seeing is clients present-

ing mostly with fentanyl only, there's really not heroin anymore, it really is some type of synthetic opioid slurry that is being taken and purchased on the streets," she said. "Additionally, we're seeing a huge increase in methamphetamines, which is something that nationally has been a problem for years and years. We have really not seen it and we're starting to see it more and more."

Faldetta said this county has seen increases in an amphetamine use in summer with local tourist industry workers using the drug to hold down two jobs and stay alert.

Methamphetamines seem to be the new drug

of choice, more so than cocaine, uppers or speed, she said.

"It's much harder to treat," Faldetta said. "What it does to your brain chemistry is scary, it releases more endorphins than you should be capable of feeling out of your pleasure center, so the fear is that it's hard to go back to normal after you've experienced something that you weren't meant to experience."

Cape Assist's Strengthening Families Program (SFP) is meeting in person following virtual events due to the COVID pandemic.

"That program is really designed on giving

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-Katie Faldetta, Cape Assist

parents and kids similar tools so that they can all communicate better," she said.

SFP meetings start with a family dinner to encourage families to gather around the dinner table when at home, a place where conversations start, Faldetta said. She said having a meal and 15 minutes of conversation a day reduces substance misuse and increases mental health.

"We start with the meal, then the parents

go in one room, kids go in another, they learn a compatible skill and they all come back together to practice it through an activity," Faldetta said of the SFP meetings that last seven to 14 weeks.

Cape Assist operates the Kids Art Resources and Education (KARE) after-school program in Wildwood that focuses on children in kindergarten developing the personal and social skills necessary to make informed choices in life.

Faldetta said the program is presented in a mix of Spanish and English with participants undertaking art projects and doing their homework.

For those caring for a loved one or patient, Cape Assist offers a caregiver support group.

"The caregiver program is really about the health and wellness of the caregiver," Faldetta said.

The support group is an effective way to reduce stress, receive useful advice, discover local resources and be surrounded by others who are going through similar experiences.

The Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) is a Cape Assist wellness and prevention program for senior citizens.

"It focuses on changing lifestyles as you're aging, focusing on how do you take care of yourself, while you are also taking care of other people and how do recognize changes in your own physical condition and how do you recognize the changes in your own physical condition and mental health as you age," Faldetta said.

Statistically the largest growing area of addiction nationally, not necessarily in this county, is women over the age of 65, she said.

"They're the largest increasing in terms of their substance misuse or at least seeking assistance for their substance misuse," Faldetta said.

She said that group may have felt the most disengaged and isolated during the COVID pandemic. On a national level, substance misuse is increasing for women and decreasing for men, Faldetta said.

Alcohol sales did not peak during the COVID pandemic but the closing of bars and restaurants increased liquor store sales, she said.

"We did not in our agency see a real increase in the need for counseling," Faldetta said.

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