



Strategizer

Leading the way to a healthier Forsyth County

December 2024 Volume 4 Issue 8

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FCDAC Council Meeting, Work and Programs Round-up

Kayden's Korner

We are excited and thankful that we have secured UNG as the home of our next Drug Summit, which will be held on February 4, 2025, at 6

you a season of blessings, peace, and wholeness in every relationship.



p.m.! Please take a look at

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!



our new flyer below and start spreading the word to everyone.

We will need all hands on deck as we start to promote this, our signature community education event, at its new

venue.

Please save the date for **The Walk For Recovery at The Cumming City Center on April 13th.**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!



As we close out 2024 in gratitude, I wish each of

Our next FCDAC Council Meeting is on **Wednesday, January 7 8 a.m.**
United Way Offices



Save the Date

Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council Drug Summit



Save the Date: February 4th, 2025

Time: 6:00PM

Hosted by FCDAC at

The University of North Georgia

Address: 300 Aquatic Cir, Cumming, GA

30040

More info to come!!

Council Meeting Highlights

Director Rachel Kayden opened the 8 a.m. monthly council meeting by welcoming everyone, introducing attendees, and making announcements.

Announcements:

- Wednesday, January 7, 2025 will be our first FCDAC Council meeting in the New Year 2025
- February 4, 2025 Drug Summit at UNG
- April 13, 2025 The Walk for Recovery at The Cumming City Center
- Harmony Grove Baptist Fellowship Drug and Alcohol Awareness Breakfast, January 18 (See announcement below under Our Partners)

Our guest speakers this month are from our school sector. Principal Drew Hayes Principal of Gateway and Forsyth Academy, and Drug Counselors Emily Ennis (Academies) and Ainsley Miller (North Forsyth High).

Emily Ennis, Prevention Coach at Gateway and Forsyth Academies, and Ainsley Miller, Prevention Coach at North, gave a brief history of how their positions came to be. It took many years of volunteer work

by Matt Meyer, the Insight Program Director, Drew Hayes, the principal of the Academies, and the founding of FCDAC to get us to where we are today. Resistance from parents and school staff due to shame and not wanting to be known as the school with a drug problem. "We have to overcome

change and not wanting to be known as the school with a drug problem. We have to become community perceptions and put the good of students first," said Ainsley. "That's done through incremental steps and determination to keep offering services to the schools, and things are beginning to change," said Principal Hayes.

What are we currently doing?

- Support groups
- Sober Social events
- Parent information sessions
- Transition meetings
- Individual appointments
- Freshman and middle school health talks
- Volunteering at other Forsyth County Schools



The Numbers

ACES Since 2018

- 227 Students have attended outside support groups or additional treatment
- 523 youth have attended school support group meetings
- 1,072 individual students met with
- 3,954 individual appointments held

North Forsyth High School since Fall 2022

- 130 youth attended school support group meetings
- 311 individual students met with
- 1,732 individual appointments held

Survey Says...

- Since August 2018, 401 surveys have been included in data tracking project
- Average age of first use 12.89
- 85.1% used marijuana first
- 76.9% from that reported moving on to other drugs
- 48.52% reported daily use

- Prevention coaches inside schools give students more opportunities to build rapport with a support and resource person than is possible at, say, a school assembly. Our numbers show the number of individual contacts with students. It's almost a whole school.

- Coaches help students in small group settings where they learn about self-awareness, what makes a person a friend, and how to handle conflicts in relationships without turning to drugs like nicotine, alcohol, or THC.
- Coaches in the school allow for contact with parents, who sometimes also need resources and accurate information, especially about vapes.
- Vaping is a huge problem because the students easily hide it, and it is not detectable because it is odorless. Both Nicotine and THC cartridges are available.
- Students first use comes from older friends, siblings, and even parents. There is a perception by parents that vaping isn't harmful.
- Vape products, especially flavored cartridges, are marketed to attract youth.
- A cultural change is needed for long-term results that are upstream instead of our band-aid approach after addiction begins. Early intervention is key. Reaching and developing resiliency in the youngest students and reaching parents with small children about how they start building resiliency are small long-term goals the Council may want to plan for.



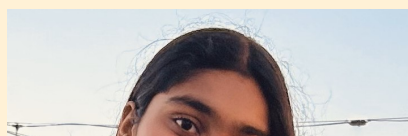
There was much great discussion, which continued after Rachel brought the meeting to a close at 9:15.

Youth, Community Outreach, Members, and Partners

Youth Outreach

Youth Council ~New Youth Council Member

Manasvi Kondamudi



Meet a new Youth Council member, **Manasvi Kondamudi**. A South Forsyth High School freshman, Kondamudi, is passionate about community service and public awareness initiatives.



Manasvi says, "My journey into drug prevention work began while scrolling on social media. I came upon a post from the Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council (FCDAC). I immediately wanted to get involved in this grassroots organization. I was impressed by the impact the Council was having on the schools and raising awareness in the community.

"My motivation for this work stems from witnessing the devastating effects of substance abuse on families and communities. I believe that raising awareness and providing resources can empower individuals to make informed decisions and help create healthier, safer environments,"

she said.

Manasvi is leading a youth-guided project to distribute kits designed to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use and provide support to those affected. These kits include educational materials, resource guides, and items that promote healthier lifestyles. They are intended for individuals and families in the community to help them understand the risks associated with substance abuse and provide tools for prevention and support. The kits will be distributed through local community events, awareness programs, and partnerships with organizations to ensure they reach those who need them. I plan to begin this project next week and work on it over winter break.

"I am an active member of my school's Science Olympiad club and HOSA chapter, where I continue to explore my passion for healthcare and science. Outside academics, I enjoy mentoring elementary students in the Science Olympiad and playing competitive soccer," she said.

School News



Emily Ennis, Gateway and Forsyth Academy Prevention Coach



Ainsley Miller, Prevention Coach, North Forsyth High School.



This month, we are hosting the **Iron Chef Grilled Cheese Competition** for the Gateway students. **Judges**

Ainsley Miller and Gabby Breiten will evaluate the taste, presentation, and cheesiness of the grilled cheeses, and the winning team will receive a gift card of their choice.

I'm gaining momentum with students at Forsyth Academy. For the past few weeks, we have been handing out questionnaires for the students to complete for more

accurate data reporting. The data we gain helps present precise information to the community regarding the drug use problem facing teenagers.

Ainsley reports, "My transition into Substance Prevention Coach at North has been smooth and positive. I had a Sober Recreational Event, "Fall Mini-Games," on November 13th; about nine students attended, and Emily Ennis helped.



I have a Christmas Movie, *Elf*, planned for December's recreational event. I am super excited and looking forward to it. More students have been attending Group Sessions, and new students

have been introduced to me as a resource."



We are continuing to facilitate a support group once weekly at Lambert High School and make appointments once a month at Forsyth Central High School. It's been a great semester, and I'm looking forward to next semester.



Parent Partners Corner

Ashley Dickerson and Marti Roveda



Marti Roveda

Marti's only child began his recovery journey at the age of 16, igniting Marti's passion for educating and supporting parents of youth struggling with substance use disorders. Driven by this commitment, she founded **Equanimity Parent Coaching** to help parents find peace and serenity during the challenging times of their parenting journey. Marti is also an active member of FCDAC and volunteers as a parent advisor for an under-18 recovery program in Nashville.

Parent Coaching For Challenging Times by Marti Roveda

Parenting is a journey full of joys and challenges, but sometimes it takes unexpected and life-changing turns. For me, that turn came in 2019 when my only child became addicted to high-potency THC. His struggles with substance use and mental health blindsided our family, leaving us feeling overwhelmed, heartbroken, and desperate for answers.

Our son's addiction began with marijuana and escalated to high-potency THC products, which I later learned have significant and harmful effects on the developing brain. As I struggled to support him, I realized how little awareness and education exist about these products and their risks, especially for parents of younger children who may believe these issues are far off.

Through this painful journey, I not only became an advocate for my son but also for other families. I



Ashley Dickerson

Ashely currently holds the role of Revenue Accounting Director at AT&T and is an active member of FCDAC.

Her personal journey as a parent of a child who suffers from Substance Use Disorder covers a lot of pain, frustration, and isolation; but also a lot of hope and healing. Ashley openly shares her story of personal recovery with other parents to reduce the shame and stigma of the disease and help start the dialog among parents who may be struggling to find support for themselves. She contributes her insights monthly to the *Strategizer*."



began volunteering as the Co-Chair of the Parent Support Committee for the Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council, where I help educate families about the dangers of high-potency THC and support parents navigating their child's substance use disorder. This role also ignited a passion for reaching parents, especially those of elementary and middle school-aged children, to help them understand the risks early and empower them to have proactive, informed conversations with their kids before substance use becomes an issue.

This work inspired me to launch **Equanimity Parent Coaching**, a resource



This work inspired me to launch Equanimity Parent Coaching, a resource for parents seeking guidance, tools, and support. My coaching and educational efforts focus on:

- Educating parents about the risks of high-potency THC and its impact on adolescent brain development.
- Helping parents of young children build strong foundations of connection, trust, and open communication to prevent future challenges.
- Providing tools to navigate difficult conversations and set clear family boundaries.
- Empowering parents to regulate their emotions and respond to challenges with clarity and calm.
- Supporting parents of teens through substance use, mental health, or neurodivergence with compassion and knowledge.



My work as a coach builds on my volunteer efforts to raise awareness and support families at all parenting stages. Whether you're a parent of a young child or a teen, understanding the dangers of substances like high-potency THC and having the tools to build a strong parent-child relationship is critical to preventing or navigating challenges.

Parenting through a crisis like this is one of the hardest things anyone can face, but I've learned that healing is possible—not just for our children but for us as parents and for our entire families. With the right resources, education, and support, we can grow stronger, more connected, and more resilient.

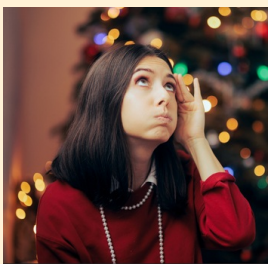
Through Equanimity Parent Coaching, I offer parents the guidance they need to create a foundation of connection, find calm in the chaos, and rewrite their family's story with hope and healing. As co-chairs of the Parent Support Committee, Ashley Dickerson and I welcome the opportunity to partner with our fellow Forsyth Drug Awareness Council members, local schools, and other organizations to educate parents of the detrimental impact of High Potency THC products and that there is hope and healing for their families. Together, we can empower ourselves and protect the generations to come.

[Contact Marti Here](#)

Members teaching Members

STRESS RELATED TO RECOVERY, ESPECIALLY AT TIMES OF HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

By Dana Bryan



Each year, as the holiday approaches, there is added stress due to the many extra demands on our time, energy, and finances. In the midst of all the joy that surrounds us, we also have memories of close family members and friends who are an important part of our past but who are no longer here. For some, this might be their first Christmas without a loved one. In addition to these reasons

for stress, other causes might be more personal.

I recently read an article that focuses on how holidays can be stressful for someone new to recovery from drugs. It might be their first family gathering in years at which they are sober and not using. The article focuses on thoughts and feelings common to those new to recovery who will experience their first sober family gathering in a long time. It also includes things that family members can say or do to help this

Dana Bryan

Dana is a retired



middle school teacher and member of FCDAC. Through

also includes things that family members can say or do to help this transition back into sober living and with their family.

People who are new to recovery will bring both expectations and anxiety about the potential reaction their family members will bring with them. This will be their first attempt to get their life back to "normal," but they might have little memory of what sober life was like. They might be embarrassed or ashamed about their past behavior, and they might even find themselves among people from whom they have stolen in order to support their drug habit. They are often self-conscious about either they do not have money to bring gifts or they might only be able to afford very modest gifts. If the person has a job, he will find himself with more money than they had when all of their money was spent to support their drug habit. When thinking of buying gifts, they could be faced with the temptation to spend their money on drugs as they did in the past.



Through her personal

loss of her daughter to drug experimentation, Dana devotes her time reaching out to youth through presentations about the real consequences and high risk of experimenting with addictive substances and how it affects them, their futures, and their families. She contributes her insights monthly to the *Strategizer*.
Thanks, Dana!

I do not want to make this article sound negative, so I will share with you some suggestions from the article that we can do to help our family members transition successfully back into sober living and back into the family. Be sure to include the person in the conversation, even if he is sitting away from the group. The more he is included, the more he feels welcomed and at ease. When they arrive, welcome them and give them a job to help you. Doing something as simple as taking coats when people arrive or pouring water and tea in glasses will go a long way toward helping them feel useful and part of the group.

Finally, the subject of whether to serve alcohol is addressed. According to the article, if alcohol will be served, it is best to inform the person that alcohol will be served and to ask them the best way to handle it. The article states that some who are in recovery from drugs will choose to continue to drink alcohol. Others might be emotionally prepared to be around alcohol even though they plan to abstain from alcohol and all addictive substances. In my opinion, it is always best not to serve alcohol when one of the guests is new to recovery.

My hope is that you will create many new memories with your family and friends during this time of year and that stress will be avoided whenever possible. I wish each of you an abundance of peace as you gather with family and friends and prepare to welcome the New Year.

Our Partners in Prevention

More Great Community Events from our Friends at the ...





RESERVED

4TH ANNUAL THRIFTING EXTRAVAGANZA

PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING:
COATS, HOODIES, JACKETS OF ALL SIZES
AND WINTER ACCESSORIES
&
BOTTLED WATER FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY
HURRICANES HELENE AND MILTON

DONATIONS ACCEPTED
THROUGH DECEMBER 5TH
AT THE FCHS FRONT OFFICE

LAST YEAR, OVER 1300 ITEMS WERE DONATED



Cannabis and Adolescents Webinar January 15 2025

Webinar

Cannabis and Adolescents:
An Overview of the Science and Concerns from Leading Experts

Q&A Session with Dr. Mark Gold and Dr. Sarah Vinson

January 15, 2025
1:00 – 2:30 PM ET

[Register Now](#)



Dr. Mark Gold
Former Chairman of Psychiatry, Professor of Neuroscience, and Chair of Psychiatry at the University of Florida; Adjunct Professor at Washington University in St. Louis, School of Medicine



Dr. Sarah Vinson
Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at the Morehouse School of Medicine; Founder of the Lorio Psych Group



Explore the complex relationship between cannabis use and adolescent development with Dr. Mark Gold, M.D., and Dr. Sarah Vinson, M.D. The presentations will explore the effects of cannabis on teenage brain development, its potential long-term consequences, and emerging trends in use among younger populations.

[Register Here](#)

Let's Be Clear, GA Hosts 7th Annual Cannabis Prevention Education Summit Virtual Event!



Join us on **Tuesday, Jan 28, 2025, from 1:00 PM to 4:30 PM** for our annual event. Speakers will address high-THC products and their effects on mental health, including aggression. You will hear the latest on hemp regulations in GA and what you can do to help protect Georgia's youth.

[Register Here](#)



[Register Here](#)

Who Should Attend?

The Rx and Illicit Drug Summit welcomes and attracts a wide range of stakeholders addressing the opioid crisis, including:

- Counselors, social workers, therapists, psychologists, interventionists
- Law enforcement personnel
- First responders
- Public health and prevention officials
- Federal, state, and local officials and lawmakers
- Education specialists and researchers
- Treatment center owners and operators
- Advocates, families, and people in recovery
- Physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, pharmacists, dentists
- Attorneys

Save the Date

Harmony Grove Baptist Brotherhood 19th
Annual Drug and Alcohol Awareness Breakfast

January 18th 8:00 a.m.
Harmony Grove Baptist Church Fellowship Hall
5470 Keith Bridge Rd, Cumming, GA 30041

[RSVP HERE](#)

NEWS FOR YOU

Local News



Let's Talk Vaping with Principal Drew Hayes Gateway Academy

We are facing a serious problem in our schools: underage vaping. In



We are facing a serious problem in our schools: underage vaping. In celebration of Red Ribbon Week in October, Georgia Public Radio aired an episode of *Classroom Conversations* with Drew Hayes of Forsyth County Schools.

[Click Here to Listen](#)

State News

Addiction Recovery Awareness Day for the Georgia General Assembly



On Tuesday, January 21, 2025, **JOIN** the Georgia Recovery Community - health care professionals, family members, and other allies for the 2025 Addiction Recovery Awareness Day for the Georgia General Assembly.

This is our time to unite and support funding for the Georgia Recovery Community. The purpose of this day is to recognize and elevate the power of Recovery in the lives of everyday Georgians and to say thank you for the bipartisan support the Georgia Recovery Community receives from the General Assembly and our state Constitutional Officers.

If you have any questions about registration, please contact **Ciara Carnes**.

[Email Here](#) or [Call Here](#).

[Register Here](#)

National News

Recreational Weed Voted Down in November Elections

Drug Legalization, Elections Big



Loser!

Kevin Sabet is president of Smart Approaches to Marijuana and wrote a great opinion piece in the *Washington Times*. Not only did recreational

Marijuana get voted down in Florida and the Dakotas, but so did the legalization of psychedelics in Massachusetts.

Weed Voted Down in Florida

The legalization of Recreational Marijuana battle in Florida was a close one, but the good guys pulled it out with the support of Governor Ron DeSantis.

It was a David vs Goliath battle, and Trulieve, the marijuana company, outspent the opposition by millions.

The effects of Marijuana are hard to miss: psychosis, increased crashes involving drug-impaired drivers, the obnoxious invasive skunk smell, and, in general, the lower quality of life.

Read Kevin Sabet's article, *Drug Legalization Was Election's Biggest Loser*, [Here](#).



Read the article, *Legal Weed Goes up in Smoke*, by [Charles Fain Lehman](#), fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

[Click Here](#)

The issue will come up again, and voters need to be ready. What stopped it?

- Proactive Governor
- Voters didn't like that 90 percent of the money to push legalization came from outsiders wanting to cash in on addiction.
- People see the negative adverse effects of marijuana on family and friends.
- Marijuana STINKS

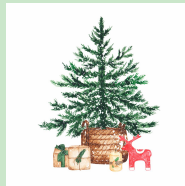
Supreme Court Case Will Look at FDA Vaping Regulations in December

A case testing the federal government's ability to regulate potentially harmful sweet-flavored tobacco vaping products seeming designed to attract youth will begin in December and kick off arguments at the US Supreme Court.

Anti-tobacco advocates say the regulations helped drive down youth vaping to a decade-low after an "epidemic level" peak in 2019. The vaping companies pushed back in court, countering that the FDA unfairly disregarded arguments that these vapes would help smoking cessation efforts by adults.

Listen to this podcast to find out more.

[Click Here](#)

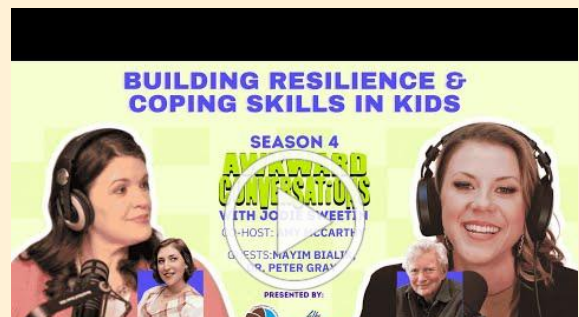


FYI

SEASON 4
AWKWARD
CONVERSATIONS

Episode 16
Building
Resilience

In this episode, Jodie Sweetin and Amy McCarthy are joined by Mayim Bialik, actress, neuroscientist, and mom



and child psychologist Dr. Peter Gray, to explore how parents can help children build resilience and develop essential



coping skills. Bialik offers her unique perspective as a neuroscientist and mom, while Dr. Gray shares his expertise in child development and the power of play. Together, they provide practical strategies for fostering confidence, emotional well-being, and independence in kids.

On the Calendar

December



- National Impaired Driving Prevention Month
- Jingle Jog 5K, December 15 City Center
- Christmas December 25



Save the Dates!

- February 4, 2025 Drug Summit at UNG
- April 13, 2025 The Walk for Recovery at The Cumming City Center

January



- Happy New Year January 1
- FCDAC Council Meeting, January 7
- Georgia Recovers meet the GA Assembly, January 21



Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council | 240 Elm Street | Cumming, GA 30040 US

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