



2013

# Annual Report



*Working together for  
community change!*

## Chairperson's Remarks

As a principal of a local public school, I am constantly hearing “suggestions” on how education should be improved and how it makes sense to have a test determine the effectiveness of a teacher. Many of the people trying to “fix” the system have never worked in a school setting nor do they understand the intricacies of instruction. While I may not agree with all of the reforms and “suggestions”, I would say that I respect those people who are working to better the educational system rather than just complain about it. In general, this connects to the work of non-profits. Instead of sitting back and complaining, we are working toward a positive change one way or another in our communities.

I truly believe in the work of non-profits, such as SERAC, and see many similarities between a non-profit and the public education system. They both are driven by their missions, scramble for funding each year, use data to evaluate programs, make decisions on what programs to run each year depending on funding, work to change the mind-set of people or groups, and they are required to work within guidelines created by people who often have no idea about the real work we all do. However, there are also many positive similarities; the most important being we have the ability to have positive life-long impact on someone's life. And this is why we all do what we do.

Over this past year, SERAC has done an immense amount of work in our area and in the state of Connecticut to meet the mission of the organization. We continue to work on more programs, apply and receive more grant funding, coordinate more public relations campaigns and work with more community partners than ever before. We have also quickly become the “go to” organization in our area, and eventually the State, when it comes to data services. This area of growth will help sustain SERAC into the future.

Through the work of our visionary staff and the support of our community partners, we have created connections that allows all of us to work together to bring school systems, colleges, community organizations, youth, parents and senior citizens, the highest quality prevention programs possible. Last year was another successful year which is a testament to all of the hard work of many people. Whether you are an employee, a partner or a provider, we recognize that together, we have a larger impact by working together.

Thank you,

*Christopher J. Sandford*

Chairperson, SERAC Board of Director

## **Executive Director's Remarks**

In 1989 SERAC began as an organization tasked with helping communities address the issues of substance use and abuse. Although that seems like a simple directive, the truth is it has been a moving target from the beginning. We have seen dramatic declines in tobacco use due to highly effective campaigns. We have seen increases in marijuana use and prescription drug misuse. We have seen the emergence of new drug threats like salvia and synthetic marijuana. Each of these changes has required that SERAC change, adapt and adjust to meet new challenges. This year has been no different. The end of our Drug Free Communities Grant funding has allowed us to expand our focus to include other aspects of prevention including Suicide Prevention, Tobacco Prevention, Energy Drinks, and Rx Drug Misuse among others. New State laws have forced us to address the potential for legal production, prescribing, dispensing and use of marijuana for certain medical conditions in our State. Emerging research suggests that effective prevention requires that we address not

only substance abuse itself but also interrelated mental health issues. New regulations from the State Department of Education have resulted in new opportunities for survey and evaluation work.

All of this change can be very overwhelming. SERAC has been successful in meeting these challenges through collaboration with our prevention partners within our region and throughout the State. By leveraging our strengths and the strength of our partners we have been and will continue to be able to respond to the ever changing demands of prevention. Thank you for your continued support and collaboration.

*Michele Devine*

SERAC Executive Director

## **Mental Health First Aid**

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that helps identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Mental Health First Aid is an interactive 12-hour course that presents an overview of mental illness and substance use disorders in the U.S. and introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of

mental health problems. The program builds understanding of the impact of these illnesses and disorders, and also overviews common treatments.

### ***Youth Mental Health First Aid***

The Youth Mental Health First Aid program introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents. The program builds understanding of the importance of early intervention and teaches individuals how to help a youth in crisis or experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. The course teaches participants the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of mental health challenges common among adolescents, including anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance use disorder. Participants do not learn to diagnose, or how to provide any therapy or counseling – rather, participants learn a core five-step action plan to support an adolescent developing signs and symptoms of mental illness or in an emotional crisis.

This past year Michele became a certified instructor for the Mental

Health First Aid program as well as the Youth Mental Health First Aid. In June, Angela was certified as a Youth Mental Health First Aid Instructor through a statewide training initiative provided by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. More information on costs and details can be found in the SERAC Service Catalog 2013.

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### **Suicide Prevention**

SERAC received a Suicide Prevention Grant from the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for 2012 through 2014. It is part of a larger Garrett Lee Smith grant to increase community awareness and training. Currently 8 towns have been awarded mini-grants to extend the effort to the town level (Old Lyme/Lyme, Groton, Montville, Ledyard, Mansfield, UCONN, Norwich, Shiloh Baptist church in New London)

Each of those towns will receive a Connect training to prepare them to create action plans to improve suicide prevention efforts in their towns.

Over 10 trainings were held in the 2012-2013 year and approximately 245 individuals were trained in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer). Groups that

participated in in QPR trainings include Three Rivers Community College staff and faculty, Regional Faith-Based Congregation, NFA SADD members, Our Lady of Lourdes Gales Ferry and SERAC Prevention Committee Members.

### **TIPS (Responsible Seller Server Training)**

Responsible beverage service programs target both on-premises and off-premises alcohol retailers and are designed to reduce sales to minors as well as intoxicated adults. TIPS Training is an evidence based prevention strategy that helps to enforce minimum legal drinking age laws, increase server familiarity with State and local restrictions on alcohol service, decrease failure to recognize false identification, and promote excellent customer service skills. Responsible beverage service works to eliminate gaps in prevention. As with all types of environmental prevention, responsible beverage service should be conducted as part of a larger comprehensive plan to reduce underage drinking

SERAC staff members provided seller server trainings to local package stores around the region. This past year we held several regional TIPS trainings

for liquor store owners and employees. TIPS trainings were held in the towns of Groton, Old Lyme and Ledyard.

### **4th Annual Prevention Conference**

May 2nd marked the 4th Annual Prevention Conference hosted by SERAC. This conference, which is a full day event focused on prevention, continues to grow year after year. Youth workers, school personnel, counselors and prevention professionals gathered at the Mystic Hilton to become educated on various prevention topics. Workshops included school climate, resiliency, marijuana laws, mental health and gambling awareness. This is a great way for local professionals to be provided with current information pertaining to prevention and great networking opportunities. Participants were welcomed with a lively performance from the Interactive Theatre Group which gave a lighthearted perspective on some of the difficult situations prevention professionals and youth workers are faced with on a daily basis. We are looking forward to continuing to provide our communities with the best education possible.

## **Trainings in 2012 – 2013**

Every year SERAC offers low to no cost monthly trainings to increase the knowledge of risk and protective factors associated with making healthy choices and avoiding risky behaviors. This past year the following training were held:

- Suicide Postvention
- QPR: Question Persuade Refer
- Current Drug Trends
- Play By the Rules Instructor Training
- Mental Health First Aid
- PACT 360 (Partnership with GPP)
- Teen Compliance Check Training (Partnership with GPP)

## **Youth Initiatives**

### ***6<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Forum***

On May 8th, SERAC hosted the 6th Annual Youth Forum at the Mystic Hilton. This fun and educational day was attended by 110 middle school students from Southeastern CT. Again the successful theme Dream It! Believe It! Live It! was continued in order to motivate and empower the students to make healthy choices. Students participated in interactive

workshops about stress reduction, underage drinking prevention, bullying, tobacco prevention, mental health awareness and positive relationships. In the morning the students took part in an upbeat and inspiring keynote presentation by motivational speaker Kevin Booker Jr. During this full day event students had the chance to make new friends and walk away with key information and tools that they could bring back to their schools, peers and families. Here is what some of the students said about the day: “I liked the partner interview because it helped me make new friends”, “I had fun and learned a lot”, “Great job, I want to come again next year”! Thank you to the teachers, administrators, counselors and youth workers for allowing the youth to be a part of this special day. Thank you to the following towns for providing their students with such a great opportunity: New London, Colchester, Groton, East Lyme, Norwich, Ledyard, Old Saybrook, Montville, and North Stonington.

### ***Adolescent Learning & Leadership Institute (ALLI)***

SERAC was the recipient of the STOP Act Grant which provides the ability to expand the Regional

Youth Leadership Coalition, which was started by SERAC for the 2011-2012 school year. The STOP Grant will provide funding to support the youth coalition for five years. The Coalition has transformed into the Adolescent Learning and Leadership Institute (ALLI) for high school students in the region. There were 49 students from eight local high schools that participated in the 2012/2013 school year.

Students met on a monthly basis to develop their leadership skills and learn about risk and protective factors associated with underage drinking. They assisted in the planning of SERAC initiatives. Members also received education on the following topics: Internet Safety, Shoulder Taps/Compliance Checks, Developmental Assets, Policy, Drinking and Driving and Bullying. We would like to thank the following presenters Karen Fischer, Paula Grillo, Christopher Sandford, Barbara Lockhart, Officer Karen Moorehead, 1Sgt. William Melanson, and Interactive Theatre Group.

Thank you to the school principals for supporting this initiative, and thank you to all the chaperones who were involved. The following high schools participated in ALLI: Wheeler

High School, Waterford High School, Montville High School, Griswold High School, NFA, Ledyard High School, Stonington High School and Bacon Academy.

### ***Statewide Tobacco Education Program (STEP)***

SERAC is continuing to provide the tobacco prevention curriculum STEP (Statewide Tobacco Education Program) which is funded through the CT Department of Public Health. This is an interactive program for youth ages 10-14 to become educated on the harmful effects of tobacco on the body, health and environment. The STEP program has been delivered during after-school programs, summer camps, and health classes. Youth in Griswold, East Lyme, Montville, Preston, Norwich and Thompson have participated in this program. STEP provides an excellent opportunity to work directly with youth across Southeastern CT. We have received great feedback and the kids really seem to enjoy this program.

### **Community Survey Data**

In the Fall of 2012 SERAC conducted a coalition survey to help with organizational planning. 132 community

members participated in the survey.

- 96% agreed that SERAC effectively advocates for change.
- As a result of SERAC efforts 78% feel that existing partnerships have been strengthened.
- Community members feel that monthly trainings, annual prevention conference, policy change and advocacy are of great value in the community.
- 95% agree that substance abuse prevention efforts have increased in Southeastern CT.

## **Public Awareness**

### ***Realtor Education Program***

A campaign was created for realtors to request that home owners lock up their Rx drugs when they have Open Houses. Studies have shown that this is one of the locations that active users obtain their pills. If you are interested in any of that material let us know.

### ***Rx Lockbox Disposal Program***

Over the years, SERAC has strengthened a partnership with the CT Department of Consumer Protection in order to educate communities on how to properly dispose of unused prescription medications. Drug Take Back Days were held in several communities in SECT with great success! It was determined that providing residents the opportunity to dispose of unused meds at any time was a priority. Working closely with the Department of Consumer Protection, several towns in SECT have installed 24 hour secure Prescription Drug Lock Boxes in hopes that residents will drop off unused meds. Thank you to the towns who have invested in such a preventative opportunity! Towns currently providing Prescription Drug Lock Boxes are Colchester, East Lyme, Groton, Montville, New London, Norwich, and Waterford.

### ***Marketing and Media***

Each month, SERAC highlighted a public service announcement in the three Big Y grocery stores (Old Lyme, Norwich and Groton). The campaigns are seen by those that are waiting in line at the deli counter. The campaigns align with the other work that we do. Big Y advertising has been a

strong supporter in prevention for the region and the state.

### **Problem Gambling Prevention**

SERAC continues to increase awareness and capacity of the region in Problem Gambling Prevention. During the 2012 – 2014 years SERAC will focus on three objectives: (1) To strategically gather statewide community awareness and readiness data; (2) To review and assess the efficacy of select current programs; and (3) To build and strengthen a gambling awareness infrastructure within the Region through the establishment of a Regional Gambling Prevention Team.

SERAC conducted key informant interviews with community members across the region to gather information on their perceptions and awareness of problem gambling in southeastern CT. Eighteen individuals participated in interviews. Some issues and perceptions that evolved during the process are listed below.

Common warning signs that were identified included:

- Spending money you can't afford to lose

- Being consumed by gambling
- Putting gambling above other priorities such as work, paying bills, spending time with family
- Shifts or changes in mood and personality
- Unexplainable economic troubles: selling personal items, excessive borrowing
- Neglecting basic needs: eating, sleeping, experiencing depression

Motivation for gambling:

- Exhilaration, excitement
- Risk-taking (physiological reward)
- Entertainment

Individuals referenced seeing PSA's, media campaigns, and TV commercials that highlighted the issue of problem gambling.

Overwhelmingly, participants referred to the impact of problem gambling in youth and senior populations. Several of the responses directly spoke of the need for prevention in problem gambling with youth in Southeastern CT. Participants spoke of the normalizing of gambling through scratch tickets, lotto, sports betting, and raffles

and pools and the impact this has on youth.

*“Do you want to bet?”...* a common phrase that we hear all over. For some, it triggers a reaction and a feeling to wager something of value on a game of chance. This year we partnered with Chelsea Groton Bank to create and distribute Financial Literacy education to high school students, providing the skills they need to manage their money and not spend it on “chance”. The complete program, “Bank on your Future” was presented in the towns of North Stonington and New London.

### **Town Highlights**

We recognize all the hard work that goes into preventing substance abuse in our region. Year after year our local communities continue to amaze us with their dedication to reducing substance abuse. Each individual town has proven that educating their residents is a top priority. Thank you for your commitment to SERAC’s mission!



### **Local Prevention Council initiatives include:**

- Children of Alcoholics Support Group
- Tobacco Free signs at parks and playgrounds
- Rx safe disposal information dissemination
- Pro-social family and youth activities
- Media campaigns
- Middle school youth awareness day
- Youth leadership programs
- Sticker shocks
- Youth surveys

### **Awards and Recognitions**

#### ***Outstanding Community Leadership***

*Patricia Albamonti Health Teacher, Wheeler Middle/High School*

Over the years Patricia, “Trish”, has shown an overwhelming amount of dedication and commitment to promoting healthy behavior among youth in Southeastern CT. She has a

powerful connection with her students and community and excels at being a positive role model. Trish is an active member of the Positive Health In Teens (PHIT) Coalition in North Stonington, and was responsible for the tremendous amount of teen involvement and participation. Every year she runs a prevention health contest with her students in order to educate on the risks associated with substance use. Several of her students have had their work publicized on the town billboard, in local Big Y grocery stores and in The Day Newspaper online. The enthusiasm of the students stems directly from her leadership. During the 2011-2012 school year Trish partnered with SERAC to help create and lead the Regional Youth Leadership Coalition, now known as ALLI. Thank you for all of your hard work and for setting such a great example.

### ***Outstanding Coalition Involvement***

#### *GASP Coalition (Groton Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention)*

Since receiving funding from the Drug Free Communities Support program in 1999, the GASP Coalition has been slowly and steadily growing into a vibrant,

and effective coalition representing the community it serves. Over thirty representatives from 12 sectors have been involved in the implementation of policy change initiatives and prevention programming. In 2005, the GASP Coalition was named “Coalition of the Year” by the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking for its work in implementing the Social Host Ordinance in Groton. The coalition has implemented several community wide initiatives including but not limited to a social norms campaign at the high school, family dinner nights, and safe prescription disposal site at the police department. Many of these initiatives were developed or coordinated by Program Coordinator Michelle Hamilton who has facilitated the GASP Coalition since 2003.

Currently the Coalition is working on proposing a drug paraphernalia ordinance in Groton, marketing and education to parents through a social marketing campaign called “Be the Wall”, prescription drug prevention and education and TIPS training for liquor permittees in the town and city of Groton.

## ***Employee Acknowledgements***

Jennifer St. Pierre Buckley came to us as a community volunteer and resident of Montville in October 2012. Jen has a bachelor's degree in human services and business. She previously volunteered for the Danielson Recreation Department. Jennifer has been a blessing and an asset to SERAC during the past year. She has assisted in many tasks, showing a great deal of initiative and passion for our mission and work. In the spring of 2013, Jen implemented the Statewide Tobacco Education Program (youth program) supported by the CT Department of Public Health across the eastern region in the following towns: Thompson, Griswold, East Lyme, Norwich, and Preston. We are tremendously grateful for her hard work and commitment to reducing substance abuse.

Lydia Gill- SERAC loves when interns are interested in the field of prevention. It is even better when they have an interest in research. Lydia came to us with an interest in both. She assisted us in completing one on one interviews with key stakeholders. The information

gathered was used to gain an understanding of the perception of gambling and problem gambling in Southeastern CT.

1SGT William Melanson was assigned to SERAC through the Counter Drug Unit of the National Guard. He was with us for a short time but brought a great deal of experience and knowledge in prevention and intervention. He was willing to jump in and speak to students, parents and communities about the need to reduce the impact of substances on our communities.

Christine Miskell, our Epidemiologist, is now full time. Though she has been with us for 7 years, she now will take on more of the implementation and coordination of surveys and other SERAC programs. She is a valuable member of the D2P2 Team.

We would like to thank both Stephanie Spargo and Margaret Gilbert for their hard work and dedication for SERAC. We wish them the best of luck and success in all their future endeavors.

## **SERAC Board of Directors**

Chairperson - Christopher Sandford, Wheeler School  
Secretary - Barbara Lockhart, Montville Youth Services  
Treasurer – Pamela Luketich, Chelsea Groton Saving Bank  
Patrick McCormack- Uncas Health District  
Stacey Lawton – SCADD  
Michelle Sylvestre – Dept. of Consumer Protection  
John Duca- SECT Re-Entry Program  
Scott Trepenier- Achievement First Hartford Academy  
Senator Andrea Stillman

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## **SERAC Staff**

Executive Director – Michele Devine  
Community Coordinator – Angela Rae Duhaime  
Epidemiologist – Christine Miskell  
Program Coordinator \_ Jennifer Buckley  
Accounting – Susan Keach

***Thank you to all the communities in Southeastern CT for the  
excellent work you do!***

Bozrah	New London
Colchester	North Stonington
East Lyme	Norwich
Franklin	Old Lyme
Griswold	Preston
Groton	Salem
Ledyard	Sprague
Lisbon	Stonington
Lyme	Voluntown
Montville	Waterford