

Youth Coalition works to ease teen transition

BY PHIL CUSTODIO
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Entering their teenage years as well as a new school, junior high can be a tough time for students.

Their soon-to-be classmates offered survival tips from the trenches at Transition Day, Jan. 25.

"They're all in this together – they need to rely on each other, not just their friends," said Karen Vangilder, president elect for Clarkston Coalition for Youth.

The coalition of parents, schools, and community groups hosted the fifth-annual event for about 600 seventh-grade student.

Junior high Leadership students prepared and organized several role-playing activities, games, and skits.

"This gave the Leadership students an opportunity to be leaders," Vangilder said. "They wrote the skits based on real situations, to give seventh graders tools to be successful. The Leadership students really stepped up."

Issues included bullying, from the perspective of bullies and those bullied, prescription and illegal drug abuse, good and bad choices, and social interactions and relationships.

"Bullying is a big issue," said Allison Farrelly, community organizer with Clarkston Coalition for Youth.

Tips for dealing with bullies include finding



John Paddock, Leadership Team teacher at Clarkston Junior High School, kicks off Transition Day for soon-to-be eighth graders. Photo provided by Sean Farrelly.

an adult in authority, and also making a stand if necessary, Farrelly said.

"The old way was to just walk away from bullying," she said. "Now, stand up for yourself, but there's a right way to do it."

"If it's ignored, that can reinforce it," Vangilder said.

For bystanders, they worked on stepping forward as a group to stop bullying.

"Instead of standing by, be more vocal – empower children to be more active," Farrelly said.

From the bully's perspective, they considered why they do it.

"Many don't realize they're bullying, and won't until someone stands up and says it's not right," Vangilder said.

Students also played Telephone, whispering progressively garbled messages from one to another, to illustrate how rumors quickly distort information, and watched a skit on the pitfalls of Facebook communication.

"All these ideas came from Leadership students," Farrelly said.

Coalition volunteers will also be at the Family Health and Fitness Expo, Feb. 5, at the Community Education Building.

"We will be presenting information about developmental assets and other resources available for parents and other concerned citizens," Farrelly said.

Other projects include the Sticker Shock program, in which volunteers go to local stores and label alcoholic beverages with reminders about underage drinking laws.

In May, they will work with Sashabaw Middle School Leadership students on Transition Day for fifth graders.

For high school seniors, they will present information on good choices at spring break and graduation parties. They also offer three \$500 scholarships – two at Clarkston High School and the other at Renaissance High School. Students can get applications at the High School Counseling Office, available mid February.

Clarkston Coalition for Youth is a non-profit, grass-roots organization founded in 1995 and funded by Oakland County Health Division, Office of Substance Abuse, along with private and business donations.

"We partner with the community and schools to support nurturing, healthy environment for kids to grow up in," Vangilder said. "We'd love to have more community involvement."