

Juvenile Justice board
advocates 'Five Promises'

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Spirits were high at Wednesday's Juvenile Justice Advisory Board (JJAB) meeting as members celebrated national recognition of their commitment to "Five Promises" to help children succeed in life.

A comprehensive research report released by America's Promise Alliance – "Every Child/Every Promise" – measured the presence of the Five Promises in children's lives, and the impact the Promises have on children's overall well being.

The Five Promises include the following:

- caring adults;
- a safe place;
- a healthy start;
- an effective education; and
- opportunities to help others – at home, in school and in the community.

The report reveals that to succeed in life, young people must experience at least four of the Five Promises. The report also states that when youth receive these fundamental resources, economic and racial disparities can be eliminated.

Less than one in three children are receiving enough of the Five Promises to be confident of success, according to the report, which adds that millions of children don't yet have even one of these essential resources.

The Five Promises concept comes out of America's Promise, created at the 1997 Presidents' Summit for America's Future by Presidents Bush, Carter, Clinton, Ford and First Lady Nancy Reagan, who challenged America to make youth a national priority.

The goal of America's Promise is to help change the lives of 15 million underserved children over the next five years through the power of the Five Promises.

The JJAB has embraced the Five Promises, which has resulted in Los Alamos being selected as "One of America's 100 Best Communities for Young People."

Sharon Stover has served as the JJAB coordinator since its inception. She explained that Kevin Holsapple of the Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation shared an announcement of the recognition program he had received. Venessa Finn from the LACDC and Barb Marcille of Teen Court worked together to submit local information to America's Promise Alliance.

"One of the programs that incorporates all five promises is our "Building Leadership Skills," which is a collaboration of Leadership Los Alamos and the JJAB," Stover said. "Building Leadership Skills is an annual two-day workshop for high -school students that includes a professional facilitator who works with the teens on developing skills for building relationships, increasing confidence, and positive and effective communication.

The group also participates in outdoor team challenge activities including a ropes course. The participants select community service projects and work throughout the year with adult leaders to plan, raise necessary funds, and complete their projects.”

The JJAB was established in 2004 in resolutions adopted by the school board and county council. The JJAB includes more than 30 representatives from youth, education, legislative, law enforcement, judiciary, social and health services, media, and recreation. The JJAB is lead by Municipal Court Judge Alan Kirk, who has served as board chair since its inception.

Other community-wide collaborations working on behalf of children and youth that contributed to the national recognition include the Los Alamos Family YMCA, LAPS and the Youth Environmental Services (YES CORP), a program specifically for ages 11-17 that combines volunteer service, environmental education and work experience.

YES focuses on trail improvement, landscaping and watershed restoration in Los Alamos, and is another partnership between the YMCA, which administers the program, and Los Alamos County, which provides the trained adult leaders.

The Community Health Council was formed in 2001 to address health issues through ongoing research and coordination of services. Its 22 members include the Los Alamos Medical Center, crisis centers, counseling agencies, the schools, Maternal and Child Health and others.

The DWI Planning Council, made up of law enforcement officials, school and service organizations representatives, works to reduce underage drinking through educational and law-enforcement efforts.

The Kiwanis Club of Los Alamos sponsors youth clubs such as Key Club at the high school, Builder's Club at the middle school, and K-Kids at the elementary schools. Kiwanians attend the youth club meetings and, along with school faculty members, work with the youth to complete community service projects and participate in youth-mentoring-youth projects such as “Read and Lead.”

The Kiwanis Club also sponsors youth each year to attend "Key Leaders Conference," a national training program that focuses developing leadership skills.

There are other local youth programs that added to Los Alamos County receiving the national award.

“There is some funding available through America’s Promise Alliance that we hope to apply for so we can do even more to help the youth of Los Alamos County,” Stover said. Members of the JJAB and the LACDC will attend a ceremony Oct. 10-11 in Washington, D.C., in honor of their selection as “One of America's 100 Best Communities for Young People.”