

# tough love is out!

at kids escaping drugs we save lives

By Ellen Mintzer

At Kids Escaping Drugs (KED), an organization which offers community education, early intervention and treatment to chemically dependent youth, the "tough love" approach is discouraged. Administrative Director Ellen Breslin says, "We encourage boundaries and safety," emphasizing that an overly harsh approach can be disastrous for vulnerable young people.

Located on Harlem Road in West Seneca, the Renaissance Campus is a residential treatment center for chemically dependent teens and young adults, ages twelve to twenty. There are two houses on the Campus—Stepping Stones for girls, with sixteen beds, and Renaissance House for boys, with thirty beds. Both are furnished with comfortable couches and shelves full of books and DVDs, providing a homey feeling. In addition to treatment, the patients fill their days with schooling, life skills training, recreational activities, and field trips to fun destinations including Buffalo Bills and Sabres games and ventures like the Maid of the Mist. The Campus is also in the process of expanding in order to be able to provide stabilization and reintegration services in addition to residential treatment. Once the expansion is complete, the Campus will have a total of seventy seven beds.

Breslin says, "There is a high incidence of co-occurrence with addiction and mental health disorder—they tend to dance together." The residents at the Campus receive care from highly trained professionals, such as a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, Licensed Social Workers, a Medical Director, CASACs and an Art Therapist, in both individual and group settings. The walls in the therapy room are adorned with posters stating the rules of the groups—respect is paramount—and offering positive affirmations. Renaissance Campus also offers a robust family program, and Breslin indicates that there is an encouragingly high level of family involvement – "On Wednesday nights, the parking lot is packed."

In addition to the treatment facility, KED boasts an impressive community education program called Face2Face. The program offers peer-to-peer presentations, in which recovering young people visit schools and share their experiences, emphasizing the risks and consequences involved in the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Additionally, parent presentations are provided. The Program Director, Jessica Hutchings, says "We spend a lot of time educating adults about the signs, symptoms and trends [of drug abuse], which are ever-changing." She underscores the vital importance of parental vigilance

and an understanding of the consequences in order to prevent full-blown addiction. Face2Face also offers an early intervention program. Hutchings calls it "the reactive piece to the proactive approach of community outreach." At-risk young people, identified by schools and families, come to KED with their parent(s) or guardian. During the session they meet with interventionists and peers in recovery, and receive clinical recommendations if necessary.



Both KED and the Renaissance Campus are staffed with passionate, dedicated professionals who truly care about the young people they serve and believe strongly in the work they do. Mario Hernandez, Training and Operations Coordinator, asserts that instead of just patching people together, "We save lives here," a sentiment echoed by Breslin and Hutchings. If you or someone you know needs help with substance abuse, or if you would like to learn more about Kids Escaping Drugs, visit [www.ked.org](http://www.ked.org) or call 716-827-9462.

Ellen Mintzer is a freelance writer in Buffalo.

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