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New substance use treatment model for adolescents in Amherst County seeks to reinforce positive behaviors

Horizon Behavioral Health has been awarded a five-year 2.7-million-dollar grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), to offer expanded treatment options for substance use disorders (SUD), and/or co-occurring substance use and mental disorders (COD), to benefit adolescents (ages 12-18) and transitional aged youth (ages 16-25) in Central Virginia.

The purpose of this program is to enhance and expand comprehensive treatment, early intervention, and recovery support services by involving families and primary caregivers in the treatment plan. The program will utilize the Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA), a behavioral therapy that seeks to harness social, recreational, familial, school, or vocational reinforcers and skill training so that non-substance using behaviors are rewarded and can replace substance use behavior (Meyers & Smith, 1995). This positive, non-confrontational approach emphasizes engagement in positive social activity, positive peer relationships, and improved family relationships.

Horizon Behavioral Health will partner with Amherst County Public Schools to begin offering the treatment program to adolescents and their families in Fall 2023.

“We are very excited about this partnership with Horizon Behavioral Health to address substance use among our students.” says Marie Petrone, Director of Student/Family Wellness & Attendance, Amherst County Public Schools. “During the last school year, we saw more than a 200% increase in substance-related disciplinary infractions, mostly related to vapes and gummies containing THC. Changes to marijuana laws have made these products more accessible to students, and some students report buying them online. When students bring illegal substances onto school property, we want to hold them accountable for the safety risk that poses, but we also want them to learn from their mistakes. We believe partnering with Horizon will bring much needed prevention and treatment to students so they can reach their full potential.”

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Horizon Behavioral Health has been the primary public behavioral healthcare provider in the Region 2000 area for more than 54 years. Horizon provides services to adults and children, addressing challenges with mental health, substance use and intellectual disabilities. Horizon is accredited by CARF International. This represents the highest level of accreditation that can be given to a behavioral health organization.