

YBGR expanding chemical dependency program

By CHARLIE DENISON | Reporter

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch CEO Mike Chavers knows these are challenging times for nonprofits nationwide. He also knows these are hard times for families all over the state, and he wants to do his part to make a difference.

How? By announcing the expansion of YBGR's Chemical Dependency Program.

"We see the need to expand this program and expand our outreach to outlying communities all over the state, including Lewistown," Chavers told the News-Argus last week. "There are more and more kids out there who come from families with substance abuse issues."

Expansion of the chemical dependency program includes "outpatient and intensive outpatient chemical dependency treatment, chemical dependency screenings and evaluations, family chemical dependency counseling and prevention education services for youth."

YBGR Director of Chemical Dependency Walter Shore was instrumental in making this program expansion a reality, Chavers said, as he believes there is a strong need to develop this program.

Last month, Shore said in a YBGR news release that youth "deserve the opportunity to experience life without being under the influence of alcohol and drugs."

Shore added that youth also deserve to know there is "someone there to help."

YBGR wants to be that "somebody."

Chavers and Shore agree there is no easy solution to this problem, but more must be done in hopes to prevent this problem from worsening.

"Youth are starting to abuse substances at an alarmingly younger age and Montana's current treatment services are not able to address the high rates of child and adolescent alcohol and drug use," Shore said. "Early intervention... is key to preventing higher levels of treatment interventions later in life."

Along with substance use disorders, YBGR is seeing an increase in mental health disorders, which is why the program is also discussing an "extreme and immediate" need for more



Mike Chavers

therapeutic foster care parents.

"We are facing significant challenges in Montana," Chavers said. "We constantly ask ourselves, 'what are the needs and how do we prepare to meet those needs?' We want to create a healthier Montana, which is why we're expanding."

On this note, Chavers adds that YBGR partners with organizations in town that can help them "prepare kids for life," such as Child Protective Services, the Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start and others.

"Our values are similar," Chavers said. "We all try to do the

best we can for the kids."

The new chemical dependency program received licensure from the state of Montana in November. YBGR is currently looking for qualified staff in the Lewistown area and elsewhere.

This has not been an easy task.

"Finding qualified staff is an issue statewide," Chavers said. "There is a workforce shortage in almost every industry. I would say, however, we've been very lucky in the Lewistown area. The program has been able to attract high-quality people and great leadership, but we are still in need of more people."

This goes for the rest of the state, too. They need more help, whether it's employees for their chemical dependency program or foster homes for children with additional mental health challenges.

"There is never a shortage of kids who need a therapeutic youth mentor," Chavers said.

In addition to their chemical dependency program and therapeutic youth mentor program, YBGR offers psychiatric residential treatment, case management and home support.

For more information, go to www.ybgr.org or call the local office at 538-4418.

Startling statistics

According to "Addressing the Impact of Drugs Montana," an intensive study by the Department of Justice on substance use in the state, there was a 130 percent increase in child abuse and neglect district court filings from 2009 to 2015 and a 53 percent increase in dependent neglect cases in the Office of the Public Defender from 2012-2016.

AID Montana states this trend is "strongly tied to substance use," as the study indicates "65 percent of all out-of-home placements with the Child and Family Services Division with DPHHS have parental substance use indicated."

Information collected by the DOJ, the Judicial Branch and DPHHS has determined the most common substances involved in these out-of-home placements (as of April 2016) are "methamphetamine (46 percent), alcohol (18 percent), marijuana (17 percent), and prescription drugs (12 percent)."

AID Montana's report also provides a snapshot of "many important initiatives being implemented in the state of Montana to address substance use." Such initiatives include a Montana Opioid Strategic Planning Task Force, substance use prevention education in schools and continued commitment to child protection by the Child and Family Services Division. According to the recent study, a total of 1,570 children were discharged from CFSO in 2016. Sixty-two percent of those children remained with family or other relatives. In 2016, 282 of the children who achieved a permanency placement were adopted.

YBGR wants to do their part to help improve what has become a very real crisis for the state of Montana.

