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no one goes without.*



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Findings from Substance Use Dialogue Sessions Held in La Plata County

Pine River Valley residents discussed the impacts of substance use on their lives, families, and communities.

BAYFIELD, COLO.: June 18, 2023: Pine River Shares (PRS) and Southern Colorado Community Action Agency (SoCoCAA) teamed up with Pine River Valley residents in the fall of 2022 to learn about their experiences with substance use and the supports and resources needed by their rural communities. The findings from the dialogue sessions were compiled in March 2023 and are presented below.

As background, substance use prevention and intervention efforts, oftentimes, do not reach people living in isolated communities like those of the Pine River Valley. The consequences can be harmful, sometimes deadly, leaving families and communities vulnerable. **The findings from these dialogue sessions may help individuals and communities create useful strategies that address the specific root causes of substance use.**

Recognizing the significance of these dialogue sessions and their findings, Lori Niewold, the Executive Director of SoCoCAA, thanks Rocky Mountain Health Plan for the grant funding to complete this project.

The Process

These findings were gathered during five initial and five follow-up sessions offered to residents in four locations that included Ignacio (two sessions offered: Native and non-Native American), Bayfield, the South Valley (Allison), and the North Valley (Vallecito).

Over 50 people, ranging in age from young adults to seniors, attended the community dialogue sessions facilitated by Pine River Shares staff. Participants attended a session nearest their residence to address their experiences with substance use. Thirty of the 50 participants, representing each of the dialogue sites, attended a follow-up session to review their community's data, identify key themes, and summarize the gathered information across all sites.

The Findings

Alcohol, tobacco, methamphetamine, and opioids tops the list of **substance uses most prevalent** in the above rural areas. Of these, residents named alcohol, meth and opioids as **the most problematic and destructive substances** used. The **people most impacted** by substance use are the users, their families, children/youth, followed by the entire community.

Rural residents identified the **most harmful impacts of substance use to individuals** are physical and mental health issues, followed by relationship issues, isolation, death, and suicide. **Friends and families** of substance users reported experiencing depression, suicide, death, financial impacts, and the destruction of families and relationships as the top impacts. According to attendees, theft and crime caused by substance use are two of the biggest **impacts on rural communities**, followed by destroying trust between community members, further isolation, and loss of community members.

Pine River Valley residents identified the **best ways to reduce the harm of substance use in rural areas** are to implement local peer support and resource groups and community level, peer-led interventions. Other ways identified to reduce harm

include offering positive, accessible, social activities; provide financial support for peer-led interventions; and with support systems and safety planning organized by community members.

Residents identified the **most effective preventions strategies** as co-creating culturally relevant social and group activities to help reduce isolation; provide love and support; offer validation for youth at home and in the community; provide early age prevention (3-5 y/o); and culturally generated prevention programs.

The **least helpful responses** to substance use in rural communities are jail time, criminalization, and fines, followed by the shame, negativity and stigma associated with use.

The **most helpful responses to substance use in Pine River Valley communities** include the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Wellness Court; peer supported interventions; access to rehab services and counseling; and restorative justice programs.

When asked **why people in the Pine River Valley use substances**, the most common responses were due to isolation and loneliness followed by depression and low self-esteem.

Other reported factors include a family history of use, social/peer pressure, and socially accepted alcohol use.

Numerous respondents used substances for pain management, either physical or mental, to "numb," and "feel better," for "comfort," and to avoid "dealing with reality/problems."

A few responses related to recreational use of substances for fun and to relieve boredom.

The **outcomes sought** by the hosts of the dialogue sessions on substance use in the rural communities of the Pine River Valley are that the findings may be used to **develop and implement effective, culturally relevant intervention and prevention strategies that address the specific root causes of substance use and are informed by the needs and solutions identified by rural community members.**

The Hosts

Pine River Shares, centered in Bayfield, is a constituent-led social justice **leadership project, that brings together the knowledge, skills, and resources of people in the Pine River Valley to increase collective power and bring about positive social change resulting in healthy, thriving Pine River Valley communities.**

Located in Ignacio, Southern Colorado Community Action Agency's mission is to empower community members of all ages to recognize and reach their full potential by providing select programs and services in order to create better communities.

More information about Pine River Shares programs can be found at <https://www.pinerivershares.org>

More information about Southern Colorado Community Action Agency can be found at <https://sococaa.org>

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