



United Way  
of Bradley County

## United Way grant helps provide life skills training to area students

*(Tenth in a series detailing the 14 programs receiving United Way of Bradley County grants made possible through the Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Fund)*

Youth today are inundated with all sorts of temptation: drugs, alcohol, tobacco and violent behavior. Each year, it seems that these temptations reach younger and younger children. To fight against children being drawn into destructive actions and behavior, programs are being put into action to help these youngsters at even earlier ages.



One of those programs is the STARS program. STARS stands for Students Taking a Right Stand, and is a school-based non-profit program that encourages students to make healthy choices and refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and violence.

STARS is one of 14 programs receiving funding from a United Way of Bradley County grant made possible through the Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Fund.

Shelly Tullier is the local liaison for the STARS program, and is presently meeting with 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at the local middle schools using the Life Skills Training curriculum.

"I do 10 sessions for 7<sup>th</sup> grade," Tullier said. The program provides for 13 sessions for 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 10 session for 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 5 sessions for 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

“They are in progression, so they build on each other each year,” she explained. “It’s building on what you already know and it is age appropriate.”

Tullier said each session is different, but also works into a total program to enhance the children’s life skills.

“First session is drugs and alcohol; second session is decision making; we talk about media in the third session and the fourth week is anger management and how you control your anger,” she said. “Fifth week is anxiety and we tie that together with anger management because in many cases, your body responds the same way to anger as it does to anxiety, so we go over several techniques on how to control each and talk about what works for them.

“The next week is communication – verbal and non-verbal,” Tullier continued. “The next week is social skills, such as overcoming shyness, while we talk about assertiveness in week eight. Resolving conflict is the ninth class and the last topic we talk about is peer pressure.”

Tullier spoke to 7<sup>th</sup> graders this past week at Jim David’s Social Studies class at Cleveland Middle School, discussing the media.

“We talk about how the media will often times glamorize drugs and alcohol, and violence, and how they need to see through some of this and learn about the dangers,” she said. Tullier pointed out in the class how manufacturers will target certain types of people with certain messages – moms might be targeted when an auto company talks about the safety of their vehicles, while young men might be targeted when the speed and maneuverability of a vehicle is the focus of the advertisement.

She talks with students about the three C’s: clarify the message, consider the consequences and choose the right option. Student comments show that they appreciate Tullier talking with them about life-changing decisions and how they ultimately make the final choice, and how they can do that in a way that is best for their future.

Earlier in the week, she spoke to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at Lake Forest Middle School about social skills.

"I had them give each other compliments, which they really liked, and then told them their assignment was to give someone a compliment not in this class – someone who might normally never receive a compliment – and see how they respond with expecting a response," Tullier said. "You will be surprised at what they learn from our activities that they carry with them later in life after they see how these activities make a difference with their peers."

Statistically, Life Skills Training has shown an 87 percent reduction in drug use among 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Research also shows that the Life Skills Training helps middle-school age children in making the right decisions to resist alcohol and tobacco and also reduce violence and other high-risk behaviors.

"This prevention/intervention type programming is proven to successfully reduce alcohol and drug abuse, but unfortunately, the current school economic climate does not allow most districts the luxury of providing this type of support, and therefore, they often see the unfortunate consequences related to not doing this type of programming," explained Matt Ryerson, United Way of Bradley County Vice President of Community Investment Strategies.

"That need or gap is exactly the role that the Bradley Memorial Health Endowment Funds were created to fill, and the United Way is honored to be able to both meet the expectations of the Board of Trustees original vision for these funds and meet the needs of our community," he added.

Tullier said that while the LST program is not available in Bradley County for 6<sup>th</sup> graders due to funding, reaching these students as early as 7<sup>th</sup> grade does still make a big difference.

"They are already involved in risky behavior by the time they reach this age, or are being tempted to become involved, even before they reach high school," she said. "This program builds self-esteem and decision-making skills which will help them make the right choices that they face and will face as teen-agers."

To find out more about the STARS or Life Skills Training program, contact either Shelly Tullier or Karen Glenn, STARS director, at (423) 209-5535.

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**DISCUSSING MEDIA** – The STARS program’s Shelly Tullier discusses advertising with 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at Cleveland Middle School this past week during one of the Life Skills Training exercises.