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Area youth spend day at conference
YIT builds coalition

By JESSIE FORAND
Messenger Staff Writer

ST. ALBANS — Youth in Transition (YIT) is a grant-funded program that offers support to young people, typically ages 15 to 21, who are going through an awkward or difficult time in life.

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services' YIT grant coordinator Ebony Nyoni has worked with area youth for a few years serving as a mentor and recently helped obtain a space where teens can hang out,

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Kayla Messier, left, and Cheyenne Knuth, president and vice president of the New Generations leadership group, speak from the BFA gymnasium's stage during the third annual Youth In Transition conference, held for the first time in a local school.

JESSIE FORAND, St. Albans Messenger

YOUTH

Road back from drug abuse

Young woman relates horrors of life as addict

By JESSIE FORAND
Messenger Staff Writer

ST. ALBANS — The third Annual Youth in Transition Conference was held Friday at Bellows Free Academy. Carol was there, among the young people. No last name. No photos allowed.

She is petite, but her personality and powerful life's story filled the school gym.

She was born to drug-addicted, alcoholic parents.

‘I didn’t know how to get out of this hole that I’d literally created for myself.’

Carol, drug/alcohol abuse survivor

Her mother sobered up after a moment of enlightenment lying in bed, a gun beneath her pillow and her infant daughter by her side. Carol was six months old then.

All but predestined for addiction, Carol began experimenting with alcohol and drugs before reaching her teens, “trying to survive what

I would call the minefields of adolescence,” she added.

She was uncomfortable in her own skin then and sought

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socialize, and be safe after school.

The New Generation space, which shares a name with Nyoni's youth leadership group sponsored by NCSS's YIT, opened its doors at 17 Lake St. late last year and is available for use Mondays from 3 to 6 p.m.

Members of the New Generations advisory board, president Kayla Messier and vice president Cheyenne Knuth, addressed the YIT Conference after a student named Cameron performed Justin Bieber's pop song, "Boyfriend."

The young women explained their group inspires positive physical and mental health well-being.

"We envision a region where youth are respected and valued as celebrated citizens of our community," Knuth said.

St. Albans City Mayor Liz Gamache also addressed the crowd, which included area service providers from the Community Justice

Center, Franklin County Caring Communities, the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, the Vermont Dept. of Labor, and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps., among others.

Gamache said they city, like the youth gathered to hear her speak, was in transition.

She said the two groups shared many common denominators.

In order to transition successfully, she added, "You need to have a vision, and so part of success is committing to a vision, dreaming."

Talking about resources as the young adults were Friday, Gamache said, was tremendous because "it's not easy to move in a direction. It takes hard work. It

does take a personal commitment, but it also, as you well know, takes one another to support each other so that you can move forward and achieve the goals and the dreams that you hope for in your future."

Gamache commended those who chose to participate and said she would meet with the organizers to hear what insights came out of the day's discussions so the community might help in their continuing efforts.

Messier said that YIT's next event is the Valentine's Day dance, to be held at City Hall on Feb. 14.

The fundraiser will feature a DJ and costs \$7, though \$2-off coupons were given at Friday's conference.

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refuge where she could find it. In alcohol she felt like she had found "the piece of the puzzle I'd been missing all my life."

Her time spent drinking, though, was not a beautiful experience. She was drunk, vomited on herself, and at times wet her bed. Drinking, however, had its own way of quelling embarrassment and she saw it as one small bit of the greater whole of her developing lives.

When living in a "dry" home as her parents tried to overcome addiction, Carol made friends with those from whom she could get her fix. As her tolerance to substances grew, so did her intake. She became angry and violent, punching walls and getting into physical altercations with her mother.

Getting kicked out made her think more strategically.

Once she started high school, she found solace in upperclassmen, but the results of her social efforts proved dangerous.

"I loved the attention," she said. She sought help in Alcoholics Anonymous but at that point saw only as "old people" telling stories.

As a blackout drinker, Carol often woke up without knowing where she was, sometimes during intercourse not knowing whether she'd given consent. That's when she, she said, she became known as the school slut and suffered verbal and physical abuse from her peers.

She attempted suicide two months into high school. A doctor said if she'd taken just a couple more pills she would most

likely have succeeded.

After a hospital stint, Carol spent four years lying to therapist, saying that she did not use drugs and alcohol. She would stop using for short periods just to prove she could.

Already depressed, ingesting a depressant such as alcohol made things worse. One summer she lived in a dog kennel with a "crackhead" she made her boyfriend. Showing up to work with hickeys on her neck and smelling badly -- she bathed only in pond water because running water wasn't available -- she met complaints from higher-ups.

"I didn't know how to get out of this hole that I'd literally created for myself," she said.

When her mother kicked her out of the house -- her meth-addicted friends were not welcomed guests -- and all she could ingest without vomiting was SlimFast and alcohol, it was time for a change.

Carol said she didn't attempt to kill herself because she didn't want to see her brothers' faces if she was again unsuccessful. That was the one time in her speech that tears welled in her eyes. Her voice grew shaky for a moment.

At 17, she entered a treatment facility. Later she finished high school while in a halfway house.

Graduating high school was surreal, she said; "I thought I'd be dead before then."

She never thought of applying to college, and her addiction at such an early age had adversely affected her education.

When thinking again of

AA, she envisioned a life spent in church basements at meetings, she said.

However, AA meetings offered her a new clarity and eased what she, and the group, calls a "spiritual malady." It's not the method for everyone, she said, but it is one way to get help.

Recovery wasn't easy, though, Carol said, adding to her incredibly compelling recollection.

"The first five years of sobriety were constantly painful," she said.

She noticed that others in AA had similar backstories but managed to lead purposeful, meaningful lives. She started to let her guard down, letting go of old patterns and building relationships.

"I'd never really had anybody get to know me," she explained.

She learned that the feeling of discomfort she felt was part of a growth process. She was finally challenging herself.

Since recovery, Carol has furthered her education within the Community College of Vermont and then at the University of Vermont. She traveled the globe for a year and attended AA meetings along the way. She went to the first-ever women's AA meeting in Zanzibar, she said.

Sadly, her father after maintaining sobriety for years relapsed and died. She was never able to say goodbye.

Buy, Carol said, she didn't have to drink to deal with it.

See the accompanying article for a closer look at YIT and Friday's conference.