

Achievers' Club Hits 30-Year Milestone

As many of us look forward to the new school year, the members of the Millstone Alliance to Prevent Substance Misuse are looking back on the past 30 years that the afterschool Achievers' Home Work Club has been in existence. That's right – 30 years!

In 1993, with input from school and community representatives, a proposal was sent to the Monmouth County Board of Alcohol and Drug Abuse for funds to provide prevention programming for the Millstone School District. Community, school and township input was sought to develop a funding proposal. One suggestion was for an afterschool program where students would work with teachers on completing homework assignments. The original idea came from longtime Millstone resident, Lou Ambio. He recognized that many young people who struggle academically may not have the guidance and support they need to succeed in school. He shared his thoughts with Karen Hyers, who was then the school guidance counselor. She had heard about another district that wanted to extend support to students past the walls of the school building by implementing an afterschool homework club in a local apartment building. Additional input came from Jerry Popkin (former Millstone Principal, /Superintendent and Curriculum Director). They reviewed research which indicated that students who feel connected, engaged and positive about school, build important academic, social and resiliency skills which are all important protective factors against substance misuse and risky behaviors.

The proposal was submitted and the Millstone Alliance was awarded funding for an After School Homework Club. Students who had difficulty completing homework assignments were referred by classroom teachers, and with parent approval they were invited to be part of the program. Initially, Mrs. Helen Bruseloff was the supervising lead teacher, and since 1995 Mrs. Joanne Schiumo has been in charge of recruiting and providing support to students and teachers, outreaching to parents, and taking care of the myriad of administrative responsibilities needed to make this program successful.

Helen Varvi, Alliance Coordinator, has applied for funding each year since from Monmouth County, through the Governor's Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (GCADA). Although funding levels have varied across the years, overall, the Alliance has provided support to the Millstone School District in an amount exceeding \$100,000 for this program and has reached well over 500 students. A few years ago, the name of the program was changed to the Achievers' Club to more accurately represent the expanded goals of building self-confidence and lifelong social skills that young people need to succeed. In 2021, the Millstone School District implemented its own Homework Club and the Achievers' Club collaborated by adding another day to continue offering a two-day program for students. In addition to funding for the Achievers' Club, the Alliance has also provided prevention education to elementary and middle school students amounting to over \$150,000 over the years as well.

Here are some comments from former Achievers' Club participants:

- *It helped me improve on my grades*
- *They explain problems very well*
- *It helped me a lot*
- *It helps me do better*

- *It grew my skills*
- *It grew me*
- *It helped me because my mom didn't get it*

Parents also feel very positive about the Achievers' Club:

- *He hates H.W. Club - I love it. He is really bad at home with HW*
- *He didn't like going, but it worked*
- *Now when she does homework, she tries to teach me the tools she learned*
- *She looks forward to the Achievers' Club; just makes it fun for her*
- *More confident and happy to come home and say that his homework was actually done!*
- *It is a good program and I hope they will be able to continue it next year*
- *It rocks!! Thank you all very much; you've been helpful and supportive. Very much appreciated!*

A special recognition will be presented at the September 20th Township Committee Meeting to founding and current residents who have worked so hard to make the Achievers' Club a success. The presentation will commence at 8 PM. We invite any former students and families who participated in the Achievers' Homework Club over the years to attend and share some of their memories and experiences. If you cannot attend, any thoughts and comments can be sent to millstonealliance@gmail.com and they will be shared with our honorees.

To ensure programs like this continue, please consider joining the Alliance and be part of the important process of responding to the needs of our community through effective prevention efforts.