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## Elgin drug & gang task force launches new program

By Elena Ferrarin

A new substance abuse prevention program launched in January by the Elgin Drug and Gang Task Force targets freshmen at Larkin and Elgin high schools.

The program is funded by a three-year, \$75,000 per year grant that next year will include a communications campaign aimed at youth and parents who allow youth to drink, said task force secretary Ryan McSheffrey.

The grant was awarded by the division of family and community services of the Illinois Department of Human Services, said Deb Howe, director of marketing and development for Renz Addiction Counseling Center. The center is the fiscal agency for the task force.

Illinois Youth Survey results show that both Larkin and Elgin High have a large underage drinking population, McSheffrey said.

Students are learning about substance abuse prevention, but also life skills and goal-setting, project coordinator Ricardo Gasca said Wednesday during a presentation to Elgin City Council members.

"In order for them to do prevention, we need to teach them the right decision-making," he said.

The program takes place two days a week at each school, during study hall at Elgin High and during physical education class at Larkin, McSheffrey said.

The task force, which has been around since the late 1980s, has shifted focus toward prevention — rather than intervention — in the last seven years, board member Charla Waxman said.

The task force wants to expand its membership among local businesses, and religious and civic organizations, said its media representative, Janelle Walker.

"We're looking for people who have time and want to volunteer because they have a heart for kids," she said.

For more information email [ryan@renzcenter.org](mailto:ryan@renzcenter.org) or check out the group's Facebook page at [facebook.com/pages/Elgin-Gang-Drug-Task-Force/133744506651296](https://facebook.com/pages/Elgin-Gang-Drug-Task-Force/133744506651296).