



# The High School View

The High School View is staffed and prepared entirely by students from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and published on their behalf by The Martha's Vineyard Times.

## Juvenile Diversion Program offers a second chance

BY NATALIE WAMBUI

This year, for the first time, the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) is working with the Cape and Islands District Attorney's Office to provide an alternative to formal prosecution for young people through the Juvenile Diversion Program. Led on campus by school resource officer Jillian Sedlier-Clarke, the program aims to help students avoid a criminal record while simultaneously learning from their mistakes.

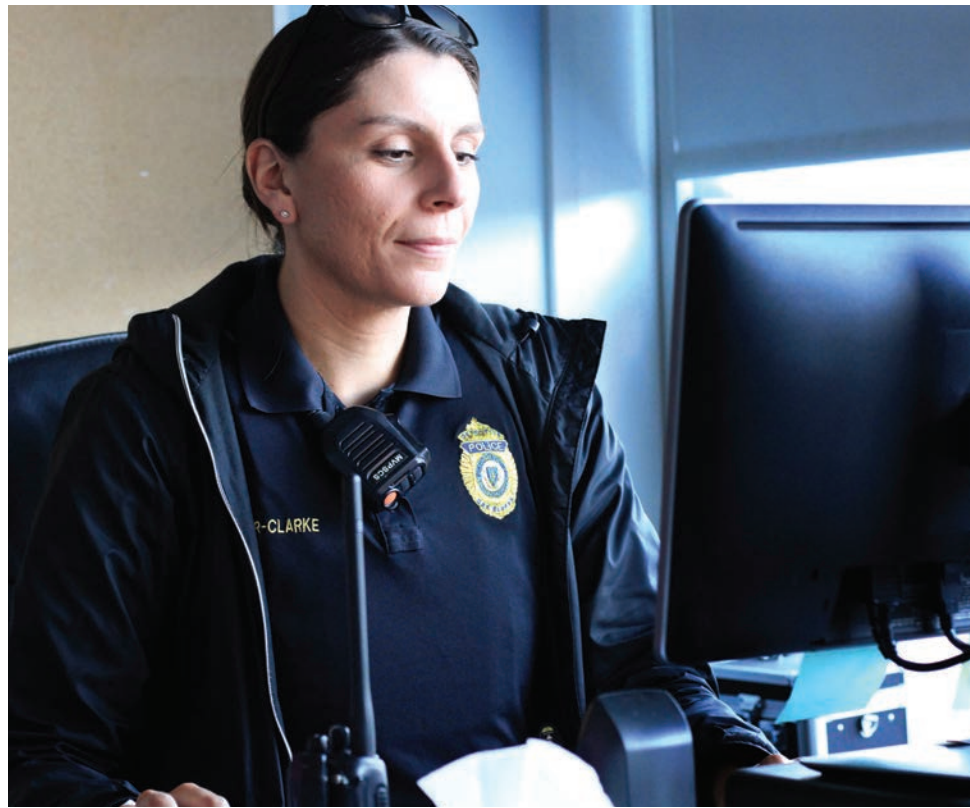
"The diversion program is designed to keep kids out of juvenile court, and help them make better decisions through restorative practices," Officer Sedlier-Clarke explained. "Rather than simply punishing a student, we aim to address the root cause of the behavior, and provide them with the tools they need to understand why their actions were wrong and how to make healthier choices moving forward."

The program is for certain first-time offenders who have been involved with misdemeanor cases like

shoplifting, possession of alcohol, disorderly conduct, property damage, or sexting. Sexting cases are specifically addressed under the 2024 Act to Prevent Abuse and Exploitation, which mandates diversion for youth under 18 who are involved in sharing explicit images of minors. The law ensures that young people involved in sexting receive education on the serious legal and social consequences of their actions.

"Many young people don't fully understand the long-term effects of sexting," Sedlier-Clarke said. "They might think it's harmless, or that their photos are only shared between friends, but that's not always the case. These images can be leaked or shared without consent, leading to devastating consequences for the young people involved. It can even lead to harassment or bullying long after the images have been sent."

The diversion process begins before arraignment, which keeps students out of the court system. If a stu-



School Resource Officer Jillian Sedlier-Clarke at her desk.

DANIELLE MEYER

dent successfully completes a diversion plan, no charges are filed, and the case is closed without a criminal record.

The program offers in-

dividualized plans tailored to each participant's needs. These plans may include counseling, community service, restitution payments, and educational workshops.

The goal is to give young people the support they need to address their behavior and make positive changes in their lives.

Participants engage in

activities designed to help them reflect on their actions and to make healthier choices. "Through this program, participants aren't just learning about [the consequences and implications of] their mistakes, but they are also gaining new skills to help them avoid making similar mistakes in the future," Officer Sedlier-Clarke said.

"It's not about punishment — it's about giving young people the chance to learn and move forward without their mistakes following them into adulthood," Officer Sedlier-Clarke said. "A criminal record can stay with someone for a lifetime, but this program gives them the opportunity to make things right, and avoid the consequences that could affect their future."

Officer Sedlier-Clarke highlighted the program's success. "I've had kids and parents tell me that this program really helped them turn things around. Hearing that makes all the difference," she said. HW

## School weighs need for on-campus health center

BY PENNY HADDAD AND NORA MOTAHARI

Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) offers robust mental health support to students, but when it comes to addressing students' physical health concerns, that responsibility falls solely to school nurse Mike Savoy. MVRHS administrators are open to the possibility of starting a school-based health center with the goal of improving students' access to healthcare.

Wellness coordinator and school adjustment counselor Amy Lilavois has helped lead the development of the I-Care suite, which connects students to a variety of mental health services within the school day. "We have outside clinicians that come in, and recovery coaches that see students in school during free blocks," said Ms. Lilavois, who noted that the appointments are scheduled so that they don't interrupt learning time.

Similarly to the I-Care suite, a school-based health center could be a gateway that allows more students to access physical healthcare. The details of how the center would be funded are still being explored, and could include a combination of grant funding, billing students' insurance plans for those who have coverage, and facilitating access to insurance through MassHealth or other programs.

Principal Sara Dingley is exploring options with on-Island healthcare providers. "We were considering partnering with Island Health Care [IHC], and they would have some of their staff come and deliver services once a month or once a week here in the building," said Ms. Dingley. IHC is a federally funded healthcare organization that provides services on-Island, including a recently opened dental clinic.

Nurse Savoy has been involved in ongoing con-



Nurse Savoy's office has a variety of medical supplies used to treat basic health issues.

BRADY VOUGHT

versations about a potential school-based health center. "There's a lot of upside. It will allow providers to come here. If you need a physical because you can't get in to see your primary care physician for two months, we'll have a nurse practitioner here once every two weeks or once a

month, and you can just get a physical exam," he said. "We'll maybe keep simple vaccines [here], like meningitis or tetanus, that you need more often than others."

Nurse Savoy's role as school nurse is more limited in scope, whereas a school-based health center would

help students access a wider range of care. "I'm here to help give out meds, simple first-aid-type stuff, and keep [student] records under control," he said. Instead of dismissing students who feel ill, a school-based health center could allow students to be assessed during the school day.

"Instead of calling your mom [and saying] you need to go see a primary care physician, I could call the clinic and say, 'I've got this kid, I think this is going on, do you have an opening?'" he said.

Ms. Dingley and Ms. Lilavois both believe that a school-based health center could help address the issue of student absences and early dismissals. "An in-school clinic has a tendency to increase rates of attendance, instead of missing school to go to an appointment," said Ms. Lilavois.

Ms. Lilavois has seen a lot of success coming from the implementation of mental care services in the school, and believes it could be similar in physical healthcare as well. "The rate of attendance is so much better. But that's the mental health side of it," she says. "We currently do the mental health side of it. Now we're looking to try and institute the physical health side." WHW