



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Connecting Children with Brighter Futures—One Clubhouse at a Time

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE April 20, 2018

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

As we continue to battle the heroin and opioid epidemic here in Central and Northern New York, the conversation is most often focused on the users, the dealers, rehabilitation and law-enforcement. While these conversations are critical to helping our communities rid themselves of these drugs, I cannot help but think that there is one other aspect that may

not be receiving the attention it deserves—how is this problem affecting children?

In many cases, it starts before birth. The child of an addicted mother can be born with any number of health issues including, their own addiction. Children with addicted parents are also at risk of accidentally taking a substance. Many do not get the care—the nutrition, supervision or nurturing—they need. These children constantly live with uncertainty and fear. Their education slips. Many have to grow up much faster than any child should, perhaps to take care of a sibling. Some lose a parent to an overdose while others are removed from their homes and placed in foster care. In most of these cases, as the child gets older, they face the same risks to use drugs that their parents did.

It is critical that we do more for our children. They need somewhere to go that is safe. They need a chance to be heard, supported and valued—in other words, to be children.

Across New York State, there are now 15 different “Youth Clubhouses”. Funded by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), these clubhouses offer our children a safe, substance free place to come together and support one another.

Two of these clubhouses are here in our region. The Horizons Clubhouse in Massena, operated by the Seaway Valley Council for Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention is a place for kids to have fun, work on social skills in a positive environment, build confidence and support a healthy lifestyle. The Oswego Clubhouse, run by Oswego County Opportunities, is doing the same great work.

Clubhouses are able to also teach skills such as cooking, resume development or specifics like graphic design. Meanwhile, clubhouse staff work with members to plan monthly field trips and monthly community service projects.

These clubhouses are able to offer transportation, and while children can show up alone, family members are welcome to come along and see what these clubhouses are all about.

We all know that being a young person has its challenges—and one of the greatest challenges today's youth face is the temptation to use drugs and alcohol. As the summer approaches, these clubhouses will be looking to provide as many of our region's young people as possible with the guidance they need to have bright futures. For more information on our local clubhouses, you can call the Oswego Clubhouse at (315) 342-7532 or the Horizons' Clubhouse in St. Lawrence County at (315) 713-4861.