



From the ground up: Sile fosters mainstay with Cohasset's Youth Ambassadors

By Quinn Kelly

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Cohasset High senior Morgan Sile builds program with the Safe Harbor Youth Ambassadors

Two years ago, Morgan Sile was just a sophomore at Cohasset High School looking for a way to get involved in the community through volunteer work.

She came across a town newsletter from Safe Harbor Cohasset, the non-profit substance use awareness coalition, and its then director Christine Murphy.

Murphy was looking for help with an upcoming sticker shock at Curtis Liquors, where special stickers are placed on each purchase reminding adults not to provide alcohol to minors.

Sile decided to get involved, and ended up creating what would become a lasting partnership.

While volunteering, Sile said that Murphy informed her of current Safe Harbor Director Nicole Balaschi's intentions to start a youth section of the coalition, and put the two in touch.

Sile would soon become the founding, and momentarily sole member of Safe Harbor's Youth Ambassador Program. Little did she know what the program would become just two short years later.

The Youth Ambassador Program is one of the most popular youth groups in town now, built much on the back of Sile's hard work.

The youth-led program builds leadership skills, raises awareness around health issues affecting the Cohasset community, and facilitates lasting peer relationships. Its membership includes students grades 7 and up.

Safe Harbor's Youth Ambassadors spread awareness by hosting events and sponsoring campaigns throughout the year.

Shortly after joining, Sile recruited classmate Kira Jamieson, and the two served as the first two leaders in the program.

"I think in the first year, we only had 10 people that would show up off and on," Sile recalled. "It was definitely a really slow start. We had no training and didn't exactly know what we were doing, but the whole year was an experiment on what we thought would work and what wouldn't."

The program launched different campaigns in town, from the sticker shock to educational seminars and community outreach events.

Soon, its popularity grew.

"By the second year we'd grown by 20 people and had a real structure in place," Sile said.

Now in the program's third year, membership has hit its 50 person capacity and has had to even turn away applicants.

It's a far cry from where the program started out, when Sile was tasked with finding classmates to join.

"In the beginning, I was being that recruiter," Sile said. "But as the program grew, we didn't really need to do that anymore. People could see how special the program is through what we were doing in the community and they wanted to get involved in that."

Sile continues to serve as one of the program's four Youth Leaders, along with Jamieson and two other classmates.

A completely student led and run group, Sile is at the head of what has become an active program in the community.

The program has been involved with students not only at the high school level, but at the elementary in middle school levels, too.

It is with the younger kids that, Sile said, she's been able to do some of her most rewarding work.

"One of the most fulfilling things we've done was last year's Red Ribbon Week," said Sile. "It was me and a subgroup, and we put together a presentation and a series of activities for the fifth graders about healthy habits. We strongly believe in mental health and reducing stress so that it's less likely for students to develop those unhealthy habits that can eventually lead to drug use."

The program hasn't been quite as active as Sile would have liked in the past few months. Though they continue to meet regularly, many Youth Ambassador events and projects have been waylaid by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've definitely had a lot of projects that had to be put off," Sile said.

"Since April, we've been virtually meeting, and are still doing so," Sile said. "We've found it challenging in terms of communication as well as participation. But I think that the Youth Ambassadors who are really committed to this have stepped up to the challenge and done some great work over the past few months."

Despite the challenges of staying engaged during the pandemic, Sile said she couldn't be more appreciative of the effort her Youth Ambassadors have put forth.

"It's definitely a lot to be sitting at your desk in front of a laptop for six hours a day and stay focused and be productive," Sile admitted. "There has definitely been a lack of energy as a result of this, and you can't blame people. But I really do appreciate what people have been bringing to these meetings in staying focused and getting things done even though they don't have to."

"It really shows that people want to be involved and make a difference in their community through our program."

The volunteerism that Sile has helped to inspire looks to be something that will extend past the now senior's time at Cohasset High. Sile has constructed a program that is built to last, and knows she's ready to pass the torch to another motivated student after her graduation this spring.

"I hope to come back in a couple years and see that this program is still going and that my contribution made a lasting impact in this community for the better," Sile said. "It's something I'm truly passionate about, and I really believe in the work we're doing here in Cohasset."

Residents can see some of the efforts made by the Youth Ambassadors by taking a stroll downtown. The pumpkins that adorn Village shop windows are soon to be judged as part of the Youth Ambassador-run Pumpkin Decorating Contest.

Next month, the group's focus will be on alcohol abuse. With each new month comes a new orientation for the program, and Sile said that their upcoming projects and campaigns will be focused on that topic.