

5 Year Report to the Community 1999 - 2004

Executive Summary

Ithaca Community Drug Task Force

Coordinated by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department
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www.ithacaparents.org

Background

In 1997, a grass roots initiative was launched to fight the growing problems of drug trafficking and abuse in the Ithaca area and the Community Drug Task Force was born. From the beginning, the Community Drug Task Force has worked to bring together a diverse community to improve the welfare of children and the entire community by reducing the incidence of substance abuse. In 1999 we submitted an application for funding to the Drug Free Communities Support Program of the U.S. Department of Justice. Our application to focus on the Ithaca City School District was approved and from October, 1999 - September, 2004 we implemented programs to reduce substance abuse among youth in the Ithaca area and to strengthen partnerships and collaborations among communities, government and private agencies in their efforts to prevent and reduce substance abuse among youth. For the first 2½ years, the Coordinator was an employee of the City of Ithaca. Since November, 2002 the coordinator's role has been filled by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department. In addition to the traditional representatives from health and substance abuse organizations our Coalition has benefited from having representatives from the broader community: schools, business, media, youth, parents, youth-serving organizations, law enforcement and civic minded volunteers.

Data Collection

We have used two survey instruments to collect data on student drug use, behavior and attitudes. From 1998 - 2001 the Rocky Mountain Behavioral Science Institute's *American Drug and Alcohol Survey* was administered annually to Ithaca City School District students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. In 2000 our locally designed Student Life and Culture survey was piloted at Ithaca High School. In 2003, it was administered to 83% of ICSD students in grades 6 - 12. Survey data have been used to track student drug use and other risk behaviors over time and to direct the strategies and activities of the Coalition.

Goals and Strategies

Our Coalition has had three primary strategies to meet our goals of reduced substance use by youth and increased community collaboration to prevent and reduce substance abuse among youth.

Increased Public Awareness - We instituted a public awareness campaign to educate and inform the community, with a special emphasis on youth and parents, of the dangers of substance use.

- Social Norms campaign initiated at DeWitt Middle and Ithaca High Schools used student survey data to develop positive norm statements to correct misperceptions about student involvement in risky behaviors, thereby reinforcing healthy attitudes and behaviors and reducing pressure to conform to a "false" norm. (posters, computer screen savers, classroom discussions).
- Created and launched a website (www.ithacaparents.org) in 2001.
- TV, print, radio ads in 2000-01 using materials from the National Youth Anti-Drug Campaign
- Appearances on local talk radio, regular monthly articles for the Ithaca Journal on a variety of substance-abuse related topics.
- Workshops for teachers and school staff on using local survey data in a social norms campaign.
- Workshops and speakers to help educate and inform parents, professional staff and community members about substance use and prevention. (Over 600 people attended the 2002 presentation by Sen. George McGovern.)

Increased Partnership with the Ithaca City School District -We sponsored a number of collaborative initiatives.

- Negotiated a special youth after-school bus pass with Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit; provided over 2,400 bus passes to increase student access to healthy after-school activities.
- In-school assessments of students referred for possible substance abuse problems, individual counseling, group activities and support groups.
- Classroom instruction in Botvin's evidence-based Life Skills, giving students resistance skills and character education to prevent tobacco and alcohol use.
- Workshops for school staff and local youth workers on Life Skills and social norms.

Prevention, Education and Intervention - Local youth-serving programs and initiatives improved students' school performance and connected youth with positive adults and opportunities to reduce the likelihood that youth at risk of using substances would use.

- 54 students per year received help from the A+ Tutoring Program at Ithaca High School.
- 10 youth receiving ongoing mentoring, academic and emotional support in the Paul Schreurs Memorial Program.
- 18 students participated in Tompkins Alternative Adventure Program -outdoor adventure, group sessions, and community service projects. They connected with positive adults, built self-esteem and personal and team-work skills while engaging in healthy activities.

Outcomes

- Alcohol use has decreased for all grades since the survey was first administered in 1998-99.
- Tobacco use has decreased for grades 8, 10, and 12 but increased among 6th graders.
- Marijuana use has decreased for grade 10 and increased for grades 6, 8, and 12.
- Marijuana use by Ithaca students is higher than the use by their national peers.

What's Next

We have received funding for a new Drug Free Communities grant beginning October, 2004. Renamed the Community Alcohol and Drug Coalition, we continue our commitment to reducing substance use among Ithaca City School District youth and to strengthening collaborative efforts to prevent and reduce substance abuse. An addition goal has been added: improve school safety and student bonding to school by reducing incidence of hurtful behavior. Our four strategies for 2004-2008 are

- Social Norms Marketing Campaign – We are working with two secondary schools as they implement a school-based campaign to correct the misperceptions of youth in ways that ultimately reduce substance use. Efforts may expand to other secondary schools in the future.
- Evidence-Based Programs in Schools – We are working with the ICSD in exploring ways to expand and enhance evidence-based curricula in elementary and middle schools.
- Environmental Strategies – We will work with youth, parents, business, law enforcement and community members to identify ways to target the environment - how, when and where youth gain access to drugs – to reduce availability.
- Strengthen Coalition to Better Coordinate Prevention Efforts – We are reaching out to new sectors and groups to join our efforts.

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