



Youth *in action*

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OJJDP

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BULLETIN

Youth Preventing Drug Abuse

The links between drugs and crime are clear. Not only is possessing or selling illegal drugs a crime in itself, but studies show that a strong link exists between the use of drugs and the occurrence of criminal activity. In the more than two dozen cities studied in 1995, more than half of the individuals arrested for non-drug-related crimes were drug users when they committed the crimes. Drug trafficking—particularly in crack cocaine in the 1980's and 1990's—has been clearly linked with increased violence, especially in urban areas.

Although drug use by American teens has declined since the 1980's, the percentage of students reporting illicit drug use increased substantially between 1992 and 1996. According to the most recent Monitoring the Future study, the percentage of 12th graders who reported that they used drugs almost doubled between 1992 (when 14 percent reported drug use) and 1996 (when 26 percent reported drug use). The increases were similar for two other grades during that time period: from 11 to 23 percent for 10th graders and from 7 to 15 percent for 8th graders. The same survey found an increase in marijuana use—both at parties and at home—by 12th graders.

What Is a Drug Prevention Project?

Drug prevention projects have proven successful in curtailing drug activity and the violence associated with it. An effective drug prevention project can educate children, youth, and adults about the dangers of illegal drugs. It can provide skills to help people refuse drugs, develop peer and community support for drug-free lifestyles, or help people find drug abuse treatment programs. Some drug prevention projects strive to reclaim public areas frequented by drug dealers and users and make them safe for community use.

from the administrator

There are no winners when it comes to illegal drugs. Users lose and so do innocent citizens who become the victims of crimes committed by drug users. You can make a difference by working to prevent drug use. Setting up a drug prevention project will not be easy, but this Bulletin offers good ideas to help you get started. Besides helping others, you will develop leadership skills that will benefit you throughout life.

How Does a Drug Prevention Project Prevent or Reduce Overall Crime?

A drug prevention project can raise awareness and motivate community members to take action. Youth in New York City created Take Back the Parks projects in which they worked with police and area residents to host numerous activities in parks formerly occupied by drug users and dealers. The summer-long programs of games, movies, arts and crafts, and athletic events helped bring children and adults back into parks and forced the drug community to move out. More than two dozen parks have been reclaimed in less than 6 years through this program. The use of parks usually doubles or triples as a result of these efforts.

In Evansville, IN, Teens Against Drug Abuse created a puppet show for elementary school students to explain why and how they should refuse drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. The performances were so popular the youth had to create a second puppet troupe to meet the demand.

In Humboldt County, CA—a rural community in northern California where the Youth Services Bureau now targets runaway, homeless, and street youth—youth started a substance abuse prevention initiative called RAVEN. The project provides the surrounding community with health education; risk reduction information; resource referral and access to services for

at-risk youth; and healthy, drug-free activities. Youth who participate in the RAVEN project are recruited from the community and trained to provide other youth with drug prevention skills and needed intervention services.

What Does It Take To Start a Drug Prevention Project?

Starting a project may seem like a difficult task; however, with a little desire and some organization and structure, you can develop a successful project in your area. To begin, follow these steps.

Step 1. Learn about the drug problem in your neighborhood or community. Go to the library and research newspaper articles on the topic. A reference librarian will be able to direct you to local or national publications addressing this topic.

You also can obtain information from the local police or local chapters of antidrug organizations or drug rehabilitation centers. Ask them about drug use rates, the kinds of drugs that are likely to be abused in your community, current treatment and prevention programs, and gaps in services.

With this information, assess the needs of your community and find out how you can either strengthen an ongoing drug prevention project or start a new one.

Step 2. Take a look at your group's skills, time availability, and other resources. Make sure you know what kind of projects will hold the group's interest. What type of activity excites everyone? What uses your special talents? Are there actors, artists, or dancers in the group? If so, a performance might be a good educational or skill-building project.

Step 3. After you've assessed the drug-related problems in your neighborhood or community

Warning!

Many people involved in selling drugs can present a real danger. Leave law enforcement (investigations and arrests) to trained officials. Be careful and work with a responsible adult in setting up any program that may put you in jeopardy from drug pushers or users.

and your group's interests and abilities, you are ready to identify the kind of drug prevention project you can tackle. If your group is very busy, don't select a project that will require 20 or 30 hours a week from everyone. If the drug dealing situation in your community is dangerous, consider doing a community survey of the problem and its effect; then share the results with the police and community leaders and request that action be taken.

Step 4. Once you've decided on a project, you will need to plan it. Here's how:

- ◆ Develop objectives that are clear and realistic. For example, "We will teach at least 150 of our peers about the dangers of using marijuana." Or, "At the end of our project, the local park will have no drug users in it during the day."
- ◆ Break down each objective into specific tasks or steps. For example, if your objective is to increase youth's ability to resist drugs, you may want to teach them how to do so through a presentation. Your steps could include the following:
 - ~ Identify your audience and its current level of knowledge on the topic.
 - ~ Learn the skills necessary to resist the lure of drugs.
 - ~ Learn how to teach those skills to others.
 - ~ Develop an outline for your presentation.
 - ~ Prepare materials to hand out.
 - ~ Set dates for the presentation.
 - ~ Rehearse the presentation.
 - ~ Design a way to check on whether your presentation was successful.
- ◆ Identify local partners who can help with the project—other youth, businesses that are willing to donate materials or services (photocopying, access to a computer, construction paper, etc.), drug rehabilitation centers, community outreach groups, the

chief executive of your local government, a legislator, or a crime prevention officer in the police department.

- ◆ Recruit at least one adult knowledgeable about the subject to work with you and provide ongoing advice and support, especially if your project is a complicated one.

What Are Some Possible Drug Prevention Activities?

There are many types of drug prevention activities, a few of which are listed below.

However, you don't need to limit yourself to the examples in this Bulletin. Be creative.

- ◆ Consider providing information to peers, younger children, and adults on the dangers and effects of alcohol and drug consumption. Work with alcohol and other drug prevention programs such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, D.A.R.E. America, or Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America to obtain this information. Compile your information in a fact sheet and distribute it at your school or local recreation center. Ask your school newspaper to publish the fact sheet.
- ◆ Create a reporting system in your school that allows people to anonymously identify the who, what, when, and where of drug dealing or related crimes. Authorities often cannot act on individual anonymous complaints, but putting complaints together may uncover patterns that will help them apprehend criminals.
- ◆ Compile a list of drug and alcohol treatment programs in your area and indicate how to get in touch with them. Most treatment programs require professional skills and intensive therapy. These may be beyond the skills your group can offer and may involve working with violent or disturbed people. Because the first step in getting help is knowing where to go, you can play a

big part in someone's rehabilitation by providing them with this vital information.

- ◆ Obtain training to be a peer counselor and help other young people with their problems. Some of these problems can lead to drug use. Just being friendly to someone in need can be very helpful. You also may want to consider organizing counseling services to be offered at neighborhood locations such as a recreation center or a religious institution. If you are interested in obtaining training or in organizing counseling services, talk to your guidance counselor or a local nonprofit organization that already provides such services.
- ◆ Organize youth events that show that a drug-free lifestyle is "cool." The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and its partner organizations have information on alcohol- and drug-free postprom and postgraduation parties. Group trips, especially to adventurous, active destinations, can be made available only to those who are drug free. Special movie theme nights with popcorn and other traditional snacks can prove

that you don't have to do drugs to have fun. You can also get involved in Race Against Drugs (RAD), a nationwide drug education program sponsored by the National Child Safety Council, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and motorsport sanctioning organizations. RAD offers an Adopt-a-School program through which students complete a RAD workbook, prepare posters, or write essays. Students who participate in the program can even compete for RAD scholarships.

What Does It Take To Keep a Drug Prevention Project Going?

Depending on your project, you may periodically need to find new neighborhoods to serve, new audiences to address, new groups to work with, or new classes to teach. Consider that additional resources may be required for each new activity (e.g., new tools, more handouts).

You will also need a good base of volunteers. Start recruiting participants early in the process. You may have to recruit more participants throughout the project because group members may move on to other activities or have other demands on their time. Remember to train new volunteers and make sure that you give them a clear role in your effort. Don't forget to thank all volunteers and celebrate your group's successes.

Another way to sustain your drug prevention project is to periodically evaluate your activities. Evaluating what you've done—even if this only involves passing out a questionnaire on how the audience liked your presentation or counting the number of people using the park now that it is free of drug dealers—is an important part of maintaining your project. You will be able to show volunteers and other supporters that your efforts made a difference.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:

- ◆ *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- ◆ *Planning a Successful Project.*
- ◆ *Lining Up Resources.*
- ◆ *Acting on Your Plans.*
- ◆ *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section. Good luck!

You will also be able to make changes to your activities and improve their effectiveness.

What Are Some of the Challenges in Starting a Drug Prevention Project?

Some people find it hard to believe that even young children need to learn drug refusal skills. Some adults don't think youth are able to teach young people these skills and the important facts about drug use. Be persistent. Sceptics are best convinced by results—doing a great job can prove them wrong.

Drug use and dealing present real dangers. Dealers use violence to stake their territory and to keep their workers in line. As a result of their drug use, individuals who use these substances often act violently or at least threaten to harm others. Be careful and use good judgment. Think about how you can report a drug problem without subjecting yourself to retaliation from drug dealers and users. It is important to report these activities, but it's equally important to report them safely.

What Are Some of the Rewards?

Drug prevention programs create a win-win situation for everyone involved. Youth benefit by learning leadership skills, changing attitudes about alcohol and other drugs, strengthening their connections to their schools and communities, learning how to conduct surveys, developing public speaking skills, and learning facts they can carry with them through adulthood. They also benefit from the experience of helping others. Communities benefit from drug prevention projects through reduced drug abuse and fewer drug-related problems. Communities also benefit from being drawn together to improve their overall health. Bonding together to address

issues that affect everyone is very empowering and gives a community a sense of ownership and control.

How Can Drug Prevention Projects Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your drug prevention project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting an evaluation is “to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down.”¹ You will want to be able to show that your project does one or all of the following:

- ◆ Reduces drug use.
- ◆ Educates youth about drugs and drug-related issues.
- ◆ Reduces crime.
- ◆ Reduces fear of crime.
- ◆ Is cost effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.
- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safe and better about being in their school or community.

The basic way to evaluate your project is to reflect on your original goals for the project. If your goal is to prevent drug use in your neighborhood, measure whether or not drug use was reduced. Keep a tally of drug use before and after your project and compare the differences. Did you reach all the people you intended to? Did the message of your project reach other youth? Are young people more

¹ National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

aware of the dangers of illegal drugs? You can measure some of these by keeping track of the number of people attending community anti-drug meetings or the number of educational pamphlets distributed to the public.

Be sure to include an evaluation step in your project's overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your messages to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

Evaluating your activities while your project is going on can help you maintain a focus on your goals and improve your chances of being successful. For example, if you performed a skit, an assessment may show that none of the third graders in the audience paid attention. You may want to interview a small group of these young people to find out what parts were exciting, what parts were boring, and what would have made the skit better.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Go for it!



Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Citizens Committee for New York City, Inc.

305 Seventh Avenue, Fifth Floor
New York, NY 10001
212-989-0909

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)

901 North Pitt Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-706-0560
Internet: www.cadca.org

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)

Division of Community Education
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockwall II, Suite 800
Rockville, MD 20857
301-443-0373
Internet: www.samhsa.gov/csap/index.htm

D.A.R.E. America

P.O. Box 512090
Los Angeles, CA 90051-0090
800-223-DARE (800-223-3273)
310-215-0180 (Fax)
Internet: www.Dare-America.com

Just Say No International

2000 Franklin Street, Suite 400
Oakland, CA 94612
800-258-2766
510-451-9360 (Fax)
Internet: www.justsayno.org

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-638-8736
301-519-5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

511 East John Carpenter Freeway, Suite 700
Irving, TX 75062-8187
214-744-MADD (214-744-6233)
Internet: www.madd.org

National Child Safety Council

4065 Page Avenue
P.O. Box 1368
Jackson, MI 49204-1368
800-222-1464
517-764-6070

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
800-729-6686 or 301-468-2600
301-468-6433 (Fax)
Internet: www.health.org

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272
202-296-1356 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncpc.org

National Family Partnership

9220 Southwest Barbur Boulevard, #119-284
Portland, OR 97219
888-311-1933
503-768-9659
503-244-5506 (Fax)
Internet: www.nfp.org

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, SW.
Washington, DC 20590
202-366-0123
Internet: www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)

Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20503
202-395-6700
Internet: www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

Race Against Drugs

P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
800-729-6686
Internet: www.raceagainstdrugs.org

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Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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