
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, Summer, 2012

Summer is Here



The Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free youth had a wonderful year. There were interesting and productive prevention activities that began with the Youth Leadership Conference for middle school students and ended with an inspiring talk given by Jack Claypoole, who came to Westchester from the White House Office of National Drug Policy.

During Mr. Claypoole's presentation he discussed the mounting concerns about the use of marijuana among young people in our country. We too are concerned about the use of marijuana by young people in our county. At the 10th grade level, the usage is less than national levels but by 12th grade our students are using at the same level as other teens in the country.

Research shows that summertime is when many students start using marijuana so it is a time for parents to be very vigilant about who their children are with and whether they are in a supervised setting,

Happy and safe summer to all.
Patricia Murphy Warble, LCSW, CCP

Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth Launches Alcohol Prevention Initiative

A postcard with a graphic showing a group of teens with alcohol in their hands and the question, "If It's Not Your Kid Whose Kid Is It?" was sent by the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth to parents with children in middle school and high school. The same graphic is also displayed on bus kiosks, posters and train platforms throughout the county.



The campaign was adapted from one done by the Danver's Cares coalition in Danvers, Massachusetts and is being funded by two federal grants that were awarded to the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth. This initiative is being done in cooperation with County Executive, Robert P. Astorino, who has a prevention message on the postcard, and the Westchester County Office of Drug Prevention and STOP DWI. The coalition is co-chaired by the Westchester District Attorney's office.

This initiative was launched as a response to data collected in a 2011 survey that showed that alcohol is the drug of choice for Westchester

County teens with 71% of them reporting that it is easy to get alcohol. To address these concerns, a substance abuse prevention initiative was chosen to empower and encourage parents to make sure that alcohol is not available to teens in their homes and to talk to their children about the dangers of teen drinking. Many parents incorrectly think that once their children reach adolescence, they do not have influence over their children's decisions. However, research done by The Partnership at drugfree.org shows that parent's disapproval of the use of alcohol by young people has a major impact on teens deciding not to drink.

The postcard includes a recommendation for a website to help parents talk to their children about the dangers of drinking in an effective way. In addition, there is information about an ongoing project of the Westchester Coalition that will keep parents updated about research, information and positive strategies related to this issue. To access this, parents need to sign up to receive a monthly message on their cell phone from the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth by texting Parents to 88500.

For additional information about this campaign, contact: PWArble@sascorp.org.

Marijuana

Mounting Concerns

On April 20, close to 100 students and another 50 adult coalition leaders, substance abuse prevention professionals and representatives from local government gathered on the Westchester County Center steps for a rally to observe 4/20-Marijuana Prevention Day. This was an initiative planned by students who are members of the Teen Drinking Action Council to highlight the dangers of using marijuana. Their goal was to take back April 20 as a prevention day as this day has become for some, a day to celebrate and encourage the use of marijuana.



The tone for the day was set by a stairscape designed by Ryan Kelly that was installed on the front steps of the Westchester County Center that had a very compelling marijuana prevention message on it. The stairscape was displayed there for over a week and generated much interest from people walking or driving by the site.



Bruce Kelly and students at Westchester County Center

Bruce Kelly, coalition coordinator of *NR FOCUS* acted as the master of ceremonies for the afternoon. Joseph Kenner, Assistant to the County Executive, read a proclamation signed by County Executive, Robert Astorino. Several students, representing a cross section of local high schools made remarks about the dangers of marijuana use and encouraged others not to use marijuana.

This prevention day was planned as a response to concerns raised as a result of the most recent results of the *Monitoring The Future* survey that showed that marijuana use among teens rose in 2011 for the fourth straight year which is in sharp contrast to the decline that had occurred in the preceding decade. Daily marijuana use is now at a 30-year peak level among high school seniors. Rates for 8th, 10th and 12th graders have risen significantly since 2007.

According to Dr. Lloyd Johnston, the chief researcher for *Monitoring The Future*, there are several explanations for the rise in marijuana use among young people. First, he says that as a nation, “we took our eye off the ball,” and did not continue targeted prevention efforts towards the dangers of marijuana when the use was declining. Also, in the past few years, prevention funding has been cut on a national, state and local level. .

Dr. Johnston also thinks that there is a dynamic occurring which he describes as “generational forgetting.” This means that the young people currently using marijuana did not see the results of marijuana use in the generations ahead of them. They did not see the arrested development of teens who used marijuana or the resulting effect of becoming what has been described as being a “burn-out” in previous generations.

The Partnership at drugfree.org recently published a 2012 survey that found similar results as the ones in the *Monitoring the Future* survey. The partnership study suggests a link between teens who smoke marijuana more regularly and the use of other drugs. Teens who smoked marijuana 20 times or more a month were almost twice as likely as teens who smoked marijuana less frequently, to use ecstasy, cocaine, or crack.

In addition to these factors, young people interpret medical marijuana discussions as an endorsement of the drug. Students erroneously conclude, if marijuana can be used as a “medicine” then it must be safe. And understanding the way the teen brain works, it is not surprising that as a result of the medical marijuana debate, young people use the endorsement of medical marijuana by some as a rationalization for their own use of marijuana.

All of these realities result in what is described in the substance abuse prevention field as a decrease in “perceived risk” which is a cornerstone of drug use prevention. If young people think a drug is dangerous, they do not use it but if a drug is not perceived to be risky then teens are more likely to use it. Many young people do not regard marijuana as a risky drug.

Westchester Use

In the fall of 2011, a survey completed by almost 4,000 Westchester high school students, documented some interesting findings. Among Westchester’s 10th graders: 22.7% report having tried marijuana and 11% report using it at least once in the last month. Among Westchester’s 12th graders: 45.7% report having tried marijuana and 28.4% report using it at least once in the last month.

Reported monthly use has decreased slightly from 2008 for Westchester’s 10th and 12th graders but is still at unacceptably high levels. The percent of Westchester 10th graders reporting lifetime and monthly use is less than 10th graders nationally but the

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percent of Westchester 12th graders report lifetime and monthly use is greater than their peers nationally.

These results were presented at the June 5th meeting for substance abuse prevention and treatment professionals, substance abuse prevention coalition members and county and state officials. Jack Claypoole, the Associate Deputy Director and Drug Free Communities Administrator at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy was the featured speaker at the meeting titled, *Youth Substance Use 2012: Applying Issues Learned in Tackling Marijuana and Prescription Drug Abuse*. Mr. Claypoole discussed the importance of all sectors of the community continuing to work together in coalitions to address the problem of youth substance use and the importance of acknowledging and celebrating the majority of teens who chose not to use substances. This is critical in confronting the myth that “everyone uses.”

At the meeting Deputy County Executive Kevin Plunkett thanked all in attendance on behalf of

County Executive Robert Astorino for their work in addressing youth substance use. In addition, Bill Finkledey was given an award by the New York State Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse providers for his “29 years of service to youth and commitment to substance abuse prevention.”

Mr. Finkledey is retiring from the Hastings Youth Advocate Program. A second award was given to Congresswoman, Nita Lowey for her “unwavering commitment to ensuring that substance abuse providers receive the highest possible funding levels.” Congresswoman Lowey represents parts of Westchester and Rockland County.

The meeting also served as a reminder to renew efforts to alert parents about increased use of marijuana over the summer. According to a May, 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health report, more teens first try marijuana in June and July than any other months of the year. The increase in new marijuana use is likely due to teens having more

unsupervised and unstructured time in the summer. Research shows that unmonitored teens are four times more likely to use marijuana or engage in other risky behaviors. With Westchester teens out of school in July and August, it is reasonable to expect that these will be the months when out teens are most at risk.

John P. Walters, the former Director of National Drug Control Policy said "Kids may equate summer with freedom, but for parents, it's when they need to be even more involved in their teens' lives. As soon as they pack up their locker for the year and step out of school, kids are much more likely to try marijuana. By keeping teens busy, knowing who they're with and making sure they're supervised, parents can help prevent their teen's summer from going to pot."