
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, September, 2010

Starfish



The questions that I am frequently asked by Westchester parents are “What substances are Westchester teens using and how does this compare with other communities and other parts for the country?”

Well, thanks to an initiative done under the auspices of the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth, there is new data that has been released that gives answers to those questions, some encouraging, some disappointing. However, overall, we should feel that our work is paying off and that we are impacting families in a positive manner.

A story that I am sure many of you have heard but bears repeating in this context is the following. A person is walking on a beach where thousands of starfish have washed up and are dying. As the person walks along he begins to throw some back into the ocean. His companion says, “Why are you doing that, throwing a few starfish back makes almost no difference.” And the person replies, “It makes a difference to the ones I throw back.” That is my mantra and inspiration for all the work that we do.

As we begin the new school year, let this story be an inspiration to all of us to continue our good work.

Patricia Murphy Warble, LCSW, CPP

Westchester County 2009 Student Survey Results

*Students' first use of alcohol or drugs at a later age
while alcohol remains the drug of choice*

Under the auspices of the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth, data was released in April about teen drug and alcohol use and attitudes. The data came from the responses of 9,553 secondary school students from 12 school districts in Westchester County during the 2008-2009 school year. Not all of the communities who were included in this data had a Drug Free Communities grant or other prevention initiative. These responses were compared to responses from a similar county-wide survey administered two years ago to determine trends in alcohol and other drug use. Westchester youth substance patterns were also compared to a state and national sample of youth.

The data showed the following results:

- Alcohol is still the drug of choice for Westchester teens.
- Westchester youth try alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco at slightly older ages than their counterparts statewide. Of those who used one of these substances, the first-use for alcohol was on average aged 13; for tobacco, 13.1 years, and for marijuana, 13.8 years. These ages are older than two years ago when a similar survey was taken. (Delayed onset of use lowers the risk of having a problem.)
- Contrasted with survey findings two years ago, fewer Westchester 8th graders reported using alcohol in the past month, 21.0% to 19.4% ; using marijuana 3.6% to 3.5%; and using tobacco 4.5% to 4.3%.
- Compared to two years ago, more Westchester 10th and 12th graders reported using alcohol and marijuana in the last month. Alcohol use increased from 39.6% to 42.1% for 10th graders; and from 52.5% to 60.3% for 12th graders. Marijuana use increased from 14.5% to 16.0% for 10th graders and from 22.0% to 28.0% for 12th graders.

- Tobacco use decreased for 10th graders from 11.7% to 11.0%, and from 18.4% to 16.0% for 12th graders.
- Westchester teens are slightly more likely than two years ago to think that regular use of alcohol is harmful. However, this did not result in decreased use. In contrast, compared with two years ago, and with the exception of county 8th graders, fewer teens thought marijuana use was harmful and their rate of use increased, mirroring state and national trends.
- Westchester teens perceive regular use of tobacco as most harmful, followed by regular use of alcohol, and then regular use of marijuana. Slightly more than half (52.6%) of all 12th graders perceive regular use of marijuana as harmful compared to 72% who thought it was harmful two years ago. This represents a 27% decrease in the number of teens who viewed regular use of marijuana as harmful.
- Westchester teens are more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana monthly than students from a state sample. Westchester 8th, 10th, and 12th graders report monthly use of **alcohol** at 19.4%, 42.1%, and 60.3% respectively, versus 14.7%, 34.2%, and 48.6% of the state sample. The discrepancy is not as great for marijuana use. Monthly use of **marijuana** for Westchester 8th, 10th, and

12th graders is 3.5%, 16.0% and 28.0% respectively; versus 3.4%, 14.3%, and 21.0% for the state sample. Monthly use of **tobacco** for Westchester 8th, 10th, and 12th graders is 4.3%, 11.0%, and 16.0% respectively; versus 4.0%, 10.1% and 15.6% for the state sample.

- The vast majority of Westchester teens believe their parents would disapprove if they used alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana. Teens perceive less parental disapproval of their alcohol use than of marijuana and tobacco use. This partially explains why use of alcohol in the past month greatly exceeds marijuana and tobacco use.

The latest Monitoring The Future survey and the surveys that were done locally re-enforces the fact that underage drinking and drug use are serious problems nationwide and in Westchester County. And as is often the case, in gathering data, there is good news and bad news.

The good news is that in the last two years, the age of first use is slightly higher and more of our teens view drinking regularly as more harmful than they did two years ago. This is significant since the research shows that there is a relationship between age of onset of drug and alcohol use and developing substance abuse problems that can last a lifetime. So, it is possible that it could reflect a trend that will continue in the future.

The bad news is that fewer high school students believe that their parents would disapprove of their drinking and more teens report increased monthly alcohol use.

There is also concern that there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of 12th graders who perceive the regular use of marijuana as harmful. This is a national trend attributed in part to the legalization of smokeable medical marijuana in some states.

These results indicate that prevention efforts including substance abuse prevention coalitions are making a difference and all the meetings, presentations and education are raising awareness and changing some norms which is often the precursor to changing behavior. But, it is a bit like swimming upstream as there are many forces like the legalization of marijuana and new alcohol marketing strategies that can undermine and compromise the good work that coalitions and other organizations are doing in the county.

This data provides us with valid information about some of the issues that coalitions, parents, educators, counselors and others should be dealing with in their communities.

- Continue efforts to raise awareness about early drug and alcohol use.
- Renew efforts and strategies designed to let students know about the long and short-term risks of using marijuana.
- Continue education for adults and youth about the risks associated with underage drinking..

Coalitions Effective at Reducing Teen Substance Abuse

Many communities in Westchester County have had, have, or are trying to obtain Drug-Free Communities (DFC) grants to fund the efforts of their communities to address underage drinking and substance abuse. In addition, there are other communities in Westchester that have other sources of revenue from schools or communities to fund activities.

There is very good news about the impact of having a substance abuse prevention coalition to deal with underage drinking and drug use. The evaluation was done in communities with DFC grants. However, the results suggest that all communities with some sort of coalition or effort to deal with underage drinking and drug use are making a positive difference.

The evaluation of the DFC programs showed that in communities where there are DFC coalitions, substance abuse rates among high-school students were significantly lower than national rates. The data also showed that while youth drug use has been declining across the country, it has declined more rapidly in communities with DFC coalitions.

The evaluation looked at trends in current use among communities with DFC coalitions and compared the data to reported use at the national level. The analysis showed that current use rates for communities with DFC coalitions declined for all three substances measured (alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco) in grades 9 to 12. Communities where there are DFC coalitions also reported significantly less past 30-day alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use than communities without a DFC grant.

The DFC study found that:

- Current use of marijuana among high school students in DFC communities is 9.9 percent lower than the reported national average;
- Average alcohol use by youth in DFC communities is 23.3 percent lower than the national average;
- Annual tobacco use is ten percent lower in DFC communities than the national average.

According to General Arthur Dean, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, (CADCA) Chairman and CEO, "This research confirms what we have observed in many communities where CADCA-member coalitions exist; it demonstrates that community coalitions are in fact an effective vehicle for reducing drug and alcohol problems."

CADCA

CADCA is a valuable resource for all coalitions whether funded by a DFC grant, a committee of a PTA, or municipal government. It is a clearing house for the latest information and has a valuable conference in February in Washington, DC that highlights the latest trends and research in the field. If you want your coalition to be up-to-date then join this group and come to DC with representatives from many of the coalitions in Westchester.

The number one reason to join CADCA is to support national efforts to help your community. CADCA's mission is to create safe, healthy, and drug-free communities. As our network grows, so does our ability to make positive change happen, from the halls of Congress to your local community.

As a CADCA Member, you will enjoy the following:

Advocacy & Public Policy-

CADCA serves as your national representative throughout Washington. They are on the frontlines to address issues that impact the field – and keep you up to date with the latest legislative alerts and updates.

Professional Development-

CADCA offers a variety of conferences and events to help members develop their skills and network with their peers. Events include the National Leadership and the Mid-Year Training Insti

tutes, where members enjoy discounted registration fees.

Annual Survey of Coalitions

All community coalitions are invited to participate in CADCA's Annual Survey of Coalitions, a single source where coalitions, policymakers, researchers and practitioners can access up-to-date information on communities. Coalition members have exclusive access to local, state, and national reports detailing survey data.

Publications

Complimentary subscriptions to publications are included with a CADCA membership. This includes e-newsletters such as Coalitions Online, print publications including the Strategizer and Practical Theorist series, and access to free PDF downloads within the vast archive of publications produced by CADCA.

Youth Leadership Conference in Westchester



Last February, a group of leaders from Westchester coalitions were at the CADCA conference in Maryland in a historic snow storm. There they met with Ty Sells and other members of the Youth to Youth staff from Columbus, Ohio about doing a youth leadership conference for high school students in Westchester in the fall. Since that day, a date has been determined, November 11, 2010, funding has been secured and Youth to Youth presenters have been booked. Furthermore, in anticipation of this event, several coalitions sent 15 Westchester students to the Youth 2 Youth annual summer conference in Rhode Island to get a better sense of how to plan a successful conference in Westchester.

Logistics and a venue are still being decided. It has not been determined how many students will be able to participate but it is hoped there will be enough room for at least two or three students from every high school in the county to attend. If there is room, more students, will be accommodated.

One of the constraints is that there is a need for one adult leader and one student leader for every ten students who will be attending. Everyone who is interested in being a staff member, is required to attend a training session the night before the conference, November 10 from 4 to 8pm at Student Assistance Services. Getting involved in this project will be energizing, fun and worthwhile. All participants will come away with tools, strategies, and leadership skills that will benefit them personally. In addition, everything that is learned can be implemented back in their school community.