

Strategy: Youth-to-Youth Antidrug Strategy

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Drug Problem Addressed

Young people are often reluctant to heed adults who warn them to avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs. Such youth frequently respond more to peer influence.

Teens are resourceful and imaginative. When charged with developing programs and projects for reaching their peers with antidrug messages, young people nationwide have suggested and implemented a teen activity center, training for teens to help peers, puppet shows or other performances that dramatize an antidrug message, youth workshops, "fun days" that feature positive alternatives to drugs, peer counseling and mentoring, awareness campaigns, community patrols, school-based youth projects, antidrug

murals, cross-age teaching, athletic contests with law enforcement sponsorship and participation, parent-teen talk sessions, and many other programs. One thing is critical in a youth-led, youth-focused program: let the program belong to the youth.

Key Partnerships

Youth should be the program's primary participants, although adults can be effective in supporting roles. Youths can seek the assistance and involvement of school personnel, community leaders, business professionals, law enforcement personnel, social service providers, religious leaders, and others.

Potential Obstacles

Some young people have more energy and enthusiasm than training. Supporting adults should ensure that young people acting as peer counselors or mentors, as project leaders, or in other positions of responsibility have sufficient training to do the job properly. Be careful, though: some adults have difficulty limiting themselves to supporting roles in youth programs. When adults take over, youths often lose interest in the program.

Signs of Success

In one neighborhood "good kids just stayed home," said one young girl whose mother was afraid to let her leave the house.

When the young people in town developed a youth center with the help of some caring adults, there was a feeling of safety among the neighborhood residents. In collaboration with the local police department, the young people connected to this center produced a video to educate their peers about the dangers of using crack cocaine.

Applying the Strategy

In Evansville, Indiana, teens organized a Teen Council and sponsored a video on alternatives to drug use, identifying fun activities in the area that did not involve illegal substances.

In New York City, teens participated in Youth Unlimited (formerly Youth Force), training other teens in life skills and implementing a program (Take Back the Park) in which a group of teens identified as emotionally handicapped restored a children's garden in a park that had become littered with drug paraphernalia.

Members of the Natural Helpers Program in Hampton City, Virginia, train to help younger children avoid alcohol and other drugs. They have developed a New Students' program to help youths adjust to new school situations and a Peer Partner program to help ninth graders adjust to high school. Natural Helpers serve as drug-free role models and special friends.