

Town of



AMHERST *Massachusetts*

AMHERST HEALTH DEPARTMENT, 70 BOLTWOOD WALK, AMHERST, MA 01002
(413) 259-3077 (413) 259-2404 - FAX Environmental Health Division (413) 259-3078

Amherst Drug Free Partnership Summary January, 2007

In the fall of 2006, the Amherst Drug Free Partnership used some of its remaining drug free communities funds to gather information about substance abuse in Amherst, and to generate interest in addressing prevention. One of the goals was to assess community interest in applying for future Drug Free Communities grant support.

The plan called for four activities:

- Interviews: One-on-one with key informants and residents
- Focus Group with High School Youth
- Compliance checks
- Sticker Shock Campaign. A detailed project summary and recommendations for next steps were provided to the Amherst Health Department. This summary is intended for potential partners in future prevention efforts as well as Amherst residents.

Twenty-seven people were interviewed about their views on substance abuse issues in Amherst. The interview format was based on the Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol approach. The intent of the interviews was to better understand the various perspectives on youth substance abuse in Amherst as well as to generate interest in future prevention efforts. Although 25 questions were available, each interview was different and not all questions were answered in each interview.

Several themes emerged from the interviews.

- There is considerable interest in prevention
- Parents are seen as a vital part of any future prevention plan
- There is agreement that participation from a wide range of community members and institutions is important, with Amherst schools and police identified as essential partners
- There is generally agreement that the tendency to include all opinions in every important debate is traditional and worthwhile, but also makes decision-making very slow and inefficient
- Groundswell of community energy and involvement initially. The grant was written somewhat outside the grassroots support. Eventually, the process became driven more by funding than community.

- The current Partnership started out well, but then faded. Various reasons were cited with the most important being that members lacked a clear understanding of the purpose, their roles, and the details of the strategic plan and that communication about meetings, minutes, and activities was poor.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to develop a consensus that Amherst wants to address substance abuse prevention
2. Rebuild the Partnership, or something like it
3. Develop a clear and agreed upon vision and general plan before pursuing funding
4. Include a wide range of people to create the vision
5. Develop a shared commitment to using data and evidence-based practices to guide strategies
6. Select an administrative/fiscal partner entity (based on criteria established by the Partnership) before pursuing funding
7. Orient new members to the Partnership by creating an information packet
8. Make the purpose of the Partnership clear at every meeting and event and on written materials
9. Provide clear expectations to staff
10. Develop methods to ensure accountability for performance
11. Develop community leadership
12. Use a variety of communication methods
13. Choose a consistent meeting time, place, format, and decision-making style
14. Have a clear purpose for coming together (in terms of larger vision, but also in terms of meeting tasks)
15. Focus on action items rather than process
16. Include some networking opportunity
17. Secure commitment by police and schools to be active participants
18. Continue Challenge Day

There are good models to use for community prevention planning, such as Communities That Care. CTC has been used in other communities in the area. Once a community has a plan, there are many good programs and strategies to use to enhance current programs or create new ones or to change local policy. See www.samhsa.gov for more information and links to a variety of best practice prevention models.

MAKE SMOKING HISTORY