

PARTNERS FOR SUCCESS

2015

Youth Marijuana Use Prevention Initiative

In 2014, Citizens and Students Together (CAST) received funding from Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) to implement the Partners for Success program in collaboration with the town of Foster. The prevention priority is to reduce marijuana use among 12-17 year olds by implementing strategies through a local coalition that have been working on substance abuse prevention initiatives such as CAST.

Why Marijuana was chosen for this project and why it is a problem for young people.

Early use of marijuana is linked to a variety of developmental and social problems.

Learning – Long-term studies have found that continued use of marijuana effects learning, memory and IQ in negative ways.

School Performance – Early age users of marijuana have reduced school performance, more absences and higher drop-out rates.

Socialization – Early age users are at higher risk for leaving home; immature sexual activities, driving under the influence and criminal behavior.

For more information on the impact of marijuana use on youth, visit National Institute on Drug Abuse website www.drugabuse.gov.

CAST and the Community Assessment

The Partners for Success project started with a community wide assessment with three major components: key informant interviews, focus groups and other data collection. Twenty-three community leaders representing school faculty and staff, youth group leaders, clergy, police, rescue and elected officials were interviewed and asked their opinion on marijuana use by youth in Foster. Focus groups were conducted with parents, high school teens, middle school youth and 4th and 5th graders. Data about Foster, was collected from a variety of sources and was made available to CAST during the decision making process. More details about the community assessment and the implications are located on pages 2 and 3.

A recent study followed people from age 13 to 38 and found that those who use marijuana a lot in their teens had up to an 8 point drop in IQ, even if they quit in adulthood.

Cream RD, Crane NA, Mason BJ. An evidence based review of acute and long-term effects of cannabis use on executive cognitive functions. *Journal of Addictive Medicine*, 2011:5-18.

KEY INFORMANT QUOTE

"There is an adult perception that marijuana is 'safer' or 'better' than using alcohol."

HIGH SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP

Students said that some parents engage older youth in their marijuana use and marijuana is readily available to them. This was also consistent with the Key Informant Interview comments.

PARENT FOCUS GROUP

"Everyone looks out for kids in Foster."

4TH AND 5TH GRADER FOCUS GROUP

The most striking result from the 4th grade focus group discussion was the lack of awareness of smoking and marijuana use among peers and older youth. On the other hand, the 5th graders were very aware of older teens use of marijuana and smoking. They clearly identified it as a problem.





Major Finding

Consistent with state wide Rhode Island data that shows above national average marijuana use in the 12-17 age range, 2013 data showed that the percentage of Ponaganset students reporting using drugs remains higher than the average of other schools in Rhode Island (36% vs. 27%) and the Ponaganset 9th graders' understanding of the risk associated with marijuana is underestimated. This is also supported with key informant interviews and anecdotal reports gathered from a study conducted by CAST in 2012.

Recurring Themes

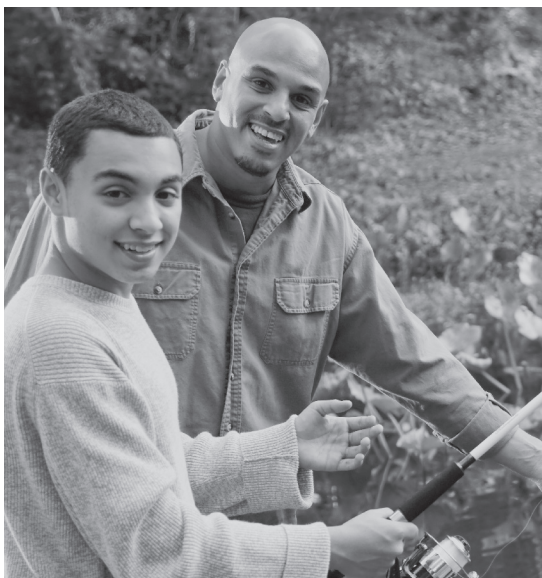
When looking at factors that contribute to risky behavior, it is also important to explore "protective factors" or community and family qualities that can support positive behavior as well as the negative factor such as readily available marijuana and low perception of risk. Throughout the community assessment, there were recurring themes that reflect this concept.

The two most prevalent themes were:

- Marijuana is available, young people and adults use it and it is perceived to be not a problem.
- Foster is a caring, rural community that values its young people.

The following are the most prevalent risk factors and protective factors, data sources and a sample of the comments collected from the community assessment:

RISK FACTOR	DATA SOURCE	COMMENTS
Adult community unaware of risk to youth Low perception of harm/risk	Key Informant Interviews Focus Groups Rhode Island Student Survey	<i>"Marijuana can side track youth from school and personal development and life goals."</i>
Perceived peer approval or actual peer use of marijuana	Rhode Island Student Survey	<i>"Youth have the perception that "everyone has it."</i>
Favorable attitude toward marijuana use by parents (family norms) Community norms supporting use	Key Informant Interviews Focus Groups	<i>"There is a parental perception that it is "okay" or "cool" that dates back to the 1960's. Parents do not perceive it as a problem." "My parents would rather I smoked marijuana than drank."</i>



PROTECTIVE FACTOR	DATA SOURCE	COMMENTS
Parents and community leaders talk with youth	Key Informant Interviews Focus Groups	<i>4th and 5th graders reported in the focus groups that there are trusted adults to talk to in their school and at home.</i>
Positive school climate	Key Informant Interviews Kids Count Focus Groups Info Works!	<i>"Parents trust schools when their kids are happy."</i>



The Implications of the Community Assessment Findings

- The community is aware that there is insufficient activities for youth after school, weekends and during the summer. While town leaders identify this as an issue, there are complex revenue and cultural considerations (i.e. such as keeping the small town character of Foster). However, the adults in Foster care about youth and based on the response from the youth focus groups, they feel cared for and supported. The Foster schools have school-wide initiatives that build community, support emotional intelligence and academic achievement. The improvement in graduation rates and reading proficiency and the decline in suspensions speak to a learning friendly environment.
- Younger youth (grades 4 and 5) were in agreement with the adults about the lack of activities. They were able to identify trusted adults they could go to for help. They also indicated that some adults could not be trusted.
- High school students found the after school activity level high, but could identify students who were not engaged in any activities for a variety of reasons. They saw this lack of engagement as a choice rather than the lack of transportation and/or resources as identified by the adults and younger children. More understanding about the stressors on older teens in the high school might be useful as well as reasons for non-engagement in sports and school activities among some of the teens.
- High school youth appear to be unaware or dismissive of the harmful effects of marijuana and adults may be contributing directly to adolescent use. This is consistent with Key Informants in the school and in the community.
- Parents are aware of the problem, view the mixed messages about marijuana use with concern and would like to see more consistent negative consequences for use such as enforcement in the schools and by police. They view Foster as a safe and healthy environment in which adults "look out" for all the children in the community.

The complete Foster Community Assessment Report is available on the CAST website, www.castr.org.



SOLUTIONS

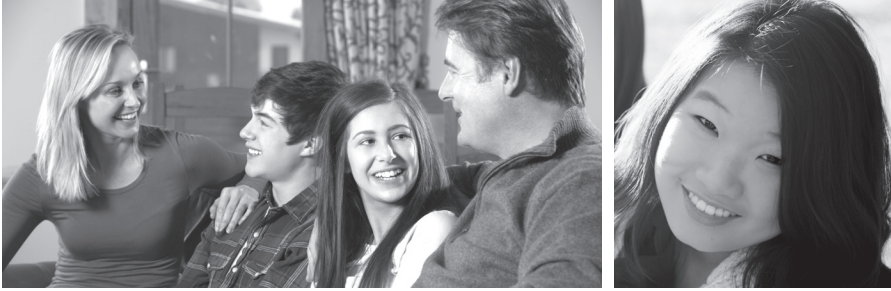
Based on a community wide assessment, CAST selected two main strategies known to be effective in combating marijuana use in youth: a media campaign to increase public concern about marijuana availability and the potential harm of marijuana use in youth, and engaging the caring community leaders and family members in building Developmental Assets™ in Foster's youth.

What are Developmental Assets™?

Developmental Assets refer to positive factors that help to shape and influence youth behavior that promote young people's successful growth and development. There are 40 Developmental Assets identified by research conducted by Search Institute. The assets are grouped into 8 categories:

- Youth have families and organizations to provide **positive support**
- The community values youth and **empowers youth**
- Youth are made aware of **boundaries and expectations**
- Youth have opportunities for creative and **constructive use of time**
- Youth develop a lifelong **commitment to education and learning**
- Youth develop **positive values** that guide their choices
- Youth have **social competencies** in decision-making, relationships and how to succeed in life.
- Youth have a sense of their own **value, purpose and worth** to the family and the community.

For more information about Developmental Assets go to www.searchinstitute.org



Why Social Marketing and Media Campaigns?

Social marketing is a strategy use to influence healthy behavior changes that can benefit the individual and the community. Media campaigns such as the two recommended for this project are proven effective strategy designed to raise awareness about the negative consequences of marijuana use on youth. *Above The Influence* is aimed at youth and *It Matters* was designed to reach parents.

"In order for drug free campaigns to be successful, parents must see marijuana use by youth as a problem."



Above the Influence is a website and prevention ads campaign originally created as a part of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and is now part of a non-profit program. The campaign was, and continues to be inspired by what teens say about their lives, and how they deal with the influences that shape their decisions. *Above the Influence's* "goal is to help teens stand up to negative pressures, or influences". The campaigns and website are about increasing teen awareness of the influences around them and better prepare them to face these influence, including the pressure to use drugs and alcohol. (www.abovetheinfluence.com)

COLLABORATION MEMBERS



It Matters is a website educational campaigns aimed at teens and parents. Sponsored by Kansas Behavioral Health Services, the campaign helps communities understand the extent and cause of substance abuse problems and take action to reduce and prevent them. The program uses trained professionals from communities to help with the selection of proven prevention strategies and resources. (www.itmattersks.org)



CAST is a volunteer community health coalition that supports programs that enhance healthy conditions towards a drug free community in Foster and Glocester and is currently funded as a substance abuse prevention task force. If you would like more information about CAST, visit the CAST website or contact the CAST Coordinator, Lorraine Kaul, at 397-5616 (www.castri.org)

Asset Champions is a "home grown" strategy based on the proven effective Asset Development research and evaluation. The CAST coordinator will be collaborating directly with Foster youth groups, parents and community leaders to coordinate strategies that promote assets and positive youth development. (www.searchinstitute.org)



Foster is collaborating with CAST on the Partners for Success project. Foster is a rural community of less than 5,000 people located in northern Rhode Island.

If you would like more information contact Lorraine Kaul, at (401) 397-5616.



The Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospital (BHDDH) is a state agency that provides care services for more than 50,000 Rhode Islanders with mental health and substance abuse issues, developmental disabilities, and chronic long-term medical and psychiatric conditions. In addition to care services, BHDDH receives state and federal funding for prevention services such as Partners for Success. (www.bhddh.ri.gov)