



Addressing Problematic Substance Use: Effective Actions by Young People

"I am a wild child...the only thing that keeps me out of trouble is my other activities. I am too busy."

– Youth Participant

Projects

- National: Youth Action Committee (YAC) for Tobacco Control
- Provincial: Youth Consultation on Problematic Substance Use (Saskatchewan)
- Municipal: City of Vancouver Prevention Strategy
- Local: Circle of Voices

Knowledge Transfer and Outcomes

Youth engagement promotes healthy decision-making and reduces negative health risk-taking. Youth engagement is an effective strategy for preventing substance abuse. Youth that are engaged in extra-curricular activities are less likely to use both soft drugs such as marijuana and hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin than students who were less involved.¹

Youth engagement in substance abuse-related activities and programs is an effective practice to improve programs for youth. In a review of youth tobacco control strategies by Paul Lantz et al, it was reported that interactive programs and those led by peers that addressed the social influences of substance use were most effective.² Youth-led and youth-driven programs create benefits not only for the recipients of these programs, but also for the youth involved in planning the programs.

Those young people involved in developing and implementing these programs are receiving positive health related outcomes too, more so than the end users themselves, particularly if the planners are at-risk. Komro et al note that involvement in the planning of alcohol-free events was more effective in reducing later drinking among young people who were already consuming alcohol than their peers who abstained.³

The Centre's role is not to design the perfect program or toolkit to end all substance use, but to continue to engage as many youth as possible in planning programs and discussing ideas related to substance use education and prevention. It is the quality of the experience of engagement that is forefront in achieving the desired result.

Linkages

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement provides youth facilitation as well as other trainings for youth and adults to work together in partnership. Our partners also design and facilitate youth programs and events, conduct peer-led youth consultations, and support various organizations and institutions at all levels to implement effective strategies to engage youth. Please visit our website for more information:

www.engagementcentre.ca.

References:

1. 1) Jenkins, J. E. (1996). The influence of peer affiliation and student activities on adolescent drug involvement. *Adolescence*, 31: 297-307.
2. 2) Paul Lantz et al. 2000. Investing in youth tobacco control: a review of smoking prevention and control strategies. *Tobacco Control*. 9: 47-63.
3. 3) Komro, K.A., Perry, C.L., Murray, D.M., VeblenMortenson, S., Williams, C.L., & Anstine, P.S. (1996). Peer-planned social activities for preventing alcohol use among young adolescents. *Journal of School Health*, 66(9): 328-334.