

Rx Drug Abuse



As it is, teenagers spend a lot of time in the bathroom each morning primping before another day at school. Lately, however, it seems that they might be making more frequent trips there in order to search the medicine cabinet for “Xanies” and “M40s”. At disturbingly high rates youth are raiding the medicine cabinets in their homes looking for Xanax and Oxycontin (the more common names for the slang terms above) among other prescription drugs, and sharing the pills they find there with friends. Often they have no idea what type of medication they are taking, the dosage or what kind of reaction combining different types pills might create, which could be deadly. Every day, over 2,500 young people use prescription drugs to get high for the first time, and summer is a prime time for this type of risky experimentation. Perhaps it’s the freedom of the season, when curfews are extended, new friends are made at summer jobs, and a carefree, “nothing bad can happen to me” attitude abounds. These parts of life are essential for teens to gain autonomy and a sense of self-efficacy, but they can also have negative consequences when appropriate boundaries are not set. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America has launched the *Not in My House* campaign to show parents how to monitor, secure and dispose of prescription drugs in their home. The campaign, which can be accessed at www.drugfree.org/notinmyhouse, also explains the warning signs of prescription drug abuse and give tips for starting an ongoing conversation with teens about the dangers of drug use. Parents can also visit www.theantidrug.com for tips on preventing prescription drug abuse.

The National Drug Intelligence Center recently released its *National Prescription Drug Threat Assessment 2009* to call attention to the increasing issue of controlled prescription drug (CPD) misuse. The report states that in 2007 almost 7 million individuals over the age of 12 claimed to have used CPDs (opioid pain relievers, tranquilizers, sedatives or stimulants) in the past 30 days. Unintentional overdose deaths skyrocketed between 2001 to 2005, increasing by 114 percent in only four years. Pain relievers are the most widely abused form of CPDs because of their ability to give a euphoric high to the healthy user. The largest population of abusers is young people from the ages of 12 to 25, with CPD abuse peaking during the transition from high school to college. This growing trend has already cost the nation billions of dollars and led to an increase in violent and property crimes. Most alarming, however, is the claim from treatment providers that prescription opioid abuse could be the spark behind the rapidly spreading fire of heroin use in our country. Anecdotal reporting suggests that CPD abusers are switching to heroin once they build up a tolerance to prescription opioids and are still seeking a euphoric high. And in many regions of the country, heroin is less expensive and more readily available than prescription drugs. This is certainly true in Middlesex County, where heroin can be bought for as little as \$10 a bag, while some pills can fetch up to \$40 apiece. In surveys of more than 5,000 Middlesex County students over the past two years, 18.5% of high school and 4.5% of middle school students reported having taken prescription medication that was not intended for them.

In order to prevent this increasing trend from becoming an epidemic many states, including Connecticut, have passed legislation to create Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) to reduce doctor-shopping and prescription drug diversion. In further prevention efforts, many communities are implementing prescription drug take-back programs. Citizens are invited to bring unneeded, unused and and/or expired prescription drugs to a designated take-back station that is staffed by volunteers and law enforcement and operated according to CT PDMP guidelines. MCSAAC has heard of the success of these programs in other parts of the state and we we’d like to know – **do you think that it would be beneficial to plan a prescription drug take-back event in your town?** We appreciate any and all feedback via email to erinn@mcsaac.org or kris@mcsaac.org!

MCSAAC in Year 2010

Matters of Substance

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As most of our readers know, the federal Drug Free Communities grant that has for ten years supported two full-time MCSAAC positions—along with Youth Leadership and Developmental Dollar grants—will come to an end on September 30, 2009. MCSAAC is already looking forward to new challenges. While competition from nonprofits nationwide will be intense, we are in the race for several new sources of funding. We are hoping to win at least one or more of the multi-year federal grants described below; any combination of grants will allow us to continue to serve Middlesex County families.

In late July we'll know whether our *Middletown Mentoring Alliance* proposal to the Office of Juvenile Justice is successful. The *Alliance* will support and strengthen three city-based mentoring programs while

developing a unique new program for older teens in Middlesex County who attend adult education and technical high schools. In September we'll hear about a second grant, the *Developing Minds Shouldn't Get Wasted* program, intended to reduce underage drinking—including binge drinking—in Middlesex County. By the following winter we will know whether our million dollar *Neurobiology of Addiction (NOA)* proposal was successful; if so we can begin development of the film and portable museum exhibit that will aid middle school teachers in offering the best substance abuse education classes possible. Finally, with the encouragement of our board and LPC leaders, MCSAAC staff is pursuing a grant to better understand the causes and means of prevention of prescription drug abuse across the life span.

Here's what some local police officers had to say when MCSAAC staff asked them "Now that school's out, what's your biggest summertime concern regarding young people and alcohol/drug use?"

"Outdoor parties where there's underage drinking going on – and what happens after those parties. That's a top concern of ours."
-Chief Tony Salvatore
Cromwell

"We're concerned about older youth who grow out of the games and recreational activities that kept them occupied when they were younger, and turn to recreational drinking and recreational drugging."
-Major John Santry
Clinton

"In the summer, kids drive around and hang out together more, which is fine. Most of them are good kids. But we do find more alcohol in cars in the summer."
-Officer David Bond
Portland

The sponsoring organization for the **Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council** is the *Business/Industry Foundation of Middlesex County*, affiliated with the *Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce*. In addition, **MCSAAC** gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support provided by the *Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce*, *The Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*, *The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention* and other public, private, and municipal resources.

The Great Divide

All but one school district in Middlesex County surveys its high school students on ATOD use—alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. To some the numbers have become familiar: nearly half the students drink, a third smoke marijuana, and 18 percent have misused prescriptions. What are the stories behind this data, though? What are the kids doing and thinking when they try out, use, and share these drugs? How are parents reacting?

These questions were the driving force behind MCSAAC's Focus Group Initiative, carried out in the late winter and early spring of 2009. We assembled three groups of people and invited a professional facilitator to lead them through a series of questions about substance use and abuse. The first were college students from public and private institutions. The second was a group of students from an adult education center. The third was composed of parents of teens. Each one-hour discussion was confidential.

Facilitator J. Kent Alexander found that the generational divide is alive and well! For example, while parents think that Ecstasy is still a problem, teens regard it as "out-dated" and "un-cool." Parents are largely unaware of mushrooms as a current drug

while young people find "shrooms" socially acceptable. Youth are worried about the increase in heroin's availability and its potential impact on their peers, while parents tend to think this is a distant, unlikely problem. Parents wonder if they should be concerned about meth when it's the youthful belief that Adderall is a "clean version" of meth that they *should* be worried about!

Perhaps most confounding is the perception of "driving under the influence." Our study demonstrated that the nation-wide campaign against drunk driving has been very effective: everyone in the three focus groups frowned on it. However, only the parent group fully understood the danger of driving under *any* psychotropic influence. The majority of young people who used marijuana claimed that it did not impede their driving; indeed, a few went so far as to say that they drive better stoned!

The full report of the findings of the Focus Group Initiative can be requested from MCSAAC. Staff and board members discussed the report with Mr. Alexander in April, and reported anonymous data to DMHAS as part of its "enhanced community assessment" work.

The Harry Eben Burr Business Award for Prevention Awareness



For six years Mr. Harry Eben Burr has served as Chair of the Prevention Committee at the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce. While a six-year chairmanship is notable, a far more impressive number is the one tied to his years of sobriety - 20 next year. After a true moment of enlightenment in the 1980s, Harry decided to turn his life around and began to attend Alcoholics Anonymous

meetings. Since that time he has been a fervent supporter of AA and sings its praises to everyone he meets. He does not hesitate to add that despite AA's success as a program, an individual's recovery really depends on his or her willingness and spirit. Recently, when addressing a crowd of former addicts recovering from various substance abuse problems, Harry stressed that a positive, dedicated attitude is the only way to avoid relapsing.

Harry himself always has a positive outlook. He is charismatic, always smiling and rarely seen without his signature bowtie. Perhaps this is why he has so many friends and fans in Middlesex County, including Chamber President Larry McHugh. "Harry is a truly fantastic community leader. He has had a positive impact on the business community with his dedication and support of

substance abuse prevention, those with substance abuse problems, the United Way, and the Middlesex Chamber," says McHugh.

Harry Burr has dedicated his life to promoting the importance of living a healthy, substance-free lifestyle. He gives countless volunteer hours to the Middlesex United Way, is a member of both the Rushford and Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce Boards of Directors, and still finds time to lead the Chamber's Prevention Committee. Along with his responsibilities as Chairman of the Board at McCutcheon Burr & Sons, Harry will start teaching a business lecture series at Dean College, Suffolk University in the fall. He is also a benefactor of Dean College Center for the Performing Arts program. For all these reasons, MCSAAC has renamed its annual Business Award the "Harry Eben Burr Business Award for Prevention Awareness." The award, which will continue to be granted each fall, will go to a Middlesex County business or business leader who goes "above and beyond" to implement, promote or support substance abuse prevention efforts. Past recipients have included Willowbrook Spirit Shoppe in Cromwell, The Middletown Press, Mazzotta's Restaurant and Bakery, Sirge and Marsha Orzeck of The Valley Press, Walt Carlson of SNET (Westbrook), and Mike Waller of Lyman Farm, Inc. (Middlefield).



MCSAAC

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!



Does your organization have an innovative idea for a program focused on promoting developmental assets in our young people? If so, you should apply for a Developmental Dollars grant! Any youth group, club, camp, church/synagogue, school or community organization can apply for up to \$1,500 in funding. **MCSAAC will be accepting applications for Developmental Dollars grants until July 10, 2009.** Applications can be downloaded at www.mcsaac.org.



Please help us save paper and money! If you are no longer interested in receiving our mailings send us your address label or contact Joan at (860) 347-5959 or joan@mcsaac.org. Also, if you receive more than one copy at your office and are willing to share please let us know. Thank you!