It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: A Model of Training for Prevention of Youth Abuse of Alcohol and Other Drugs

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ABSTRACT: Regional Prevention Centers in Massachusetts established a "training of trainers" model to help communities prevent youth from the early use of alcohol and other drugs. The curriculum, called "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child", teaches interested adults about prevention, empowers them to be positive role models, and helps them teach children skills that will strengthen resistance to alcohol and other drugs. The success of the program lies in its egalitarian climate for learning, its adaptability to different problems and populations, and its enhancement of communities' sense of responsibility for all children.

Youth abuse of alcohol and other drugs remains a serious problem in the United States. Despite encouraging statistics about the decline in alcohol and other drug abuse by youth in Massachusetts, and by high school seniors in the United States, levels of abuse continue at an unacceptably high level. For example, in Massachusetts high school students' "lifetime" alcohol use decreased—to 85.1%! (Health and Addictions Research, 1990). Similarly, in the United States more than 27.9% of seniors, 21.1% of tenth graders and 13.4% of eighth graders...
reported recently downing five or more drinks in a row (Health and Human Services News, April 13, 1993). More ominous are figures that show continued problems with alcohol abuse, and higher rates of illicit drug use, in eighth graders over the past year (Health and Human Services News).

Research has confirmed that family and community responses are crucial in abetting or preventing early use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs by youth (Hawkins, Lishner & Catalano, 1985; Jenson & Howard, 1991; Manger, Hawkins, Haggerty & Catalano, 1992). Not only are children more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs if their family members do (Goodwin, 1971); in addition, alienation, conflict, ineffective discipline and poor communication in their family put children at risk for later drug abuse (Kumpfer & DeMarsh, 1986; Simcha-Fagan & Gersten, 1986). Similarly, a youth alienated from community institutions is more likely than others to abuse alcohol and other drugs: lack of attachment and success in school (Fleming, Kellam & Brown, 1982; Spivack, 1983), residential mobility (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Murray, 1983), and low religious involvement (Jenson & Howard, 1991) have all been linked to early use or abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Communities which are deprived or disorganized (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981; Murray, 1983), or which espouse norms favorable to drug and alcohol use (Joksch, 1988) also increase the risk of adolescent drug use. Conversely, Werner and colleagues (Werner, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982) found that positive relationships with family members, presence of structure and values in the household, and availability of neighbors and community helpers for support “protected” high-risk children from engaging in drug or alcohol abuse.

Development of a Curriculum to Prevent Youth Abuse of Alcohol and Other Substances

In the 1970’s the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established eight regional Prevention Centers, funded by the Department of Public Health, in partnership with private agencies. Each Prevention Center maintained a multi-media resource library about prevention, and was staffed with prevention specialists, including social workers, who worked with local agencies and citizens as community developers and educators. A major goal of the Centers was building healthy families and communities, as well as preventing behaviors like abuse of alco-