

Westford Health Department.

Utilizing Evidence-Based Prevention Programs to Reduce Substance abuse

\$6,100 was awarded in grant funds by the GLHA (2014-2015)

Project Summary

The Westford Health Department has the distinction of having a Substance Abuse Coordinator working through it; the Coordinator's focus is on prevention, intervention services, health policy development and community outreach.

The WHD had requested grant funds to implement two programs that had previously been canceled due to lack of funding.

Project Goals

- **To re-implement the Table Talks Program:** Table Talks is an innovative program that utilizes existing social bonds between parents and their friends and neighbors, and develops those friendships as a strategy for preventing risky teen behaviors.
- Parents were used as hosts to establish a more intimate atmosphere to discussions.
- Trained facilitators will share current YRBS data on middle school student risky behaviors.
- Additionally, an emphasis was put on allowing parents to share practical tips and to communicate openly with other parents.
- **To re-implement the Guiding Good Choices Program:** The GGC program will prevent substance abuse among teens by teaching parents of preteens and younger adolescents in grades 4-8 the skills they need to improve family communication and family bonding.
- Sessions are interactive and skill-based, with opportunities for parents to practice new skills and receive feedback.

Outcomes

- By advertising through the local newspaper, the school's email system, their website, bulletin boards around the public schools and health dept. town-wide mailers, the WHD was able to successfully outreach to the community.
- Although the Table Talks Program had smaller attendance than most programs, those that did participate experienced a much-improved program which allowed for much more positive outcomes.
- The GGC program participants were given a survey to evaluate the changes; in October, 2014, approval ratings were averaging in the 5's, with a score of 6 being perfect.
- In short, both programs had made significant improvements with the grant-funds apportioned.