

Learning Community Task



Case Study--Community Resources and Readiness

Coalition _____

In thinking about the resources, remember that resources can include the following:

- Knowledge of and practical experience working with sub-populations
- Community efforts
- Community knowledge of those efforts
- Knowledge about the issue
- Knowledge about prevention research, theory and practice
- People, financial resources, organizational structures

| Resources | Resource Gaps | Readiness (High/Low) | Cultural Competency Considerations |
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Hilltop: A Suburban Town

The Community—and Community Climate

Hilltop, a suburban town with a population of 100,000 (90% white, 5% Asian, and 5% African American) has the third highest median household income level in the State, 18% higher than the State average. “Hilltop Protects Youth,” which meets monthly, began six years ago to focus on youth stress and the problem of suicide. The town’s teen suicide rate was 13% higher than the State’s and there had been three incidents in two years. Lately, teen alcohol-related traffic fatalities have been rising.

Recently, the community was very shaken when a major crash took the lives of five kids under the age of 19. The coalition received calls from numerous concerned citizens. However, many key stakeholders in the community see this as an isolated incident. In a recent article published in the town newspaper, town officials, key business leaders and the police were quoted as stating that these were isolated incidents. In addition, there has been an increase in lawsuits by parents whose kids are arrested for possession of alcohol or being present when alcohol is being served to minors. The school has also seen an increase in lawsuits concerning the enforcement of school regulation for sports.

The head of the Chamber of Commerce owns the largest liquor store (his brother is a selectman and his brother-in-law a sergeant on the police force). In the recent newspaper article he stated, “Just because we have bakeries in this town doesn’t mean that people gain weight. This is not the problem of good citizens trying to run respectable establishments.” Publicly the police have said they’re willing to meet with the coalition. Privately the police chief has aired to the superintendent of schools his concerns: the limited resources of police departments and the message he’s getting from the community: “Don’t arrest our kids.” When the coalition organized youth focus groups, teenagers reported that adults support their drinking behavior, that adults consume alcohol at tailgating parties before, during, and after football games; and many adults sponsor parties for youth where alcohol is served. “It feels like adults don’t care what we do as long as we get into a good college and get good grades,” said one sophomore.

The Coalition

Over six years, the coalition has expanded to include human services providers, hospital representatives, and the board of health. Currently, the school provides meeting space for the coalition. A comprehensive substance abuse prevention curriculum was added to the sixth and eighth grades and all teachers receive at least three hours of training on substance abuse signs and symptoms. Working with human services providers, the coalition has focused on a better referral mechanism for getting kids with alcohol and other drug abuse problems linked to the proper services. Recent discussions have focused on trying to include the police, faith community, and business community in the coalition. One steering committee member raised the need to become a more diverse group; others feel the coalition represents the community well enough. No consensus was reached. The coalition did decide to look into creating some working committees. Again, no consensus.

Funds from a State prevention grant underwrite coalition activities. In the last year, the coalition also secured additional funding to hire a coalition coordinator, hoping that this position can begin to enhance the membership of the coalition and bring in more community stakeholders. It also won a small grant from a private foundation to use for parent outreach. The coalition began to host parent coffees—informal get-togethers that provide parents with a chance to talk about alcohol- and drug-related problems and discuss positive actions they can take. So far, 20 events have reached 150 parents, grateful to gain information and network with other parents. Many parents have said they want to get involved in the work of the coalition.

Dexter: An Urban Neighborhood

The Community—and Community Climate

Dexter, a large, diverse, neighborhood in a mid-Atlantic city, is 75% white, 20% Latino from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and 5% Asian (Cambodian and Chinese). Twenty years ago, the city was the center for manufacturing in the State. Over the last five years manufacturing has left the community and the State—and left Dexter economically depressed with high unemployment. Many young people end up leaving to go to college, if they can, or to find work. Local stores hire young clerks who sell to their friends and their friends' brothers and sisters. Young people congregate to use alcohol in the wooded parks nearby. Seven years ago, after getting drunk, becoming separated from her friends, and falling into a stream, a fifteen-year-old girl drowned. This incident prompted a group of concerned parents to start the coalition

The Coalition

"Dexter Heights Prevents" consists of over 25 parents—the town clerk, a pediatrician, a former physician from the Dominican Republic who can't practice medicine in the US, local artists, a newspaper reporter, several people from the women's guild (an organization for women over age 65)—plus some teenagers from the local church youth group. A wealth of community stakeholders are involved, with many ideas and a lot of energy. Good thing, too—the coalition, lacking financial resources, operates with a very small grant from a private foundation and no paid staff. Twice a year fundraisers bring in an additional \$20,000 in operating costs.

Missing are the Cambodians (the group has not tried to reach out to the Cambodian community and doesn't know how they feel about youth substance abuse) and the schools, The superintendent feels "schools should focus on writing, reading and arithmetic" and leave other issues to the parents. Not surprisingly, there is very little prevention education and just one health class, mandatory for all sophomores and juniors.

The police chief likes to stay informed, though in an urban area, he feels the department has more pressing priorities. Relations have improved between the police and the Latino community, concentrated in a six-block area. After the death of a child hit by a car speeding through the neighborhood, residents began meeting with the police on a regular basis. There are now three full-time officers who are bilingual.

Concerned about the lack of health information for young people, some of the local churches have begun talking about alcohol and other drugs in the youth groups. Clergy from different churches come together quarterly to network. An outgrowth is an interfaith education series for parents on prevention topics, the youth group prevention talks, and weekly educational articles in the bulletins. Churches also created a policy: no alcohol at church sponsored events. Following suit, some other organizations agreed not to serve alcohol at their events when young people were going to be present.

To raise community awareness, the coalition used an excellent existing relationship between the editor of the local paper and the chair of the coalition. The editor was willing to offer a bi-weekly column to write about kids and prevention issues. The column became a great vehicle for educating the public and readers were encouraged to send in questions. In addition, using youth volunteers, the coalition started an educational Web site with pages for kids as well as parents. Another founding member of the coalition, a public health nurse, decided to research alcohol and other drug abuse prevention by finding great web sites

and taking several online courses. After that, she made sure the whole coalition was educated by bringing in two trainers from the State.

Recently local artists have approached the coalition, interested in sponsoring a writing/ photography contest where the winners display their art in a calendar, to be sold to the community. Already the guild women have found a local business sponsor willing to underwrite the cost of the producing the calendar.