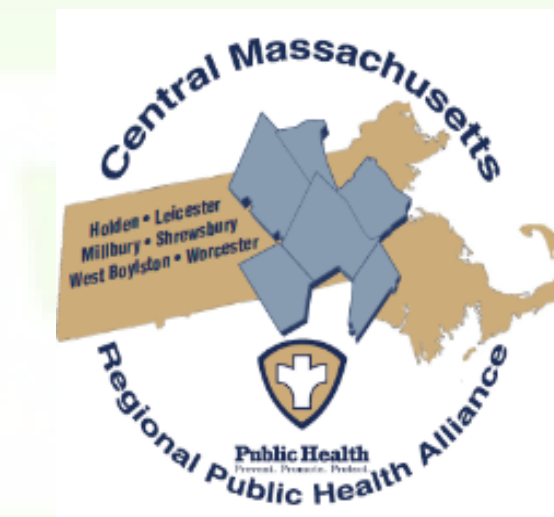


# I'M ABOUT THIS LIFE!

## Changing Youth Perceptions of Alcohol and Drug Use

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### 1 Assessing and Changing Youth Perceptions of Substance Abuse

In 2012, the Worcester Department of Public Health (WDPH) released the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) which focuses on strategies in five areas: (1) healthy eating/active living; (2) behavioral health; (3) primary care/wellness; (4) violence/injury prevention; (5) health equity/health disparities.

Under behavioral health, the WDPH seeks to reduce substance abuse in Worcester youth. Our project focused on four objectives:

Objective 2.1.2. and 2.2.2. suggests to "implement a social norms campaign to address misperceptions of local youth alcohol and tobacco use."

Objective 2.1.1. and 2.2. seeks to "conduct a youth health assessment, such as the Worcester Regional Youth Survey, in schools in the region."

### 2 YouthNet and HOPE

YouthNet is a summer program that provides recreational, educational and cultural activities to Worcester youth ages 11-16. The program is hosted at a variety of locations throughout the city, including the YWCA and Boys & Girls Club.

HOPE Coalition is a group of peer leaders that seeks to reduce youth violence and substance use, as well as promote positive adolescent mental health and youth voice in Worcester through a youth-adult partnership. The HOPE coalition is composed of 15 high school aged Worcester youth.



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### Intake Survey and Campaign

#### Intake Survey

- We made a 10-question survey for YouthNet participants about demographic information and substance use.
- Feedback: Participants had difficulty understanding the questions. A UMass evaluation of survey revealed that the survey required a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, which may have been too advanced for our target audience.
- Results: Our survey showed 93% of YouthNet participants did not drink or use drugs in the last year.

#### "I'm About This Life!" Pilot Campaign

- We printed the "I'm About This Life!" slogan on a variety of items ("swag") to promote the campaign (see images).
- At the YouthNet evening program, HOPE teens explained the meaning of the campaign and rewarded youth who answered questions with campaign swag. The meaning of the slogan is to do something positive with your time instead of negative activities like drugs and alcohol.
- Feedback: We noticed some HOPE teens were not successful in explaining the campaign or were too timid to approach groups. We were able to express our concerns to the HOPE coalition and noticed improvements in subsequent distribution sessions.
- Results: We tracked effectiveness of the campaign with focus groups at YouthNet.



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### Focus Groups and Exit Survey

- We conducted three focus groups of six YouthNet participants to assess whether they understood the "I'm About This Life!" message, as well as which branded items were the most appealing.
- During the focus groups, we piloted our exit surveys. The surveys asked youth about their knowledge of the campaign and if it had any effect on their attitude towards drug and alcohol use and norms.
- The exit surveys will be distributed at the end of the YouthNet program to all participants.

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### Next Steps

After successfully piloting the "I'm About This Life!" campaign at YouthNet, WDPH plans to expand the program into the school and/or community. Additionally, lessons about substance abuse will be incorporated into the Worcester Public health curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders.



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