

2009 CASCO BAY REGION COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS & RESOURCES FOR YOUTH SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION: *Summary Overview*

I. Introduction

The Casco Bay Coalition for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention is a regional, multi-sector coalition, made up of representatives from the region's schools, law enforcement, parent groups, youth organizations, treatment agencies, and many more. Created in 2007 with staffing and support from the 21 Reasons coalition of Portland, the Casco Bay Coalition brings together individuals, organizations, and businesses with a common mission to: *"Mobilize citizen involvement and multi-sector collaboration to foster a healthy community environment with norms, policies, and practices that work together to promote positive, drug and alcohol-free development for all Casco Bay youth."* Coalition activities are guided by a steering committee of individuals from all sectors of the region, which includes the towns of Cumberland, Falmouth, Freeport, Gray, New Gloucester, North Yarmouth, Pownal, Yarmouth, and Chebeague Island.

II. Sources/Methodology

Data sources include: **Youth substance abuse data** through the Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS), **law enforcement data** on alcohol violations, **community perception data** from the Casco Bay Community Opinion Survey, **discussion notes** from regional & town meetings, and **interview notes** from one-on-one meetings with community members.

III. Casco Bay Resources/Assets

Strength areas: Small size of the Casco Bay towns allows for close relationships to grow between adults and youth; Casco Bay parents are often very involved in their children's lives; many adults and youth believe that Casco Bay schools and extracurricular activities are strong protectors against youth substance abuse; community members feel there are many local Casco Bay organizations that really care about youth, and help them to stay drug- and alcohol-free; the Casco Bay community has local prevention, intervention and treatment resources available for youth and their families.

Community readiness: The Community Opinion Survey (2009) results show that many Casco Bay community members are worried about youth substance abuse in their community. In fact, out of the various issues affecting youth, almost 91% of Casco Bay community members are **"most concerned" about substance abuse**. The top three substances that most concern community members are: Alcohol (92%), marijuana (74%), and prescription drug misuse (41%). The survey results were clear: **Community members want change around youth substance abuse, especially underage drinking.**

IV. Youth Substance Abuse Rates

According to the 2008 MYDAUS, the drug of choice among Casco Bay region youth (grades six to twelve) is alcohol (24%), followed by marijuana (11%) and prescription drugs misuse (4%). While sixth through twelfth grade average use rates of alcohol and other substances in the Casco Bay region appear comparable to the rest of the state, a difference is evident when we examine rates among 12th grade students. By the time students in the Casco Bay region reach senior year, their use rates of alcohol are slightly above the average 12th grade use rates statewide. In 2008, 47% of Casco Bay 12th graders reported using alcohol in the past 30 days, compared to 45% of 12th graders statewide. Marijuana use among Casco Bay 12th graders is also slightly higher than the State average, with 27% having used in the past 30 days, compared to 25% statewide.

However, a much larger difference is apparent when we look at binge drinking rates (defined as drinking five or more alcoholic drinks in a row) among 12th graders: **33% of Casco Bay seniors report binge drinking, compared to 26% of seniors statewide.** This suggests that while overall Casco Bay youth drinking rates are comparable to the state average, more youth in this region are participating in higher-risk drinking practices by the time they reach 12th grade.

V. **Community Themes**

The following four community risk factor themes emerged in our review of the data:

- 1) There is a prevalence of community norms and messaging favorable toward youth alcohol use throughout the Casco Bay region, from both adults and youth.
- 2) There is a need for enhanced enforcement and monitoring around underage drinking by Casco Bay parents.
- 3) There is a need for enhanced enforcement around underage drinking by Casco Bay law enforcement.
- 4) Alcohol and other drugs are easily accessible in the Casco Bay community.

VI. **Root causes & contributing factors**

These local conditions all contribute to the root causes of youth substance in abuse in some way:

A. **COMMUNITY NORMS**

- a. Permissive myths around underage drinking prevalent throughout the community (most prominent being the “European model” myth and the “kids will be kids” myth)
- b. Adults sending messages that “It’s not a party without alcohol” and “It’s part of the adult socializing culture”
 - i. For example, as one parent said: *“Kids watch their parents and model behavior. I’ve seen parents drink cocktails at Little League games (disguised in coffee travel mugs). A lot of partying [goes on] in this town and a lot of liquor is consumed by parents”*
- c. High levels of youth stress, overachievement, and pressure to succeed, contributing to adult norms of “these are smart achieving kids, they deserve a little fun”
- d. Community as a whole doesn’t acknowledge underage drinking as a problem, contributing to the norm that “alcohol isn’t really a drug”

B. **PARENTAL ENFORCEMENT/MONITORING**

- a. Need for enhanced parental knowledge around what their child is actually doing, in regards to alcohol and other drugs
- b. Parents providing alcohol to youth in their homes—taking the car keys, but allowing them to drink at their house because they believe it is the “safe thing to do” and “kids are going to drink anyways, might as well make sure they don’t drink and drive”
- c. Lack of parental networking opportunities, and difficulty in discussing substance use in the community, making it more difficult to enforce and monitor youth behavior

C. **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- a. Youth assumption they will not be caught, can get out of their punishment, or their punishment will not actually be enforced, partly due to their economic or social status in the community
- b. Low enforcement violation rates, due in part to enforcement feeling backlash from parents

D. **ACCESS TO ALCOHOL & MARIJUANA**

- a. Permissive attitudes by adults contributing to easy access
- b. Relatively high levels of disposable income available to youth, contributing to easy access

Now that you are more aware of what is actually going on in your community in regards to youth substance abuse, would you like to find a way to get involved? Please contact Emily Wolff, Coalition Coordinator, ewolff@mcd.org, 773-7737, or visit www.21reasons.org for more information.