



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Vermont Communities Successfully Build Upon Drug & Alcohol Prevention Efforts

*Celebrate National Public Health Week April 2 - 8, 2012*

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BRATTLEBORO – Beth Shrader, director of the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition, believes her community reached a tipping point where the “blunt truth” about the high rates of marijuana use among high school students demanded everyone’s full attention.

The Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition is one of 24 Vermont communities awarded Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant funding (SPF-SIG) in late 2007 to reduce underage drinking. Communities could also choose to work on reducing high-risk drinking or marijuana use among young people.

During the five years of federal funding from the Vermont Department of Health, all 24 communities successfully built organizational capacity, created prevention plans, and put into action strategies proven to work – communication campaigns, strengthened enforcement of underage drinking laws or drinking/driving laws, local or state alcohol policy change, and educational programs. The communities also promoted ParentUp, the statewide media campaign to help parents talk with their children about drinking.

Because 47 percent of Windham County Southeast Supervisory Union high school students had reported ever using marijuana, Brattleboro was one of four communities that also prioritized reducing marijuana use by youth and young adults.

“Community surveys showed us that the high rates of marijuana use by our young people was a major concern for everyone,” Shrader said. “We all want young people to develop to their full potential. When we reviewed the data, it was a concern. We saw an opportunity to create change – and we like a challenge.”

The Brattleboro coalition launched a media campaign called “the blunt truth about marijuana,” and a website [www.thebluntruth.org](http://www.thebluntruth.org) to build awareness and educate the community about marijuana’s harmful effects, including effects to brain development and greater risk for dependency.

The approach seems to be working in Brattleboro and the other funded communities across the state, according to an independent analysis just completed by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE).

### **Binge Drinking and Marijuana Use Declines Among Youth**

For binge drinking and marijuana use among high school students, the reductions between the pre-intervention years (2003-2007) and 2011 were significantly greater for the SPF-SIG communities compared to the non-funded communities. Because the funded communities covered 71 percent of the state’s population, the effects of the SPF-SIG grants, in combination with other initiatives on underage drinking, show up in the statewide statistics.

According to Youth Risk Behavior Survey data and surveys of young adults, college students and parents, use of alcohol and binge drinking is significantly down among high school students, binge drinking has decreased among college-age adults, and parents are more aware of resources like [www.ParentUpVT.org](http://www.ParentUpVT.org) to help prevent underage drinking.

Although the funded communities that focused on marijuana use saw significant decreases, marijuana use among high school students has remained about the same, at 24 percent statewide in 2011.

“Students are a very difficult group of people to reach. Brattleboro and the other communities knew that it would take the support of everyone,” said Deputy Health Commissioner Barbara Cimaglio. “The strategies underway in Vermont are accomplishing what they set out to do. We are trending in the right direction.”

Statewide data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that past month use of alcohol by high school students statewide has dropped from 43 percent in 2007 to 35 percent in 2011, and that binge drinking (having five or more drinks) has dropped from 26 to 21 percent. The PIRE study also reported a significant reduction in binge drinking by Vermont college students, from 58 percent in 2008 to 54 percent in 2010.

The Vermont Department of Health’s Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration initiative.

For more information about SPF-SIG results, plus health alerts, news and information go to [www.healthvermont.gov](http://www.healthvermont.gov).

For more information on ParentUp visit: [ParentUpVT.org](http://ParentUpVT.org)

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