

Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

CENTERING OUR FOCUS ON WELLNESS AT CENTER DAY CAMP

Summary

Center Day Camp was established in 1949 to support campers (ages 5-15) as they build confidence, make new friends, explore new interests, discover their abilities and learn new skills. In February 2020, the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program partnered with Center Day Camp to emphasize that tobacco has no place at their camp and to combat the normalization of tobacco use.

Public Health Challenge

Almost 90 percent of adult daily smokers started smoking by the age of 18. In fact, use of tobacco products, no matter what type, is almost always started and established during adolescence when the developing brain is most vulnerable to nicotine addiction. According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), released by the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MCDC), the number of high school students who reported current use of conventional cigarettes dropped from 8.8 percent in 2017 to 7.1 percent in 2019. While this drop in usage of traditional tobacco products is uplifting, the survey also illustrates the number of high school students who use e-cigarettes has nearly doubled in the last two years—jumping from 15.5 percent of high school students in 2017 to 28.7 percent in 2019. E-cigarettes have been marketed by tobacco companies as being less harmful than traditional combustible cigarettes, however the actual health effects of e-cigarettes continues to be studied and remain largely unknown.

Approach

In conjuncture with the challenge illustrated by these statistics, it is concerning that tobacco use continues to be normalized through many social media outlets that are primarily used by youth populations. The leadership team at Center Day Camp acknowledges the narrative of tobacco normalization, and has taken the initiative to project a more positive message to their youth campers by agreeing to update their tobacco policy and reassess signage indicating that tobacco use is prohibited at Center Day Camp.

"Thank you for reaching out. I see the importance of maintaining a healthy environment for our campers, and I know having a tobacco policy in place will help support that!"

- Christopher Thurston, Director of Center Day Camp



Results

The collaborative effort between the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program and Center Day Camp resulted in more comprehensive tobacco policy that includes electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), information on the Maine Tobacco Helpline (MTHL), and posting new signage that reflects the updated tobacco policy – including the prohibition of ENDS on the signage! Having ENDS explicitly included in the updated policy and signage successfully communicates to their 48 campers and 18 person staff team that while electronic cigarettes are different than traditional cigarettes – they are still not considered safe or welcomed at Center Day Camp.

Sustaining Success

Moving forward, the partnership that has been established between the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Team and Center Day Camp will be sustained through efforts to keep their campers and staff informed and educated on tobacco prevention. Our District Tobacco Prevention Partner (DTPP) will continue to sustain success by offering ongoing technical assistance including tobacco prevention materials and Sidekicks trainings. We are especially optimistic about the opportunity to offer Sidekicks trainings to their campers, as this will empower them to initiate respectful conversations about tobacco use and vaping.

For More Information Contact Us At:

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Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention
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