SIDEKICKS: A YOUTH FOCUSED APPROACH

Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

AT A GLANCE

Portland Public Health adapts the Sidekicks workshops in alignment with mental health awareness to fit the current needs of students across Cumberland County.

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

During the pandemic many students have turned to remote learning. Being distanced from their normal schedules, friends, and social interactions, has had a significant effect on youth. There is a growing concern around mental health, and many schools are turning to public health specialists to offer education and resources regarding mental health awareness. Mental health also plays an integral role in the reasons why someone may start using or continue to use tobacco products, or other substances. Aligning mental health awareness with other public health programs, such as tobacco prevention, is important for the overall health and wellbeing of youth.

APPROACH

In collaboration with Sopo Unite, a substance use prevention coalition funded by the Drug Free Communities grant, Portland Public Health added some additional changes to the virtual Sidekicks workshop in order to cover topics that are also important to youth. Portland Public Health added in an activity called "Gallery Walk" where youth participants anonymously listed topics that are important to them during current times, and defined issues that youth find difficult to talk about with their peers. Through this activity Portland Public Health and Sopo Unite facilitators were able to highlight other subjects that are important to youth such as mental health, eating disorders, substance use, and other subjects in addition to tobacco prevention throughout the Sidekicks program.

RESULTS

With additional subjects covered along side tobacco prevention, youth were able to receive resources around a variety of public health issues that may also affect youth tobacco use. The skills taught to youth through the Sidekicks program are adaptable to a variety of issues youth face today. After the Sidekicks workshop ended, the youth felt motivated to continue this work and decided to create a podcast discussing these issues and using the skills they learned through the Sidekicks program.

"Looking through the gallery walk, it is nice to see that I am not the only one feeling this way" -Youth Participant

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MAINE PREVENTION SERVICES
Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention
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