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# THE IMPACT OF ACAP

AN EVOLUTION OF SERVICES LEADS WASHBURN SCHOOL FROM SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO TOBACCO EDUCATION

photo courtesy of msad45.net

## OBSTACLE

Delivering Sidekicks in Aroostook County school systems proves to be a difficult task for the local District Tobacco Prevention Partners, especially amidst this global pandemic. Administration and teachers are focused on the day to day difficulties of reducing risk while continuing to provide basic education requirements to students, leaving little energy for additional curriculum. For so many schools, risk reduction often means not allowing non-school staff in the building.

## SUMMARY

Working in an agency like Aroostook County Action Program opens up opportunities to work closely with so many different programs, each having the shared goal of making life better for the members of our communities.

Over the course of the last year and a half, ACAP has worked with Washburn Elementary School to meet their needs, to develop trust and respect allowing the DTPPs to safely deliver Sidekicks to the students. Each encounter brings us one step closer to the ultimate goal of establishing a comprehensive smoke-free and tobacco-free policy.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Last year, ACAP's Prevention Services, was contacted by Washburn District Elementary school to assist in managing difficult behaviors. It appeared that children had forgotten how to be together in community during their time in isolation. Students were arguing and fighting, teachers were exhausted and struggling, and the administration was searching for support. ACAP pivoted to provide social emotional learning support through the Drug Free Communities program, seeking to build resiliency among youth of all ages. Together with a behavioral health specialist, they taught adolescent brain development, established a common language around emotion, and provided restorative skills for both the students and the staff to improve reflection and self-regulation. After several months of supporting their specific needs and building these relationships, we were able to discuss additional programs ACAP could provide. Tobacco prevention educators were invited into the school where they shared E-Cigarette and Media Awareness presentations which taught the students how media works to captivate a specific audience with colors, slogans, and content, and give them the ability to see the media for what it is really worth. Once they set the stage with those presentations, they presented Sidekicks trainings to the 7th and 8th grade classes. The teachers and students were responsive to the notion that Sidekicks teaches peer to peer conversational skills that are focused on overcoming nicotine addiction, but can also be applied to so many other areas of risky behavior.

“ We were struggling with bullying and disrespect in our middle school occurring between students and especially towards our faculty...I knew we needed a long term, consistent approach.

-Lisa Dow, Principal  
Washburn Elementary School



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## HOW DID WE GET HERE? (CONTINUED)

The staff found that it was a great expansion of the lessons brought to the school earlier in the year from ACAP. Since it touched upon so many of the Maine State Learning Results in consideration to health expectations, this was a reasonable addition to their class curricula. During tobacco prevention's last session, the students gathered together with our partners from Drug Free Communities and Maine Youth Action Network for a prevention field day, to expand on what they had learned in a fun and engaging way. The students participated in a variety of field games, shared open conversations and took turns experiencing the effects of intoxication while wearing goggles provided by Drug Free Communities.

## WHAT NOW?

ACAP continues its partnership with Washburn District Elementary School by supporting them where their needs are. Some of the classes participate in weekly restorative circles, and other risky behaviors are addressed as they are needed. The elementary school and the high school have freely allowed review of their tobacco-free policy, and even entertained the idea of making updates to their policy upon review from the policy committee. The high school has shared interest in transitioning the age old consequences of breaking policy with suspension, to approaching them in a more restorative way. This allows the students to stay in school, learn the dangers associated with their risky behaviors, and serve their school in return. We know the reality for some of these students is that their hours at school may be the only time that they have consistent structure and responsibility.



## CONCLUSION

A good school experience can make the difference in the life of a student as they grow into young adults who are expected to function gracefully in society. It is our duty as prevention educators to work together and do the absolute best for the youth that grow up in our communities. At a time when schools were restricting access, we found that if we meet the most crucial needs first, we open up trust that allows for us to then expand on the programs we have to offer. Washburn District Elementary and High School are incredible examples of resiliency and determination focused on bettering the futures of their youth, and here at ACAP, we are so happy to offer support in every way that we know how.

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By using our whole suite of services, we are able to develop relationships with schools like Washburn and evolve to meet several programs' objectives. It helps us build protective factors for students in a variety of ways

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-Meg Hegemann  
ACAP Prevention Services



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