

York County Youth Leadership Summit

Partners for Healthier Communities' Tobacco Prevention Coordinators partnered with Coastal Healthy Communities Coalition (CHCC) of The University of New England to plan a Youth Leadership Summit for York County students this Spring.



THE NEED

A study released in September 2021 from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that more than 2 million U.S. middle and high school students reported currently using e-cigarettes in 2021, with more than 8 in 10 of those youth using flavored e-cigarettes.

"This study shows that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, e-cigarette use among youth remains a serious public health concern," said Karen Hacker, M.D., M.P.H., Director of CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. "It's critical we continue working together to protect young people from the risks associated with tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes."

Students experienced another unprecedented school year. As many school systems were continuing to adapt, often overwhelmed with the ever-changing landscape, much of the focus on youth prevention efforts were limited. Guests were restricted within many schools of the York County service area, therefore limiting external prevention efforts for students throughout the County.

Due to such, vaping education, school collaboration, and student connection was left to a virtual setting. In hopes of reaching students' needs, and sustaining school partnerships, York County Coordinators and CHCC plan for prevention programming during the first in person offering of the school year, a Youth Leadership Summit.

INTERVENTION

The goal of the Youth Leadership Summit is to bring together high school students throughout York County for an opportunity to network and further develop a wide array of skills including: leadership, job readiness, decision making, and supporting peers with challenges including as substance misuse.

Organizations throughout the County, including local police departments and youth serving entities, such as APEX Youth Connection in Biddeford, Coastal Healthy Communities Coalition and Partners for Healthier Communities (PHC) planned to host the day long event at Biddeford High School.

PHC will be holding a Sidekicks training session to teach youth motivational interviewing skills aimed at supporting tricky conversations with peers about tobacco and other substance use.

RESULTS

As the event drew closer, things took an unexpected turn. With less than five days until the summit, there were only 13 registrants despite the groups goal of at least 30. The teams quickly came together last minute to come up with a solution. Should the summit be held regardless for the 13 interested sign ups? What would the day's events look like with numbers much lower than anticipated? Ultimately, and with great disappointment, the group came to the decision to cancel the event.

Although the decision was challenging, the unanticipated result was a blessing in disguise. Instead of cancelling the event, the teams decided to reschedule, but this time with the help of young people. Now, the 13 youth who had signed up for the summit will be on board each step of the way to help the event be re-planned for a later date. These students will have the chance to help develop and co-facilitate the event, while using their knowledge and interests to recruit additional youth to benefit from the many offerings including PHC's Sidekicks tobacco-prevention skills training!

SUSTAINABILITY

York County Coordinators and partnering organizations will continue to plan for the Youth Summit while collaborating with those interested students. With anticipation of a successful event, coordinators hope for recurring summits and trainings for additional York County students in the future.

Partners for Healthier Communities
alissa.wigglesworth@mainehealth.org

