

Putting the IYS Data to Use

Stories Illustrate How Coalitions Are Using Their IYS Data

By Bridget Ingebrigtsen

The Illinois Youth Survey (IYS) often is referred to as a “resource” tool. But, as more schools participate and more communities use the data to steer their prevention efforts, the IYS is emerging as a “results” tool.

“I believe the IYS is a gift that keeps giving from the Illinois Department of Human Services to the citizens of Illinois,” said Connie Laurie, MA, CSADP, a prevention specialist with Chestnut Health Systems serving Madison County and part of St. Clair County. “It allows communities and schools to assess their situation, tailor choices for program strategies to match those needs and later see what progress has been made.”

Laurie is one of many preventionists in Illinois who view the IYS as being a vehicle for change. To illustrate how various coalitions are putting the IYS data to use, *Prevention Forum* asked several coalitions to share what they are doing with their IYS data to shape their prevention efforts and in many cases, bring about real results.

Unbeknownst to Community, Alcohol is a Problem

In her position with Chestnut Health Systems, Laurie serves on several coalitions. They include the Team 10 Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Coalition, which represents the communities served by the Collinsville School District, and Take Action DFC Coalition, which represents Granite City, Madison and Venice. She also works with communication campaigns.

Using the results of the IYS, the coalitions map their strategy based on specific community results, Laurie said. Officials in one community, for instance, thought the prominent issue was marijuana use and essentially excluded other potential problems. After studying their IYS results, the coalition realized the community’s marijuana numbers were high, but their underage alcohol use also was high. This information provided valuable insight into an otherwise unidentified problem and, without the IYS data, strategies would not have been targeted correctly, Laurie stated.

Parents Needed Education

In another instance, a careful reading of the Madison County IYS data helped point out an interesting relationship. While

most youth reported that they had clear family rules about alcohol and drug use, most of them also reported that they did not believe their parents would catch them if they went to a party where alcohol was served. “We then were able to report this in parent educational materials that were sent home with students in LifeSkills education programming,” Laurie said. “We can remind parents that the expectation of consistent consequences needs to accompany clear rules.”

Results Prompt Campaign

Coordinated Youth & Human Services (CYHS) has administered a community coalition since 1993, now called Take Action-Drug Free Communities Coalition. One of its major goals is to reduce substance abuse among youth. The coalition serves the communities of Granite City, Madison, Mitchell, Pontoon Beach and Venice.

“There is strength in numbers,” has been a common saying among three drug-free coalitions in Madison County, said coalition manager Karen Tilashalski. In 2006, Alton Youth Development Strategy Partnership, with the help of Chestnut Health Systems, implemented the “You Are Not Alone” campaign against underage alcohol use after the IYS data indicated the percentage of alcohol use by high school students was too high. The campaign messages that were developed in response to the findings were based on a survey of adults and suggested that one reason for the underage alcohol problem was



permissive adult attitudes. The first message read, “You are not alone. Four out of five adults believe it is not okay for teenagers to drink alcohol.” The second message read, “You are not alone. Three out of four adults believe that stopping underage drinking is their responsibility.”

The campaign moved to Take Action-Drug Free Communities Coalition’s service area in January 2007. Team 10, a drug-free coalition supporting wellness in the Unit 10 area, launched the campaign in August 2007. “Three of the county’s four largest communities have worked to get out the same basic messages,” said Tilashalski.

Each of these communities has embraced the IYS as a means for understanding youth substance issues. Due to concerns about underage alcohol use and similar issues concerning adult permissiveness, the campaign messages were displayed repeatedly throughout most of the county. The IYS, along with other locally collected data, prompted each of the three coalitions to take action. “The ‘strength in numbers’ has helped community members of Madison County take a stand against a real problem,” Tilashalski said.



Community Said Marijuana a Problem; Survey Said Otherwise

Residents in one community served by CYHS were reporting

concerns about youth marijuana use. “The data was not there to support their concerns,” said Tilashalski. “Coalition members were scratching their heads trying to figure out why marijuana was being identified as a community problem.” In the fall of 2007, coalition members decided to form a Marijuana Task Force to take a closer look at the issue. “We still don’t have clear evidence of a youth marijuana problem, but adult usage does appear to be a problem,” Tilashalski said. “In this case, the discrepancy between the IYS data and interview results has opened up opportunities to work more closely with community members. We can share the IYS data and use it as a basis to open up discussions. Other issues are emerging and community

members are genuinely glad we are taking the time to listen to their concerns and offer support.”

IYS Data Sparks Campaign Against Tobacco Use

Based on data collected in the 2002 IYS, CYHS coalition members implemented a social norms campaign to combat the onset of tobacco use by students at an early age.

With the help of a school nurse and a group of Teens Against Tobacco Use students, the Madison County Health Department, Southwestern Illinois College and funds from the Illinois Department of Human Services, a campaign was launched in 2004. A series of professional posters designed by students were printed. The message read, “If you think most students smoke—think again. Eight out of 10 (school name) students don’t smoke!” A number of marketing materials with the same message also were printed and disseminated. School personnel, the health department’s Media Sharp classes and LifeSkills sessions presented by Chestnut Health Systems and CYHS supported the campaign’s efforts.

The 2006 IYS showed a dramatic drop in the age for the onset of tobacco use as well as overall tobacco use in students at the targeted school. Interestingly, no change was seen in survey data collected at a nearby middle school where the campaign was not implemented.

IYS Results Can Affect Policies

Jean Schram, southern region director of prevention and early intervention for Chestnut Health Systems, suggests that schools can look at their IYS data and evaluate how well their drug policy is serving them and their students. “We have several schools in our area looking at this,” Schram said. She suggests that sometimes, when the policy is seen as too severe, people will not be as comfortable with reporting or enforcing violations. To combat this potential issue, she explained, schools whose IYS data reflects high substance use numbers might adopt a different strategy. Rather than punish offending students, for example, the school’s policy could include a mandated assessment with a stipulation that the youth follow its recommendations. This philosophy could yield a response more closely tailored to serving the needs of the involved youth.

As these examples show, schools, communities and coalitions across the state have taken advantage of the value of the IYS. The insight and information learned from administering the IYS is an invaluable resource that is producing definitive results.

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