



New Hampshire Tackles its High Rate of Substance Abuse Among Teenagers

Development of a substance abuse prevention leadership network

SUMMARY

In 1998, New Futures, a substance abuse advocacy organization in New Hampshire, launched the Community Leadership Initiative to train local leaders as advocates for policies and programs to increase treatment and reduce teenage drinking in the state.

Key Results

- New Futures recruited and trained 411 advocates, whom it dubbed Leadership Partners. The advocates:
 - Wrote letters to newspapers, made presentations and distributed substance abuse information to high schools, high school groups and youth organizations
 - Networked and collaborated with local law enforcement to conduct compliance checks and raise awareness of substance abuse problems
 - Educated the local medical community about state substance abuse issues.

Key Findings

- In a 2003 survey, 97 percent of advocates said they had talked to a friend, neighbor or colleague about an issue in response to "action alerts" sent by the project.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided two grants totaling \$370,495 to support the initiative from its inception through 2003.

THE PROBLEM

In 1996, an advisory committee formed by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation found that New Hampshire ranked first in the nation in per capita annual alcohol consumption; second in the nation in the proportion of adults who report binge drinking;

third in the nation in tobacco use among teenagers; and fourth in the nation in the rate of drinking and driving.

The committee found that state and local substance abuse efforts were poorly coordinated; the state lacked a strategic vision and plan to make effective changes in substance abuse programs and policies; and state investments in substance abuse prevention, intervention and treatment services were modest at best. The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation created New Futures in 1997 to address these problems.

THE PROJECT

Under the initial grant from RWJF (ID# 034005), New Futures established the Community Leadership Initiative with three objectives:

- To recruit and train 400 advocates to promote effective substance abuse policies and programs.
- To develop six regional prevention networks that would organize at least 10 community coalitions.
- To raise public awareness of substance abuse issues and build support for policies that reduce the harm caused by substance abuse.

In 1999, the state received a \$6.3 million State Incentive Grant from the federal Center for Substance Abuse to develop community coalitions. In response, New Futures dropped its plans to develop regional networks and local coalitions, focusing instead on training individual advocates. That same year, New Futures made a strategic decision to focus all of its efforts, including the Community Leadership Initiative, on two goals: reducing underage alcohol problems, and increasing the availability of treatment, especially for youth.

The Community Leadership Initiative relied on a variety of methods to recruit potential advocates, including informational breakfasts, community presentations, brochures and direct contacts. New Futures' staff developed a training curriculum that included an action kit with information on how to influence key policy-makers, and trained advocates at all-day retreats and follow-up meetings. Once advocates were trained, Community Leadership Initiative staff sent them periodic "action alerts" by mail and e-mail on important issues facing the state.

To gauge the effectiveness of the Community Leadership Initiative, New Futures hired consultants to survey trained advocates about actions they had taken in response to its action alerts.

- In August 2000, Milton Argeriou, a Brandeis University consultant, sent a mail questionnaire to 106 advocates; 58 responded.

- In May 2001, the University of New Hampshire Survey Center surveyed 138 advocates by e-mail; 58 responded.
- In February–March 2003, the survey center surveyed 236 advocates by e-mail; 119 responded.

New Futures, originally housed at the University of New Hampshire, became a freestanding not-for-profit organization in 2001. RWJF approved a grant (ID# 044097) transferring the unused funds from the university to New Futures.

RESULTS

- **New Futures recruited and trained 411 advocates, whom it dubbed Leadership Partners.** In 2003, the evaluation found that 97 percent of respondents said they had talked to a friend, neighbor or colleague about an issue in response to an action alert. In addition, partners wrote letters to newspapers, made presentations and distributed substance abuse information to high schools, high school groups and youth organizations; networked and collaborated with local law enforcement to conduct compliance checks and raise awareness of substance abuse problems; and educated the local medical community about state substance abuse issues.

One of the advocates, the director of one of New Hampshire's largest youth development agencies for girls, used data and information from New Futures to develop training programs for the agency's professional staff, volunteer leaders and clients.

- **In 2003, New Futures collaborated with the New Hampshire Teen Institute, a statewide youth development and prevention organization, to hold a youth leadership retreat, attended by 15 teens.** New Futures modified its training curriculum for use in teaching youth to become effective advocates for substance abuse policies.

Communications

The project manager made a presentation on the Community Leadership Initiative and New Futures as part of a satellite broadcast/Webcast, "Current Trends in Environmental Approaches to Prevention," sponsored by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), an organization that has been funded by RWJF (see [Program Results Report](#) on ID#s 020046, 027047, 026903, 027953, 034748 and 036494).

Other communications efforts included brochures, a newsletter (distributed at first by mail and later electronically), presentations to local and state groups and press releases. New Futures hired a communications consulting firm, Louis Karno and Company, to develop a case study on the Community Leadership Initiative. See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Efforts to recruit advocates must be supplemented by efforts to retain their involvement in the network.** Among the techniques used in this project to maintain participation were semiannual meetings, newsletters, holiday greetings and individually targeted communications from the project manager, including e-mails, letters, telephone calls and in-person meetings. (Project Director)
2. **Network-building for state advocacy may be easier in a small state.** This initiative worked in part because New Hampshire is a relatively small state that is conducive to the model of leadership-building the initiative developed. A larger state might face challenges with this model because its political dynamic is different. (Project Director)
3. **Getting the right person to recruit and train advocates is essential.** Hire a project manager who brings knowledge of the state; knows the key people who work on the issues the project is addressing; and understands the relationships between those key players. It is also critical that the manager keep project expectations simple and clear from the outset. (Project Director)
4. **Expectations for advocates need to be simple and clearly articulated.** (Project Director)

AFTERWARD

New Futures has continued the Community Leadership Initiative, using its own funds and funding from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, which is specifically for the intent of lobbying. It is also exploring ways to share lessons learned with other nonprofits within the state interested in replicating the project model.

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