The Odyssey Project: Prevention Through Collaboration

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The Odyssey Project
HIV & Substance Abuse

Objectives
- Reduce the onset of substance abuse and transmission of HIV among students on campus.
- Increase community involvement in substance abuse and HIV prevention on campus and in the community.
- Reduce the psychological and social barriers to early diagnosis of HIV on campus and in the community.
- Engage high-risk minority young adults in group-level interventions on campus.
- Refer all program participants identified with issues of substance abuse, mental health and/or healthcare to appropriate agencies for treatment services.
- Engage in research to test the effectiveness of various awareness and educational strategies.

Key Questions
In the classroom, students are exploring questions such as the following:
1. Why do people engage in risky health related behaviors such as binge drinking and unsafe sex, even when they know these behaviors are dangerous?
2. Are awareness posters and campaigns such as those featured on this poster helpful in reducing unsafe health related behaviors among young adults?
3. Are certain types of awareness strategies such as messages that use the emotion of "fear" more effective than other strategies such as the use of "humor"?
4. How can social media be used to help create awareness of the risks involved in drinking, drug abuse an unsafe sex?

Rationale
- In 2009, an estimated 16,741 African Americans were diagnosed with AIDS in the US.
- In 2009, African Americans comprised 14% of the US population, but accounted for 44% of all new HIV infections.
- In 2009, there were an estimated 11,200 new HIV infections among women in the United States. Women comprised 51% of the US population and 23% of those newly infected with HIV.
- In 2009, young persons (ages 15-29) accounted for 39% of all new HIV infections in the US. However, they comprised 21% of the US population in 2010.
- In 2009, young African Americans accounted for 65% (5,404) of diagnoses of HIV infection reported among persons aged 13–24 years.

Trends in Use
Alcohol
- In 2009, an estimated 30.2 million people (12.6 percent) aged 12 or older reported driving under the influence of alcohol.

Tobacco
- The rate of past-month cigarette use fell from 13.0 percent to 8.9 percent among 12- to 17-year-olds.

Drugs
- Marijuana use is now ahead of cigarette smoking on some measures. In 2010, 21.4 percent of high school seniors used marijuana in the past 30 days, while 19.2 percent smoked cigarettes.
- Annual rates of hallucinogen use remained unchanged from 2009 to 2010, although significant increases were reported by 12th graders for annual (2.6 percent) and (0.8 percent) use of LSD.

Substance Abuse in 2010 was highest among adults aged 18 to 25 (9.6 percent), followed by adults aged 26 to 49 (4.7 percent), then by adults aged 50 or older (1.3 percent).

Collaborators

Role of UB Participants
- Develop and implement a creative, social marketing campaign, that addresses substance abuse and HIV prevention through public service announcements, posters and web based communication.
- Serve as an active member of the Bridgeport United Coalition Workgroup.
- Coordinate the implementation of an evidence based educational model in the classroom and in the dormitories.
- Provide Free testing and counseling.
- Conduct research on the effectiveness of the awareness and educational strategies.
- Contribute to the field of knowledge in Health Psychology on how to transfer awareness and information to actual change in attitudes and behaviors.

Anticipated Results of the Grant

Awareness
- We will reach 2,500 students annually via posters, outreach, web based communication, small group interventions and social marketing efforts.
- We will develop educational training and materials.

Counseling/Testing
- We will test 450 minority young adults in the age range of 18-24 years.
- We will refer 100% of young adults identified needing treatment to appropriate agencies and health care facilities.

Education
- We will engage a minimum of 1,200 students in sessions of HIV and Substance Abuse (SA) prevention education in a classroom setting.
- We will complete initial and exit surveys on our educational strategy.

Research
- We will determine the effectiveness of our education strategy compared to standard curriculum on HIV and Substance Abuse.
- We will contribute to the body of knowledge on the relationship between awareness, attitudes and actual behavioral change. Specifically, we hope to understand more about how to transform information and awareness to actual behavioral change.

References: