

## HOW COMMUNITIES ADOPT CHANGE **By Stephen Hahn-Smith, Ph.D.**

**“No single policy or program measure will be effective. Rather, a broad mix of initiatives is required, with the interventions varying according to the circumstances of each country”**  
—WHO (1999). What in the World Works? International Consultation on Tobacco and Youth.

The previous Tactics article illustrated a broad conceptualization for how community norms change via the Diffusion of Innovation Model (Rogers, 2003). **This article is about turning ideas into action.** What are the nuts and bolts that constitute change mechanisms? What are the evidence-based interventions that support the theory of change? Broadly speaking, this article is about how community norms on alcohol and drug use can be purposefully changed through environmental strategies. Innovators and early adopters influence their communities by their actions. While individuals ultimately choose whether to engage in alcohol or other drug use, a variety of other factors play an important role in that choice, including families, schools, and media influences. Five important strategies are identified as having a significant effect:

- 1 Policy**
- 2 Enforcement**
- 3 Education**
- 4 Communication**
- 5 Collaboration**

### *Policies*

Policies include the laws and regulations that are designed to control the environment around schools and other community areas where young people gather. There have been a host of laws and regulations on alcohol and drug use. Some of the more effective include:



- ◆ Reducing availability by limiting location and density of retail outlets. Many campuses, for example, do not allow establishments selling liquor to be located adjacent to college property. While this is not foolproof, it offers a deterrent by making it a little harder to acquire alcohol.
- ◆ Increasing the price of alcohol and tobacco through excise taxes. Price controls have been shown to be directly responsible for lower levels of alcohol and tobacco consumption.
- ◆ Legal deterrents such as suspending drivers' licenses for persons under 21 convicted of an alcohol or drug violation effectively transmit the

prevention *Tactics* 8:11 (2006)

**Tactics** (tak'tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end. **2.** the art of the possible.

message that underage drinking is a serious offense. Similarly, revoking licenses for driving while intoxicated offers a powerful disincentive to avoid alcohol when driving.

- ◆ Restricting alcohol sales at youth-and community-oriented events such as county fairs and sporting events also tends to curb consumption. For example, many events have restrictions on where alcohol can be consumed and the number of drinks an individual is able to order at one time.
- ◆ Restricting alcohol advertising by prohibiting alcohol content in billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising near schools or other locations where youth are likely to be present. Similarly, alcohol and tobacco industry sponsorship of sporting and other events can be prohibited. When youth see beer ads associated with their events, this sends a contradictory message that alcohol is OK, even though they cannot legally purchase alcohol.

### *Enforcement*

Laws and regulations must be enforced in order to be effective. There has clearly been a tidal change over the last four decades on both the laws and enforcement of laws surrounding alcohol and drug use. Years ago, for example, one could be pulled over for suspicion of driving under the influence and might be given little more than a warning. Now drunk driving is taken very seriously: The vehicle will be impounded, fines are levied, insurance rates skyrocket, and repeat offenders lose their license. Suggested strategies include:

- ◆ Enforcing minimum-age purchase laws using undercover buying operations (a.k.a. compliance checks)
- ◆ Limiting driving privileges for those who violate minimum-age purchase laws, for instance by suspending drivers' licenses

- ◆ Enforcing impaired driving laws, for example by sobriety checkpoints
- ◆ Pairing enforcement of laws against service to intoxicated patrons and sales to minors with server training
- ◆ Employing citizen surveillance and nuisance abatement programs

### *Education*

It goes without saying that laws and regulations and their enforcement cannot be effective without an educated public. Public awareness campaigns are essential for getting the word out, especially to youth who are transitioning to adulthood. Youth need to understand that there are consequences, sometimes serious, for indulging in alcohol and other drugs. Strategies for educating the public include:

- Public awareness campaigns through television ads, brochures, and radio announcements. These need to be made available to youth in their own settings: at school, at community events, and any other setting that can get their attention.
- Server training programs that work with bartenders and waitstaff to reduce service to minors and intoxicated customers. Part of this education is to the owners themselves, informing them of the liability they hold when serving inappropriately as well as the potential insurance cost reductions when they have a well-trained serving staff.

### *Communication*

While this strategic point overlaps with education, it is important to specifically speak to the different methods of communicating to youth about alcohol and other drug use. Media efforts can be effective tools for increasing awareness of the dangers involved in alcohol and drug use, about the laws and penalties associated with underage use, and about merchant responsibilities in serving alcohol to the public. A number of

communication strategies have been developed to improve effectiveness of media campaigns:

- Combine media campaigns with more intensive and interactive prevention approaches. For instance, the Midwestern Prevention Project included a mass-media component using television, radio, and print broadcasts, and coupled this effort with parenting skills training, community actions, skills-based instruction, and community policy change.
- Present messages that appeal to young people's motives for using substances and their perceptions of substance abuse. Young people frequently feel invincible, that whatever problems others might encounter surely won't happen to them. Yet, one look at high-school and college hazing, or one look at statistics on driving fatalities by youth drivers debunks these myths. Furthermore, youth often misperceive drinking and drug use norms. Frequently, they believe that a much higher percentage of other youth drink alcohol and use drugs than really do. Anyone who works with youth knows the importance of peer perceptions. Correcting these misperceptions is a critical message to communicate to youth.
- Place messages where young people are likely to see and hear them. Placing ads and radio spots on youth-oriented programming is critical. Another strategy is to place placards about underage drinking and smoking in liquor stores or stores that sell cigarettes, a requirement by law in many states. Similar placards can be placed in and around schools as well. Further, the attraction of the Internet and other digital communication cannot be overlooked.
- Tailor the message to the audience. Good marketing always considers its audience. Youth respond to a certain kind of message that may not be the same as the message to adults. Effective messages to youth might take more of a peer approach, for example, whereas messages to adults might be tailored more toward community responsibility. Also, not all youth are the same. Effective messages will be tailored to meet expectations that vary by age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as the geographical location.

## Collaboration

The final strategy is to collaborate with different community sectors, including public health, education, businesses, faith-based organizations, medical institutions, and law enforcement. **A network of collaborative partners can achieve much more effective results than a single agency operating independently.** Specific strategies for building a collaborative network include:

- Making a comprehensive effort to manage all aspects of the issue, bundling the various other strategies into a comprehensive whole. Schools can be responsible for skills-based instruction for students and families. Policies can be developed at schools and any other youth-oriented group to promote environments in which substance abuse is not accepted, reduce availability and access to alcohol and other drugs, and law enforcement and security personnel can be responsible for enforcing these policies.
- Coordinating with other community efforts, avoiding duplication of effort. If a church group, for instance, is already engaged in an anti-alcohol and drug use campaign, this can be leveraged or built upon.
- Target populations at risk. Collaborative efforts can pull the brain trust and strategically pinpoint the areas of greatest concern and put focus and limited resources on those groups. Furthermore, collaborative efforts are more likely to have the collective wisdom to broadcast the appropriate message tailored to any given audience.
- Make sure that collaborative members' needs are being met. Each member will have their own agenda. Police officers will want to reduce crime on the streets, whereas schools are more concerned with fostering an educational environment. Members need to be open to the notion that even though their overarching goal is the same, they may each have different reasons for achieving that goal.

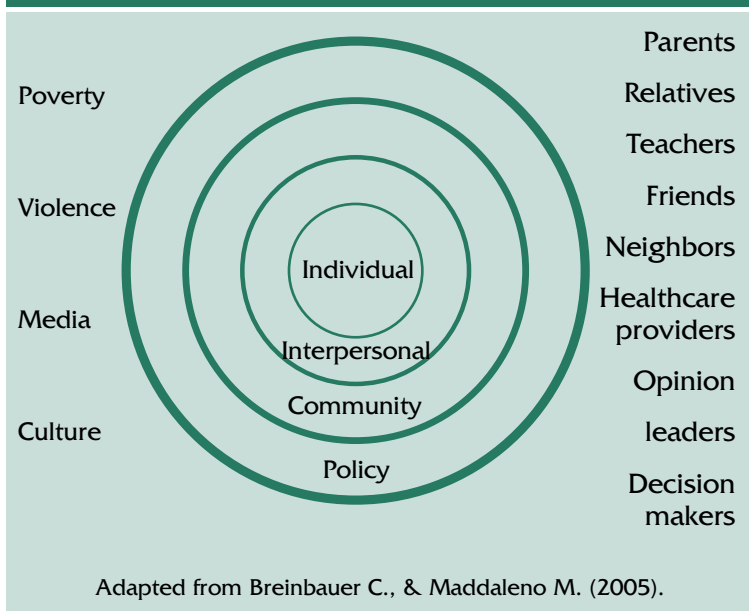
- Follow a structured organizational plan. Collaborative members should have a clear understanding of the substance use problems they want to change and then progress from that assessment through planning, implementation, and review to refinement. Continuous feedback is critical.
- Have specific, measurable objectives and activities. Such objectives and activities should be time-limited, feasible, and integrated. They also should be measurable so that program progress and outcomes can be clearly identified.

### Case Study on Changing Community Norms: Midwestern Prevention Project\*

The Midwestern Prevention Project (MPP) is a comprehensive, community-based, multi-faceted program for adolescent drug abuse prevention. The MPP involves an extended period of programming. Although initiated in a school setting, it goes beyond this setting into the family and community contexts.

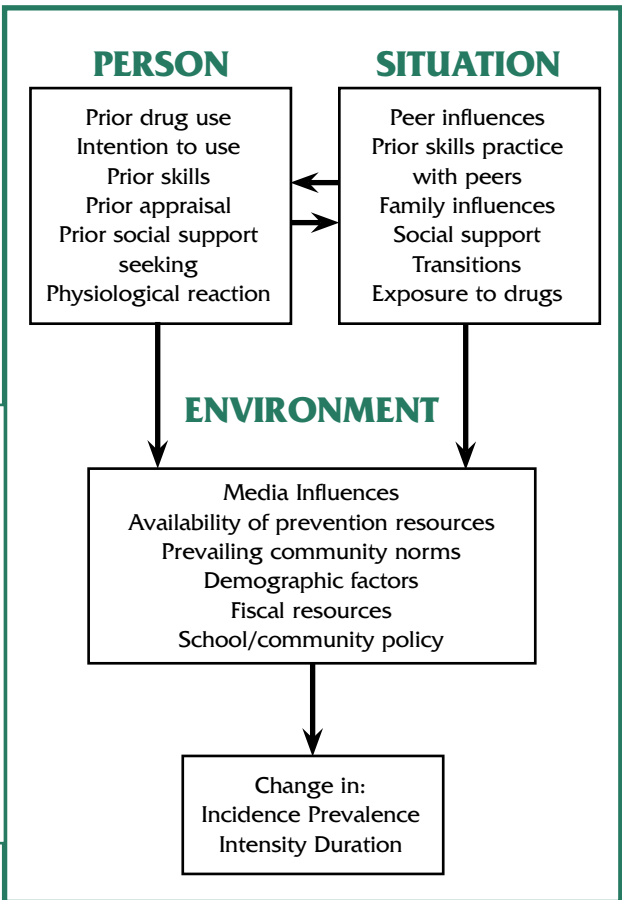
The MPP bridges the transition from early adolescence to middle through late adolescence. Since early adolescence is the first risk period for gateway drug use (i.e., alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana), programming is initiated with whole populations of middle school (sixth or seventh grade) students.

### Social Ecological Approach



The MPP is based on an integrative theoretical perspective that views behavior as the result of a set of complex interactions between person, situation, and environment level variables in a community. Within this framework, changes (improvements) in individual skills, as well as communications and policy interventions aimed at community agencies and systems are essential to effect any lasting changes in behavior patterns.

### Theoretical Rationale/ Conceptual Framework



The MPP strives to help youth recognize the tremendous social pressures to use drugs and provides training skills in how to avoid drug use and drug use situations. These skills are initially learned in the school program and reinforced through the parent, media, and community organization components. The MPP disseminates its message through a system of well-coordinated, community-wide strategies: mass media programming, a school program and continuing school boosters, a parent education and organization program, community organization and training, and local policy change regarding tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. These components are introduced to the community in sequence at a rate of one per year, with the mass media component occurring throughout all the years. The central component for drug prevention programming, however, is the school.

Active social learning techniques (i.e., modeling, role playing, and discussion, with student peer leaders assisting teachers) are used in the school program, along with homework assignments designed to involve family members. The parental program involves a parent-principal committee that meets to review school drug policy, and parent-child communications training. A consistent message supporting a nondrug use norm is delivered via the other three components: mass media coverage and programming, community organization, and the local health policy change component. All components involve regular meetings of respective deliverers (e.g., community leaders for organization) to review and refine programs.

### *Program Outcomes*

Evaluations of the MPP have demonstrated for program youth, compared to control youth:

- reductions of up to 40 percent in daily smoking;
- similar reduction in marijuana use, and smaller reductions in alcohol use maintained through grade 12;
- effects on daily smoking, heavy marijuana use, and some hard drug use have been shown through early adulthood (age 23); and
- increased parent-child communications about drug use.

Further, these evaluations have demonstrated that the MPP:

- facilitated development of prevention programs, activities, and services among community leaders.

### *Program Costs*

\$175,000 minimal cost over a three year period (includes costs of teacher, parent, and community leader training and curriculum materials for school-based program). Costs are based on up to 20 teachers trained in one group for the school program, 20 parent group members trained in one group for the parent program (about 3-4 principals, 4 student peer leader, 12 parents), and 1,000 participating middle school students. Costs increase beyond this minimum approximately as follows: \$4,000 per additional group trained on the same day or trip, \$100-\$125 per additional trainer manual, and \$7 per additional student workbook.





PRSRT STD  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Sacramento, CA  
Permit No. 2840

**Center for Applied Research Solutions**  
**771 Oak Ave. Parkway, Suite 2**  
**Folsom, CA 95630**

## prevention *Tactics*

### *References:*

- Breinbauer C., & Maddaleno M.** (2005). Youth: Choices and Change. Promoting Healthy Behaviors in Adolescents. Scientific and Technical Publication No. 594. Pan American Health Organization.
- Brounstein, P. J., Zweig, J. M., & Gardner, S. E.** (Dec. 7, 1998). Science-based practices in substance abuse prevention: A guide. Working draft. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Division of Knowledge Development and Evaluation.
- Glanz, Rimer, & Lewis.** (2002). Health Behavior and Health Education: Theory, Research, and Practice, 3rd edition.
- Klitzner, M.** (1998). Integrating environmental change theory into prevention practice. Northeast CAPT Regional Summit: Environmental Strategies to Reduce Youth Substance Abuse. Providence, RI. Dec. 2 - 3, 1998.
- Pentz, M.A., Mihalic, S.F., & Grotzpetner, J.K.** (1998). Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book One: The Midwestern Prevention Project. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.
- Rogers, E.M.** (2003). Diffusion of Innovations. The Free Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster. New York, NY.
- Schön, D.A.** (1963). Champions for Radical New Inventions. Harvard Business Review, 41:77-86.
- Wittman, F.** (2002). Community Based Planning for Environmental Prevention. The EMT Group, Inc. and DADP.

### *Web references:*

<http://www.paho.org/>  
Official web site for the Pan-American Health Organization. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is an international public health agency with 100 years of experience in working to improve health and living standards of the countries of the Americas.

<http://www.northeastcapt.org/products/strategies/>  
CSAP's Northeast CAPT's mission is to support the application of evidence-based substance abuse prevention programs and strategies at the regional, state and local levels; and enhance collaboration between and within each level.

## *Let's Hear From You!*

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented.

**Call us at 916.983.8929,**

**fax us at 916.983.5738**

or send an email to

**[cpiinfo@cars-rp.org](mailto:cpiinfo@cars-rp.org)**

Additional copies of this publication are available upon request or online at: **[www.ca-cpi.org](http://www.ca-cpi.org)**

*prevention*  
**Tactics** is published periodically by CARS under its Community Prevention Institute contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP). The purpose of this publication is to help practitioners in the prevention field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

The information or strategies highlighted in Prevention Tactics do not constitute an endorsement by DADP, nor are the ideas and opinions expressed herein those of DADP or its staff.

© 2006 by Community Prevention Institute (CPI)  
Permission to reproduce is granted, provided credit is given.

**Edition 8:11**

**Author: Stephen Hahn-Smith, Ph.D.**

**Designer: Studio C**