Peer 4 Peers:
A Strategy For Engaging Youth in Prevention

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Three Pillars

- **Prevention** - Our staff work in schools, with students, administration, and staff, to educate and support youth. Our goal is to positively impact youth by helping them steer clear of high-risk behaviors.

- **Intervention** - Our staff work on getting individuals back on track to leading healthy, productive lives. We assess the needs of each individual and work with them utilizing research-based programs.

- **Support** - Our staff provide support to individuals or families with loved ones experiencing challenges in the areas of alcohol and other drug abuse and mental illness.
Today’s Plan

- How “Diverse is You’re Universe?” - an exercise in cultural awareness
- Learn about Peers 4 Peers - the utilization of peer helpers for the implementation of youth-led substance use prevention efforts
- Methods for engaging youth in school-based substance use prevention programs
- Discuss the role of adolescent connectedness in prevention
How Diverse is Your Universe?
Peers 4 Peers Strives to Move beyond Tokenism
Brief Overview of Peers 4 Peers

Peers 4 Peers is about **youth leadership**, the youth lead the prevention efforts and the advisors guide them.

Trained Peers Helpers become ‘**Agents of Change**’ for their classmates.
Youth Training

- Three mandatory full-day training sessions per a year
- Additionally, one team building day and one school specific training
- Developed two years of training curriculum, new and returning Peers sessions
- Alignment with National Association of Peer Program Professionals (NAPPP) Programmatic Standards and Ethics for Peer Helper Programs
How can the coalition support Peers 4 Peers clubs?

- Present as ‘content experts’ at trainings and help the youth learn about local community resources!
- Volunteer to help at training!
- Find a donations for lunch and snacks!
- Support the Peer’s Parent Network!
- Have a coalition committee act as the community advisory committee for the club to build sustainability!
Engage youth
Why use a peer-based approach?

- Peers 4 Peers is a peer-based program
  - The foundation of which, is one *youth helping another youth*
- Peer-based programs are a *strategy* which has shown to have an *impact on adolescent high-risk behaviors*. 
Why use a peer-based approach?

- Peer-based programs are effective
- A “...meta-analysis of 143 adolescent drug prevention programs to assess the relative success of peer programs compared to other program strategies, found that peer programs produced the highest effect sizes for all categories of drug use, including alcohol, soft drugs, hard drugs, and cigarette use.”

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Why use a peer-based approach?

- The desire of peer-based programs is to “tap into what is known about existing social processes and to harness this power...”\(^6\)
The Existing Social Processes

Both Wisconsin and local data indicate that when youth are seeking help for sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, or other distress they are twice as likely to go to a peer (e.g., a friend or sibling) than an adult.\textsuperscript{7-9}
The Need for Prevention
A Lack of Support

- During 2017 in Wisconsin, only 28.1% of students felt they got the kind of help they needed when feeling distressed.  

2017 Wisconsin high school students who sought help when they felt sad, empty, hopeless, angry, or anxious

- 72% Got the Help they Need
- 28% Didn't get the Help they Need
The Need for Prevention
Youth Mental Health Challenges and Substance Use are Often Co-occurring

- Youths who have experienced a major depressive episode (MDE) in the last year are more than 3x as likely, 12.4% vs 4.0%, to have used illicit drugs in the same time period.\(^{10}\)

- Research has shown that nearly one-third of youth with preexisting mental health conditions will begin drinking regularly or using illicit substances by the age of 18.\(^{11}\)
Among high school-aged Wisconsin youth, depressive symptoms and anxiety are on the rise with 27% reporting experiencing depression and 39.9% reporting experiencing anxiety in 2017.
Peers 4 Peers

Select Desired Outcomes

- Peer Helpers will report high levels of connectedness with their school, family, and peers
- Peer Helpers will provide social support to other youth who are dealing with mental health and substance use challenges
- School-wide there will be an increase in the percentage of youth who get the kind of help they need when they feel sad, empty, hopeless, angry, or anxious
What is Connectedness?

- A feeling of belonging to or having affinity with a particular person or group.

- It’s one of the 5 C’s of Positive Youth Development\textsuperscript{12}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational. Social competence pertains to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence pertains to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision making). School grades, attendance, and test scores are part of academic competence. Vocational competence involves work habits and career choice explorations, including entrepreneurship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one’s global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.</td>
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<td>Connection</td>
<td>Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.</td>
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<td>Character</td>
<td>Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.</td>
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<td>Caring</td>
<td>A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.</td>
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\textit{Note:} Derived from Lerner et al. (2005) and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003)
Why Connectedness?

It is a Protective Factor!

- “Connectedness to school has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of adolescent health and risk-taking behaviors in studies using ... measures of connectedness.”¹³

- “Adolescent connectedness is theory-driven but also is appealing because it focuses on strengths.”¹⁴
Why Connectedness?

- Connectedness vs Resiliency- “Connectedness reflects actions, which can be increased or decreased through intervention…”

- It is measurable-
  We can examine connectedness in several subscales, looking at community, school, families, friends, and self-identity
  - Peers vs Family vs School

- Survey youth twice per a year using The Hemingway
  - Connectedness is tracked longitudinally with each cohort of youth
Peers Outcomes: Connectedness

Peers’ Connectedness Score, 2018-2019

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Summer 2018</th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>20.98</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>21.86</td>
<td>21.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.48</td>
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Peers' Sense of Belonging and Support, 2018-2019

- I feel like I belong at school: 86.0% (Summer 2018) vs 84.0% (Spring 2019)
- I believe there is at least one teacher or adult in school who I can talk to if I have a problem: 80.9% (Summer 2018) vs 86.1% (Spring 2019)
Peers Outcomes: Vaping

- 14.0% of Peers reported trying a vape product.
- Most prevalent age of first use was between 15-to-16-years-old.
- 79% reported obtaining it from a friend.
- 9.6% increase in perception of risk pertaining to vaping.
Peers Outcomes: Alcohol

- 19.0% of Peers reported trying alcohol.
- Most prevalent age of first use was between 15-to-16-years-old.
- 64% reported obtaining it from a family member.
- 4.9% increase in perception of risk pertaining to alcohol.

How Peers Reported Obtaining Alcohol, by Source

- Friend: 18%
- Party: 4%
- Family Member: 7%
- Snuck it at Home: 7%
- Friend’s Parent: 64%
# Peers Outcomes: Contacts

3,049 Contacts (September 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2018 - May 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2019)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling &quot;Stressed or Overwhelmed&quot;</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend/Girlfriend - Relationship</td>
<td>387</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helped with Schoolwork</td>
<td>364</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extracurriculars</td>
<td>266</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades or Schoolwork</td>
<td>261</td>
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Questions? Comments?

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References -


