



*Martha's Vineyard  
Youth Task Force  
Key Informant Interview  
Findings  
2010*



*Report Prepared by The Outcomes Project, A Program of Health Imperatives  
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## *Methodology*

Questions were developed to assess community member's beliefs about substance use among Martha's Vineyard youth. Specific questions regarding marijuana and prescription drug use was included. Coalition members were asked to meet with members of the community to gain a representative perspective on the problem of youth substance use on Martha's Vineyard. Interviews were conducted between December 2009 and March 2010. Thirty-three individual interviews were conducted over this time period. Of CADCA's 13 sectors of representation, 9 are included among the sample in this report.

## *Sample*

**Table 1. Sample Demographics**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>Number</b>
<i>School</i>	Principal, Cook, Teacher Assistant, Current Teachers, Former Teacher, Special Education Teacher	9
<i>General Resident</i>	Former addict (now in recovery), artist	8
<i>Business</i>	Bank teller, loan servicing, banking, loan processor, cabinet maker (1 small business manager counted under teacher)	5
<i>Students</i>	N/A	2
<i>Healthcare</i>	Psychotherapist in Private Practice, Pharmacist	2
<i>Youth Serving Organization</i>	Executive Director of MV Film Festival, Vineyard Tennis Center	2
<i>Government</i>	Town Clerk, Executive Assistant to the County Manager	2
<i>Parent</i>	Yoga teacher, (2 parents also counted under School)	1
<i>Substance Abuse Organization</i>	President of a sober residential program	1
<i>Media</i>	Broadcaster	1
<i>Law enforcement</i>	N/A	0
<i>Faith</i>	N/A	0
<i>Civic/volunteer group</i>	N/A	0
<b>Total Number of Interviews Conducted</b>		<b>33</b>

## ***Findings***

### ***Leading Problems Facing Youth on Martha's Vineyard***

*Interviewees were asked what they believe are the leading problems facing youth on Martha's Vineyard.*

- Lack of structure and appropriate guidance from parents and other influential adults who are part of their lives, lack of positive influences, lack of parental supervision
  - Parents are uneducated regarding signs of substance use and how to help their kids
- Parents who enable substance use activity or are engaged themselves
- Teachers who use alcohol and drugs
- Drugs and alcohol (i.e. places to get them, ease of access) and the fact that they're engaging in drugs use at an earlier age
- Illegal behaviors
- Lack of activities, things to do outside of school (especially for low income youth). One student interviewed said there was nothing to do if a student does not play sports.
- Have not been taught respect
- Peer pressure; greater on Martha's Vineyard due to unique demographic
- Isolation, detachment from world outside of Martha's Vineyard, high cost of travel
- Poverty/ poor economy/ lack of employment and housing
- People are afraid of change; they shun anything new, including new students
- Sex at an early age
- Depression, lack of hope, life challenges
- Problems caused by the economy are magnified on the island
- Sense of hopelessness

### ***Perception of Youth Drug Use on Martha's Vineyard***

#### **Perception of Use of Marijuana**

*Interviewees were asked what percentage of youth on Martha's Vineyard they believe use marijuana and why they have that opinion.*

- Ranges of 25-100% were given for use of marijuana by high school students. Reasons given were: believing there is a higher number of experimentation on the island, seeing survey results in the paper, conversations with youth and hearing marijuana is the drug of choice and is easily accessible. According to the 2009 YRBS, 34% of high school students currently use marijuana.
- For middle school students, most interviewees said they believe around 10% or less use marijuana. According to the 2009 YRBS, 3% of middle school students currently use marijuana.

### **Perception of Use of Prescription Drugs**

*Interviewees were asked what percentage of youth on Martha's Vineyard they believe misuse prescription drugs and why they have that opinion.*

- Ranges of 10-50% were given. According to the 2009 YRBS, 4% of high school students and 1% of middle school students currently misuse prescription drugs.
- Several interviewees said that they believe prescription drugs are not as popular or available as other drugs. One interviewee reported that youth know how to gain legal access to prescription drugs from doctors.
- One student that was interviewed said that YTF told them 0% of students misuse prescription drugs.

### **Leading Drugs Used by Youth on Martha's Vineyard**

*Interviewees were asked what they believe are the leading drugs used by youth on Martha's Vineyard.*

- The top two drugs interviewees believed were the leading drugs used by youth on Martha's Vineyard were alcohol and marijuana, which is correct according to the 2009 YRBS results.
- Cocaine, prescription drugs, heroin, Xanax, Valium and caffeine were also reported as leading drugs used by youth by interviewees.

### **Why Youth on Martha's Vineyard Use Drugs**

*Interviewees were asked why they believe youth on Martha's Vineyard use drugs.*

- Peer pressure, think everyone else is using them
- Acceptance of use, lax attitude on the island and belief as rite of passage
- Self-medication, to ease anxiety and depression
- Escapism; difficulty or dysfunction in family and social lives
- Boredom, past-time
- Availability; easy to get
- Parents who use and accept youth use
- No role models for healthy living and a healthy expression of emotion
- Thrill seeking; do not see danger in using marijuana
- Experimentation; most kids start with just wanting to try it then it becomes addictive.
- One interviewee said that youth use marijuana to enhance creativity
- Many events on the island have alcohol present

### **Community Standard on MV regarding youth substance use**

*Interviewees were asked what they believe are the community standards on Martha's Vineyard regarding youth substance use (such as norms regarding acceptance of use, risk of harm, etc.).*

- Most interviewees said that Martha's Vineyard has a lenient attitude towards youth substance use
- Several interviewees said that people do not realize how big of a problem it is; they are in denial, especially parents (who think their own kids will not use)
- People are afraid to talk about it and the problem is therefore ignored

- Excused as kids being kids, rite of passage
- Perception that "everyone is doing it" so it is okay
- Many parents still allow their own kids and others to drink in their homes feeling it is safer because it is a controlled environment
- Community members are not aware that their behavior is the model for teenagers
- The risks of harm of drugs are not emphasized on the island
- One interviewees said they believed teachers, police officers, doctors, social workers and therapists should be drug tested
- One interviewee noted that an example of the problem on Martha's Vineyard is having a school principal with marijuana plants in his yard

### ***Perception of Youth Access***

#### **Where Youth Obtain Marijuana**

*Interviewees were asked where they believe youth on Martha's Vineyard obtain marijuana.*

- From peers/friends or slightly older kids, young adults
- Parents, older siblings, other family members
- Travel off island to New Bedford area
- Growing on Island
- Anywhere; very easy to get, readily available

#### **Where Youth Obtain Prescription Drugs**

*Interviewees were asked where they believe youth on Martha's Vineyard obtain prescription drugs.*

- Most interviewees agreed that youth probably obtain prescription drugs from medicine cabinets of family (parents/grandparents) or friend's homes, either through theft or trade with friends.
- Kids at school selling their own medications
- Doctors writes prescription for too many pills

### ***Decreasing Youth Substance Use on Martha's Vineyard***

#### **Who is Responsible for Decreasing Substance Use?**

*Interviewees were asked who they think is responsible for decreasing youth substance use on Martha's Vineyard.*

- The majority of interviewees reported that the primary responsibility is with parents
  - Parents need to be made aware of warning signs and how to keep their kid's drug free.
  - They need to raise their level of expectations for youth
- Teachers, schools
- Several interviewees said that they believe the entire community is responsible

- Cooperation of everyone is required; anyone who comes into contact with kids working together with families would/could provide the best framework for success
- A safe health environment needs to be promoted, equally shared responsibility by everyone on the island
- There needs to be a change in the culture of our community; no longer ignore the problem
- Youth Task Force
- Adult friends of the family
- DARE, police
- Courts need to stop letting people off; there should be consequences for breaking the law
- Peer leaders who are respected

### **Role Parents Play**

*Interviewees were asked how the role of the parent plays into youth substance use on Martha's Vineyard*

- All interviewees agreed that parents played the most critical role in preventing youth substance use and that parents can be both the cause and the solution of this problem
- Parents need to lead by example; many parents don't see their own use as harmful
- Parents sometimes give kids drugs
- Parents can help kids not to use by explaining the negative effects of drugs
- If you don't address it then you condone it
- Parents need to be educated (social host law information)
- Parents need to send a message of zero tolerance and consequences for drug use to their kids
- Staying on top of them/monitoring their activities; staying up until they come home, checking to see if they've used, talking with them, who their friends are.
- Kids need to know parents are involved, by being less involved kids are more apt to use drugs
- Must be firm, responsible and supportive of the child

### **How Can Youth Substance Use Be Reduced on Martha's Vineyard?**

*Interviewees were asked how they believe youth substance use on Martha's Vineyard can be reduced.*

- Identify problem, acknowledge it and stop pretending it doesn't exist
- Reduce drug sources; parents need to be more aware of their own drugs so their kids don't steal from them
- Education for youth and adults in regards to substance abuse; explaining how it affects the brain and other negative impacts on life
  - Teach a more positive life style
  - Continue to reach kids in junior high and younger as they are impressionable

- Address issues such as insecurity, low self esteem, etc. in school as part of their education
- Provide alternatives for the community to do beside substance abuse to keep them occupied, encourage travel
- Full community holistic approach; hitting on multiple fronts is the only way to make a change
- Zero tolerance
- Harm reduction, “no tolerance” for some kids works, but not for all kids
- Make sure they pay appropriate fine and do community service
- Parent involvement; get parents more involved in kids' lives by being a parent not a friend; monitoring their child's activities/friends and being consistent
  - Parents role modeling for kids
  - Mobilizing parents, educating and empowering
  - Stop the practice that kids should use at home and that parents are being good parents by allowing this; they think that their kids are safer
- Public services campaigns; Youth Task Force strategies
- Young people should mentor at risk youth
- Substance abuse acceptance is rooted in island norms and peer pressure.
- Drug test teachers, police, librarians, coaches, bus drivers, everyone
- Have a parents sign a document saying that they will not use and if they do they will be fined and charged
- Prosecute dealers
- Clean up the high school

### ***Social Norms Messaging***

*Interviewees were asked if they have seen posters with messages that indicate that most Martha's Vineyard students don't use drugs and if so where.*

- Of the 33 individuals interviewed, 11 interviewees *had* seen posters and 22 *had not* seen posters
- Those who stated they had seen the posters reported seeing them in schools, at the fair, in hospitals, at meetings, in the ER, at the doctor's office and at liquor stores

## ***Summary***

Interviewees thought there were many problems facing youth on Martha's Vineyard such as drug use, lack of family structure, lack of positive activities for youth and the isolating culture of the island. Most interviewees over estimated how many youth use marijuana and prescription drugs. Those interviewed were correct in identifying the two most commonly used drugs by Martha's Vineyard youth; alcohol and marijuana. They believe youth use drugs for many reasons including peer pressure, ease of access, experimentation and self-medicating. Those interviewed believe that marijuana and prescription drugs are easy to obtain and believe youth most likely obtain these substances from their peers/friends. When asked who was responsible for decreasing youth substance use, most interviewees agreed that the parents are the most responsible; however it is also the responsibility of the community as a whole. Interviewees had many

suggestions for how youth substance use can be reduced on Martha's Vineyard such as education for youth and adults, changing culture of the island and providing alternative activities for youth.

***Contact Information***

For more information or questions about this report please contact:

*The Outcomes Project*  
Health Imperatives  
942 West Chestnut Street  
Brockton, MA 02301  
P: 508/583-2250  
F: 508/583-2611