



VOICES FOR PREVENTION

BEGINNERS' ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR ADULTS & YOUTH

v4pga.org





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VOICES FOR PREVENTION

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The mission of V4P is to build a unified, statewide voice for substance abuse prevention and suicide prevention by collaborating with a diverse group of individuals and organizations with an interest in and a commitment to substance abuse prevention and suicide prevention. This mission is being accomplished by advocating for and educating about substance abuse prevention, suicide prevention and related issues.

Voices for Prevention would like to thank the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Behavioral Health Prevention and Federal Grants (DBHDD/OBHPPFG) for their vision and support in making Voices of Prevention, of which this Toolkit is a part, possible in the first place.

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT
FOR BEGINNERS

SECTION

I

ADVOCACY
WHAT, WHY, AND HOW

This toolkit has been designed for adults and youth who are relatively new to advocacy. Those who are more experienced with advocacy should refer to the Intermediate Advocacy Toolkit, also available on www.V4PGA.org.

I. WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

“Advocacy” is a broad term covering a range of activities that seek to bring about social change.

“Advocacy” often means translating your feelings of discomfort or disappointment about a problem into organized action that can result in preventing or reducing that problem. In other words, getting off the couch, and really doing something about a problem that bugs you.

For Voices for Prevention this means bringing about changes you or your organization or team want to see happen in laws and policies that can help prevent substance abuse or suicide.

These laws and policies can be anything from state laws to local county laws or city laws*. They also may be policies in your county or city school system, park system or workplaces in your county or city.

*County and city laws are called “ordinances.”

WHAT ARE THE TWO KINDS OF ADVOCACY?

For our purposes there are two major types of advocacy Voices for Prevention members need to know about: Policy Education and Lobbying. See below for what these terms mean.

WHAT IS POLICY EDUCATION?

“Policy education” involves educating various kinds of policymakers and the public about the problem (or problems) you are concerned about and the changes you or your organization want to see take place.

You need to educate policymakers and the public about:

- a. The problem you and your organization or group is seeking to solve.
- b. Why this problem needs to be solved and solved now.
- c. Effective solutions that others have used to solve this problem in other locations (what works).
- d. Solutions that others have used that did not solve this problem (what doesn't work).
- e. The particular solutions you are advocating for in Georgia, in your county, in your city, in your school system, your workplace, etc.

WHAT IS LOBBYING?

A second kind of advocacy is lobbying.

“Lobbying” is any attempt to get a policymaker or the public to vote yes or no on a certain bill or ordinance. A “bill” is a piece of legislation being considered by legislators before it either passes or fails to pass. If it passes then it becomes a law.

There are two kinds of lobbying:

DIRECT LOBBYING: telling a legislator, county commissioner or city council member to vote yes or no on a particular bill or ordinance.

GRASSROOTS LOBBYING: telling your organization's or team's members or the general public to contact their policymaker to tell them to vote yes or no on a particular bill or ordinance. Or telling the general public how to vote on a certain bill or ordinance if it will be voted on by the public.

WHAT KIND OF ADVOCACY IS BEST FOR OUR ORGANIZATION OR TEAM?

IF you work or volunteer for a non-profit organization which receives funding from the federal, state or local government, and your organization does not receive any private funding, or if you work for a government agency,

THEN your organization should only practice policy education and not lobbying. Private organizations or teams can only lobby if they use private funding to do so.

However, you are allowed to lobby as an individual under your 1st Amendment right to free speech. If you do so, be sure to lobby on your own time, not when you are “on the clock.”

Use only your personal email address and personal street address when communicating with policy makers.

BUT if you are a GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE you need to check with your supervisor even before attempting to lobby as an individual.

Please know this Advocacy Toolkit should not be regarded as legal guidance, as it may not apply to your organization’s or team’s specific circumstances. Some of your questions may only be able to be answered by a knowledgeable attorney.

Staff and volunteers working on Drug Free Community (DFC) grants in particular, should read about their lobbying restrictions in their contracts, which may be stronger than other contracts.

2. WHY ADVOCATE?

Substance abuse and suicide cause an enormous amount of intense human suffering. Advocacy is a way you can really make a difference in your community and your state. You can do this by educating policy makers and the public about policies, laws, and programs that have been shown to prevent and reduce that suffering.



3. WHAT SHOULD WE EDUCATE ABOUT?

Substance abuse and suicide cause an enormous amount of intense human suffering. Advocacy is a way you can really make a difference in your community and your state. You can do this by educating policy makers and the public about policies, laws, and programs that have been shown to prevent and reduce that suffering.

Finding out about Your Community’s Needs and Statewide Needs

Your organization or team needs to decide which needs related to preventing substance abuse or suicide you want to address. When doing so you need to be realistic. Questions you should ask are:

Do we want to focus on the needs of our city, county, or state?

Has a substance abuse or suicide needs assessment or survey been done that can tell us what the major unmet needs are in our city, county or state?

If so, what do the needs assessment or survey results tell us?

Which needs in our city, county or state can we really make an impact on?

4. WHO SHOULD WE EDUCATE?

City Councils/County Commissions/Georgia Legislature

This is based on your answers to some of the questions above.

Determine what “jurisdiction” the need you want to deal with exists in. A “jurisdiction” is a state or other area in which a particular system of laws has authority. This could be

- (1) an incorporated city or town
- (2) your county, or
- (3) the state of Georgia.

Then use the following chart to determine what policy makers you want to educate.

JURISDICTION	POLICY MAKER
Incorporated City or Town	City Council / Mayor or City Manager
County	County Commission / Commission Chairperson
State	Georgia General Assembly / Governor The Georgia General Assembly consists of 2 Chambers: Senate House of Representatives

Finding out who your policymakers are

Each of us has one state senator and one state representative. It is important to find out who your senator and representative are which you can do by going to www.openstates.org and filling in your home address.

School Systems and Workplaces

The needs you want to address may exist your county or city school system or workplaces in your county or city. In the case of a school system you may need to educate your school superintendent, your school system’s board of education, your PTSA President or all of the above.

In the case of workplaces you may need to educate the local Chamber of Commerce, the company’s board of directors, the company’s CEO or all of the above.

Educating Partners

If you want to have an impact on the need you want to address a wise move is almost always collaboration. You will probably need to educate needed partners about your issue.

There may be many aspects of the need you wish to address. Your organization may only have expertise in one of these aspects. Also, other organizations can help you educate the appropriate policy makers and the general public.

Advocacy is a joint venture – you need to find your allies and work with them. Your chances of success are much greater when there are other organizations and people on your side, particularly organizations that have “clout” with the policy makers you want to educate. They can help give you access to those policymakers.

Each county’s Family Connection Collaborative can be a great way to make connections and find willing partners.

Whenever possible, be sure you and your allies have consistent, reliable data from respected sources and are presenting the same message.

Educating the General Public

You will need to determine if you will also need to educate the general public about the need you want to address. This means finding out if the public, or a certain part (sector) of the general public, can help your organization or team address the need you are dealing with.

You may want to only education stakeholders. “Stakeholders” are typically members of the general public with an interest in your issue.

In many cases educating the general public (or a portion of it) is a good idea since then they will also be able to help your organization or team educate policymakers.

5. HOW DO WE EDUCATE?

Policy Education Strategies - What Your Organization or Team Can Do

Finding the Facts

The thoroughness with which your organization or team has researched the issues related to your need is very important. You are bound to make mistakes because you are beginners at this kind of thing, and you are human. Please don't judge yourself harshly if you do.

However, you do want to try and make sure as you can that the information you are presenting is accurate when educating your policymakers, your partners or the general public.

To gain and maintain credibility, it is important that you know the facts regarding your issue. Having this information at your fingertips will help you in conversations with government officials, the media, other advocates, and the general public.

When you are leading the community in addressing an issue, it is critical that you stay in front by knowing the issue as well as you can. Therefore, any public claim you make should be rooted in factual information and reliable statistics.

Your facts will then guide your actions and your statements.

Document your claims. For example, if you claim that alcohol producers have targeted children for advertising campaigns, count and write down the location and content of the alcohol-related billboards and signage you find near elementary, middle, and high schools.



Collect data. Obtain accurate, high quality information from evidence-based sources, experts, or those who have current facts and figures about the issues and options you present.

Reliable sources include:

1. Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHS 2.0) (to increase impact compare with prior years and national surveys, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System)
2. Georgia Social Indicator Study 2.0
3. National Survey on Drug Use and Health
4. Monitoring the Future
5. Court Data (Municipal, Magistrate, Juvenile, Probate, State, Superior)
6. Georgia Bureau of Investigation
7. County Medical Examiners or Coroners
8. Health Departments (local, county, and/or state)

When highlighting state or county data, it is helpful to compare the data to states or counties with similar demographics (i.e. median income, racial/ethnic distribution, etc.)

You can also do regional comparisons, for example:

1. SAMSHA Region 4 (includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee)
2. Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities (DBHDD), Office Behavioral Health and Prevention and Federal Grants (OBHPFG) Regions 1-6.

Reference everything. Highlight as many valid sources as possible.

Document & diversify all findings. Diversify the presentation of your data (i.e. 1 pagers, briefs, infographics). Having several forms of the information increases retention of the facts and ensures that you have digestible versions of the same content to share with various sectors (such as Judicial, Law Enforcement, Youth, etc.) of the community.

Know your Audience

Find out what the climate of opinion is about the issues surrounding your need in your community, state, school system or workplace.

One of the challenges to effectively raising awareness is being very perceptive about what motivates, inspires and engages your target audience, the people you are trying to reach with your messages.

Identifying these motivating factors helps you and your organization package the information you are presenting. People are typically persuaded by one or more of the following:

1. Facts, Statistics, and Figures – presenting the bottom line.

For example, if you were trying to increase the number of drop box locations for prescription drugs in your community; quoting results from your assessment presents a compelling argument that more drop box locations are needed.

2. Monetary Value

Assigning a dollar amount to your strategy or problem may present a more compelling argument to your audience. Legislators and/or city council members may be more inclined to act if they hear “teen drinking costs our city an average of \$250,000 per quarter (i.e. law enforcement manpower for party disbursement and traffic incidents)

3. Personal Stories

Often one personal story about someone who has been hit hard by substance abuse or suicide can mean more to a policymaker than 100 statistics. We are all human and connected with our emotions. Many people begin to understand the movement around your issue or will want to get involved after connecting with a relatable, intimate story.

The story does not have to be about your own personal experience but needs to be true. If the story is about someone you know, make sure you have permission to share their circumstances. Don't use names when retelling the story and try to encourage those directly impacted by the story to share their story themselves.

For example, young recovering persons can be influential with policy makers as can young persons who have been affected by suicide in the past.

Elevator Speech

The following is adapted from How to Create a Political Elevator Pitch by Drew McKissick in Grassroots Tips (April 30, 2014) .

Just as every business needs to “sell” something, politics and public policy are about sales too. And people will respond to advocacy messages in pretty much the same way that they do to any other “sales pitch.”

Good messages that are relevant are more likely to cut through the clutter. Bad messages get tuned out.

When it comes to effectively communicating a message, there are a lot of great lessons from the business world that we can apply to advocacy. One of them is known as the “elevator speech.”

The elevator speech is a quick way to get your points across to someone else in about the time that it takes to ride in an elevator. It’s a quick and short summary of what you’re doing, why your doing it, and what you want people to do about it.

What’s the thumbnail of your issue? Why is your issue important? Can you bottom-line it in thirty seconds or less? Can you do it in a way that states your need or problem and describes how your solution will fix it? Can you present the elevator speech in a way that matters to busy important policy makers or others you want to educate?



Outline of a Policy Education Elevator Speech:

- Describe the need you are dealing with and your solution regarding that need
- Why is it important? Make it relevant to people and their values.
- Describe the key benefits of your “solution” for the need you are addressing. What’s in it for them?
- Clearly state what you are hoping they will do with the information you are giving them. Make it easy and actionable.
- Be sure to state the need or problem in a way that matches the solution you are also presenting.
- Be passionate and use “benefit” focused terms.
- Be concise and clear.
- Write it down. Read it. See how long it takes to present. Then take out anything that’s not critical.

Remember, the trick is to get all of this across in a few sentences, or about thirty seconds.

Making yourself go through the process of creating a good elevator speech can help you clarify what you’re “selling” in your own mind and get a better understanding of the point of view of your target audience.

If you’re going to go to the trouble of educating about a policy or ordinance or bill that you believe will help solve your problem, then you may as well go to the (slightly more) trouble of crafting a clear and concise message that can help you be more successful!

Talking Points

“Talking points” are a set of clear, easily remembered statements that outline information about your problem and what you think it would take to solve your problem. In most cases, talking points are used to keep you on track when you only have a short time to talk to a policy maker, the general public, or a possible partnering organization.

Please see Appendix 1 for examples of talking points regarding several substances.

CREATING YOUR OWN 1 PAGER

Policy makers are overwhelmed with information and with paper. State legislators deal with over 300 bills every session. So it's important that you hand them only 1 or 2 pages of information. Please see below for a great format for your or your organization's one pager.

One Pager

Organization Name

Organization Physical Address

Organization Phone Number

Organization Website

WHO WE ARE

What is the mission of your organization?

What strategies does your organization use to address substance use and abuse?

WHAT WE DO

List 3-4 prevention activities, events or campaigns that you have done in in the last three years that might resonate with your legislator or policymaker.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

WHY YOUR ISSUE MATTERS

Choose 2-3 important statistics about your prevention issue that might be important to the legislator or other policy maker. Don't forget to site your source (where you got the information from).

***Pro Tip:** Using state or local statistics can be a major homerun when talking to policy makers.*

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Traditional Media Campaigns and Social Media Campaigns

Once you have gathered your data (statistics) and designed the best way to engage your audience, the very next steps are selecting the proper way to present your message.

When creating your messages you want to be sure that you highlight the values that are shared between you and the people you are trying to educate.

Design your message to empower your audience. Your messages need to be compelling enough to increase support for your organization's or team's cause. There are several platforms to use to spread your message.

Don't limit yourself to just one platform.

Traditional Strategies

Common traditional strategies include billboards, letters to the editor, flyers, 1-pagers, posters, banners, buttons, etc. All of these are great ways to increase the visibility of your message.

Always consider strategies that will make your messaging visible to those you want to see your messages. For example, letters to the editor are an opportunity to share issues or concerns with a publication's readers. Here are a few reasons to consider submitting a letter to the editor (sometimes called an "op-ed") for publication:

- Educate about a stance taken by the publication, or a response to another letter written to the editor
- Comment on a current issue being debated by a governing body (local, regional, state or national)
- Highlight or provide remarks about a recent story; especially if it is related to your need or problem
- Persuade others to educate about your issue

Most importantly letters to the editor have measurable outcomes such as publication readership. If the publication is an online platform, you may be able to get more numerical measures such as link clicks and likes.

You may also gain access to great qualitative data if the platform provides a comments section. Here are some tips to get your letter published:

- Regardless how angry you are about a particular issue, refrain from ranting. Editors are more inclined to publish a thoughtful reflection on a particular issue than a rant.
- Be concise. Editors have limited space for publishing letters, so being brief is key to expressing your concerns. However, don't sacrifice being thorough.
- Incorporate data (local statistics) and personal stories
- Don't be anonymous! Include your name and title; it can add credibility to your letter, especially if your position is related to the issue.

Note: If you are urging legislators to support a specific policy or bill that's lobbying! (See section on lobbying above), make sure to write your letter as an individual. Do not include your title or organization name.

See **Appendix 2** for a sample letter to the editor template.

Social Media Campaigns

Leveraging social media is a very cost effective, efficient method for disseminating your messages. Like many of the traditional strategies, you are able to reach a large number of people. But a major benefit of social media campaigns is that you are able to more closely monitor and gauge the impact of your messaging.



Here are some of the benefits to using social media:

- Customer Orientation: focus on the needs, wants, and attitudes of the target audience;
- Audience Segmentation: divide a diverse target audience into more similar smaller groups based on motives, values, behaviors, attitudes, knowledge and opinions;
- Exchange: allows for real time exchange of ideas;
- Mixed Methods: allows for presenting a mix of information and statistics (numbers). Depending on the social media platform you choose, there are several ways to measure engagement with your messaging. Metrics may include:
 - Views/Impressions
 - Likes
 - Favorites
 - Mentions
 - Direct Message
 - Shares

The list goes on! The primary thing to focus on when launching a social media campaign is being intentional about your messaging. Identify your target audience and tailor your messages to them. Plan what messages will go out each day or week; create a content calendar like the one below.

Sample Content Calendar

Note: For fewer posts this could also be turned into a weekly calendar.

Dates	Target Audience	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jul 1-7	Parents						
Jul 2-8	Youth						
Jul 9-15	Law Enforcement						
Jul 16-22	Government						
Jul 23-29	Educators						
Jul 30-31	Judicial						

****Don't forget about other target audiences like Preventionists, the Faith Community, Business, Civic Clubs, Healthcare, Non-profit, and Media.*

A few more tips to implementing a successful campaign:

- Don't be afraid to tag groups or individuals that may be interested in the content
- Include at least one weekend day to ensure your messages are reaching everyone
- Diversify your messaging. Include images, text, infographics (a synergy of both pictorial and textual explanation of a topic (example in tools), secondary resources (i.e. articles, research, etc.)
- Remember you can schedule messages on some platforms or utilize scheduling programs, such as Hootsuite.
- Incorporate clear calls to action
- Remain flexible. Although you may establish a content calendar or schedule messages, maintain a pulse on current events and be ready to share.
- Stay user-friendly by acknowledging holidays or general national days.

Town Hall Meetings

Town Hall Meetings are another great tool for mobilizing your community members to become agents for change. There is a great deal of planning that goes into hosting a Town Hall Meeting.

If you are familiar with using a variation of the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) using an abbreviated version of the SPF will help identify your community's prevention priorities. The 5 Steps of the SPF are Assessment, Capacity, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation with the guiding principles of Cultural Competence and Sustainability.

The only difference when you are using SPF for Town Hall Meetings is adding a step between Capacity and Implementation, which is Promotion (see below). When preparing for a Town Hall meeting consider the following:

- **ASSESSMENT:** Utilizing data to identify the primary issues, capacity and readiness within the community.
- **CAPACITY:** Identify the resources and skill sets of colleagues and coalition members that aid in the success of the Town Hall meeting.
- **PLANNING:** Designing the structure of the Town Hall meeting to accomplish outlined objectives and to highlight the priorities gleaned from the assessment. Also, consider the timing of your event.
Hosting a Town Hall in conjunction with a well-recognized month, week or day (i.e. National Prevention Week, Alcohol Awareness Month, Prescription Drug Take Back Day, Red Ribbon Week, etc.) will really increase the attention and attendance for your event.
- **PROMOTION:** Utilizing all mediums to gain the attention of your target audience (This is an added Step for Town Hall Meetings.)
- **IMPLEMENTATION:** Following agenda as planned and including guest speakers the help drive the conversation and motivate community members to get involved
- **EVALUATION:** Assessing whether the Town Hall was a successful catalyst for change.

Contacting Policymakers

Ways to Communicate or Meet with Policymakers

If you can get a face to face meeting with your policymaker that is always best. It will be easiest if you meet with your state senator and representative (either virtually or when COVID 19 restrictions are lifted, in-person) when the General Assembly is not in session.

Meetings to educate your state legislators, city manager or mayor, city council members, County Commission chairperson, and county commissioners are all very important.

Meeting with your State Legislators

The General Assembly (state legislature) is in session from January through March each year.

Go to the next page in this Toolkit to find out how to identify who your legislators are in seconds.

If you can't get a face to face meeting, then calling them is 2nd best. Emails and letters are a 3rd option because they get so many emails and letters. But still this can be effective, especially if they receive a number of emails (20-30) educating them about the same issue.

Substance Abuse Prevention Advocacy Day - March 2021

Please attend Voices for Prevention's Substance Abuse Prevention Advocacy Day (SAPAD) in March 2021! If you don't have a virtual or in-person meeting with your senator and representative before March 2021 (highly recommended), then you can schedule a meeting with them during SAPAD. But do so ahead of time.



Please make sure you join Voices for Prevention as a member to receive emails about SAPAD, 2021 and meeting with your legislator. Go to <https://v4pga.org/> to learn how to become a member for free!

Tips for Communicating with Policymakers

- The goal is to provide decision makers with credible, compelling information and data in a timely manner.
- Work to building personal relationships with key decision makers and their staff members.
- Create alliances with allies and other stakeholders.
- Make your messages timely concise, and focused. Legislators are busy.
 - Provide good data and accurate information
 - Have an “elevator speech” ready
 - Acknowledge and address the other side of the issue/argument
 - Be unified and consistent with your messages.
 - Stick to your area of expertise
- Timing is important
 - Contact legislator prior to the session if possible
 - Make foundational arguments early in the debate
 - Issues are more focused later in the process
- In-Person communication is the preferred and most effective manner of communication
 - Opportunity for give and take
 - Body language and other non-verbal factors
- Correspondence can be effective from a constituent or expert
 - Letters, emails, and even faxes can work
 - Be as brief as possible (one page is best)
 - Leave it on a positive note
- **Don't be scared – Legislators are people too!** You will know no doubt know more than your legislator about substance abuse or suicide prevention issues since they are dealing with so many issues. One legislator complained his knowledge was “10 miles long but only a foot deep.”
- Authenticity: Be yourself and let your passion shine through.
- To find out who your state senator and representative are:
 1. Go to www.openstates.org
 2. Then type in Georgia
 3. Click on the Legislators Tab
 4. Enter your address in the box on the right to find your senator & representative.

6. HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Please see a funny cartoon by clicking on the link below. The state process for how a bill becomes a law is very similar to the national process described in this cartoon link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Otbml6WlQPo>
On the state level a bill becomes a law when it is passed by the Senate and the House and then is signed by the Governor. The same is true on the national level except bills are signed by the President.

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT
FOR BEGINNERS

SECTION

III

**THE ADVISOR AS A YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT FACILITATOR**

**YOUNG PEOPLE EMPOWERING
THEMSELVES TO ADVOCATE**

Section II is divided into 2 parts: Part A is for adult youth advisors and Part B is written for the young people themselves.

PART A: THE ADVISOR AS A YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FACILITATOR

Congratulations on your being an Adult Advisor for a youth advocacy team! You are making a tremendous contribution not only to the youth you are working with but also to your community and your state. Adult Advisors should familiarize themselves with the preceding pages of this Toolkit in order to be of the best service to the youth you are working with.

Youth advocates get the attention of policy makers. Policy makers are so used to hearing from hundreds of adults that they naturally want a change from time to time, and **youth can be that change in more ways than one!**

Youth advocacy is most effective when it's organized. This means forming youth advocacy teams which are groups of youth with at least one Adult Advisor or using existing youth teams for advocacy purposes.

These Teams plan and put into action peer-focused advocacy projects that positively affect their peers, their communities, or their state.

Youth Advocacy Teams can be set up in connection with schools, community organizations, faith communities, businesses, agencies, civic groups, neighborhoods or any other organization where youth are invited to participate or naturally get together in healthy, positive ways.



1. DOVER YOUTH TO YOUTH / YOUTH EMPOWERMENT MODEL

Voices to Prevention thanks Dover Youth to Youth for allowing Voices for Prevention to include the following description of their Youth Empowerment Model, especially the 3 Steps to Youth Empowerment listed below. You can visit Dover Youth to Youth at <http://dover2y.org/>

Youth empowerment is an attractive strategy for a variety of reasons. In most communities, youth are a vast, untapped resource in the effort to prevent the harm from underage drinking, other substance misuse issues and suicidal intentions.

Youth empowerment is also a "two-fer." It promises impacts on two levels:

- The impact on the community that a group of youth might have as they take action to reduce the harm from problems like underage drinking, tobacco or teen suicide.
- The effect on the participating youth advocates as they attempt to impact their environment.

Youth participating in these programs generally become informed, develop skills, and become very committed to

“practicing what they preach.”

The Dover Youth Empowerment Model – also referred to as the One Voice Model of Youth Empowerment – has three core parts or steps:

Knowledge/Education/Information: Youth are provided with the background information needed to develop an understanding of the problem and a level of expertise in the subject matter. This knowledge suggests possible solutions to the problem and provides the inspiration to act.

Skills: But before taking action, youth are provided with the skills needed to be effective in taking action and causing change. These include an intense focus on core advocacy skills needed to be effective in the adult world, including such things as media or speaking skills. Such training provides the skills to act.

Action: Only then are youth provided the opportunity to use the skills in the real world. They are given the chance to present to a classroom, hold a press conference, conduct a rally, or produce a video for cable access TV. This opportunity to take action and effect change is where the empowerment process is completed.

All three parts are critical to achieve true youth empowerment and preferably in the order described above.

Consider a situation where youth are asked to pass out rack cards (also called palm cards) about teen suicide to pedestrians at a public awareness event being planned by an adult coalition. If the youth have not been given the background info and a real understanding of the issues involved, their participation may be “helpful” to the adults, but they are not empowered.

In the previous example, the adults may (legitimately) take credit for “youth participation,” but, in reality, the youth were just performing a mechanical task for the adults (passing out information).

When youth are involved in prevention activities and do not understand the issues, problems and core background information involved - they are not learning to think about problems and consider solutions because they lack the “knowledge” element of the empowerment equation.

Similarly, when youth are involved in action projects where they are not provided the appropriate skills, those youth advocates have missed an opportunity to learn and are likely to be ineffective.

There is a correct way and an incorrect way to teach a class, write a press release, or create a radio PSA. Under-prepared youth who get in front of an audience and perform poorly are just as ineffective as adults who are unprepared. In either case a chance to have impact on the community was missed.

To teach youth these 3 Steps to Empowerment is beyond the scope of this toolkit. However, the Dover Youth to Youth Empowerment Toolkit which teaches all 3 Steps can be obtained from Dover Youth to Youth directly, something which Voices for Prevention highly recommends you do.

Their Toolkit is specifically designed to assist the user in moving their youth advocates through of the three core steps in the process of empowering youth.

The following discussion is equally important for either the brand new youth group or a group that has existed for a while but would like to expand its size or broaden its reach or capacity to get things done.



A strong youth advocacy team will need the following:

- A strong administrative base,
- A high level of organization,
- Understanding of the group’s mission and how it will work, and
- The resources needed to function as a group.

The future success of your youth empowerment group is not a function of whether there are interested youth – there are almost always youth that are very interested in getting involved in preventing the harms of substance

abuse and suicide.

If there is no marching band at your high school or no youth soccer program in your community – it is probably not because there are no kids who would participate. It would probably be due to the failure of adults to provide the facilities and resources to make that happen.

In the same way, the success of a youth advocacy group is more commonly tied to the extent the “adults” can effectively plan, organize, fund, publicize and staff the program.

Guidance on important steps that can be taken to heighten your chance of success in implementing or expanding a youth empowerment program follow below. Also, more information can be found in Part 1: Getting Started of Dover’s Youth Empowerment Toolkit.

2. FIVE QUICK TIPS FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH ADVOCATES

The following tips have been adapted from 5 Quick Tips: Here’s How Adult Allies Can Support Youth Advocacy from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in Club Stories which they in turn adapted from Youth ERA. To learn more please visit www.youthera.org or partnerships@bgca.org.

Today’s youth show promise as our future leaders, already serving as powerful catalysts for change on issues that are important to them. Adult allies can support youthful advocacy by offering their assistance as young people work to be heard about and respected for their steps toward change.

Here are 5 Tips for how Adult Advisors can help support and amplify the voices of the youth advocates who will help shape our world:

1. Amplify their voices, not yours.

Tell youth their voices matter—and mean it. As adult allies, it is essential that we create spaces for youth to use their voices. Remember that the steps we take to empower young people must be about boosting their skills and ability to convey their own authentic message, not ours. When advocating for the perspectives of youth, one helpful approach is to remove your own agenda from the equation entirely, and instead ask thoughtful questions that help young people clarify their own messages and goals. Adult allies can also take a direct approach of inviting youth to participate at the table with policy makers who can assist in bringing about change.

Long-term, young people may feel discouraged if they don’t see the immediate impact of their efforts. You can encourage youth by noticing their efforts and acknowledging their impact on the community.

2. Broadcast your willingness to be a “helper.”

Youthful voices die in a vacuum. Organize with other adult allies (like parents, teachers, community members, church leaders, staff of youth-serving organizations, etc.) to find ways to signal to youth that you are available and willing to support their voice. It can be as simple as clicking “share” when a young person speaks up on social media or making your own social media posts that express interest in partnering with and advocating for youth.

You can also take a more direct approach by asking young people what you can do to help. Consider using the following question: “If you had an adult partner to help you organize, what would you ask them to help you with?”

3. ACKNOWLEDGE AND ASSUME COMPETENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERSHIP.

When it comes to issues like youthful substance abuse and suicide, many prevention and support tactics have been tried, but nothing thus far has brought a complete solution to those problems. It’s time to acknowledge that one missing piece of these devastating puzzles might well be the youth themselves.

Following the leadership of youth doesn’t mean you should never speak up or share your opinion, but try to maintain awareness of how your feedback can motivate or demotivate young people in their commitment to finding solutions to the issues that impact them.

Part of assuming competence means giving young people meaningful and respectful feedback when appropriate and providing a safety net when they make mistakes, or their efforts don’t succeed. It’s also important to ensure that youth understand the bigger picture when approaching complex subjects.

4. DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING ELSE.

It can be difficult to remember types of obstacles we faced as when we were young and, let's face it, most adults have never been forced to endure the level of fear and anxiety that youth experience in our current climate. When partnering with and working to empower young people, it's important to acknowledge the following factors, both tactical and interpersonal:

- Scheduling: Youth schedules are different. 7 a.m. might be too early and 7 p.m. might not be too late. Ask youth what works for them.
- Transportation: Youth may need transportation support; offer to help coordinate transportation.
- Youth culture: Try to remain flexible and willing to adapt to the changing needs and interests of the young people you've partnered with.
- Group dynamics: Tailor your support tactics to suit the personalities of the youth you are partnering with; welcome humor when appropriate.

5. BE REALISTIC ABOUT CONSEQUENCES.

Help youth to anticipate and understand how their advocacy may be perceived by others. Provide feedback, ask questions about how tactics and approaches fit into the bigger picture, and help youth discuss and plan for how they will respond to negative and positive feedback from policy makers.

It's critical that adults inform youth of potential consequences that may come from youth participation in advocacy tactics like marches. It's also important that adults use our voices and influence to challenge those consequences when appropriate. Work to educate young people on their rights and equip them to navigate school and out-of-school settings.

Now is a powerful time for our nation. This upswell of youth advocacy presents an opportunity for adults to help youth voices be heard.

Together, we can empower youth to be effective advocates, capable of making a meaningful difference on the issues that are important to them.



PART B: YOUNG PEOPLE EMPOWERING THEMSELVES TO ADVOCATE

The contents of this section have been adapted from the PACE (Policy Advocacy Communication Enhanced) Project's Policy Communication Toolkit, Module 9: Youth Leaders.

The following section is designed to be read directly by youth who want to become advocates or who want to become better advocates.

Are you a young person who wants to make a change in the world? Then read this section! You may not realize how much positive change around the world would not have been possible were it not for the involvement of young people.

1. WHAT YOUTH ADVOCATES HAVE ACCOMPLISHED

Here are a few examples of both recent and historical policy changes in which youth played a critical role:

- Civil Rights Act of 1964, United States—outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act, 2015, Malawi—set 18 as the minimum age of marriage.
- End of Apartheid, 1994, South Africa—ended the system of institutionalized racial segregation and repression in South Africa that had been in place since the 1940s.

What are some other policy changes that you know of that youth leaders have helped to make a reality?

In this section we will be focusing on how youth leaders can influence policy through education and communication. Now we know that youth have been at the forefront of many positive policy changes in history. And we know from our experience that youth continue to be valued stakeholders today, although the degree to which youth are meaningfully engaged may vary widely depending on the situation and the community.

2. WHY SHOULD YOUTH BE ENGAGED IN ADVOCACY?

First and foremost, it is young people's right to be involved in shaping the policies that impact their lives and their future. Part of a rights-based approach to development is meaningfully involving youth. There is more to the story though. Not only do youth deserve to be engaged in policy processes, but when youth are engaged, stronger outcomes can be expected. Youth involvement can lead to stronger policies on a range of topics, not only youth issues. Youth have valuable contributions to make on a great many subjects.

Lastly, public participation is critical to democracy, and for public participation to be representative of all the different groups that make up a society, youth must be included.

Youth advocacy can mean lots of different things. It can mean events like Town Hall Meetings or public hearings, during which policymakers and youth have an opportunity to engage in dialogue with each other. Youth are a part of the public and should have the opportunity to communicate with policymakers about what matters most to them.

3. WHAT IS A YOUTH LEADER'S ROLE?

Your role as a youth leader is an exciting one and also a difficult one. It's exciting because you have the opportunity to interact with your peers and decision makers on important issues affecting young people.

Meaningful youth participation through educating policy makers has the potential to influence policymaking and result in more youth-friendly local and state laws.

Youth are often best positioned to understand the current problems facing young people and how to fix them. As a youth leader, you have a unique opportunity to (humbly) educate those older than you on issues related to youth. Many policymakers will want to hear what you have to say so that they can learn from you about how to best meet youths' needs.

Youth leaders also have a difficult job. They sometimes have difficulty being taken seriously by adults. As a youth advocate in the community and especially in the state of Georgia, you also bear the responsibility of representing all youth.

You are likely well aware of how diverse youth are, how much opinions vary, and how complex individual needs are among youth. The best thing to do as a youth representative is to speak from your own personal experiences while also noting to your audience that not all youth are alike and that many different opinions exist on certain issues. Do your best to serve vulnerable populations and bring them into the conversation whenever possible so that the diversity of youth experiences and perspectives is well understood.

We believe that in all of the many roles that a youth leader can take on, each role can be made stronger by effective use of data and evidence.



4. WHAT DO YOUTH LEADERS DO?

Youth leaders often take on multiple roles. They can be asked to serve on youth advisory groups or on youth advocacy teams. Sometimes they have the opportunity to give presentations to decisionmakers. They may regularly engage with and educate their peers on a range of topics and serve as leaders within their communities or even their state. Youth advocates serve as representatives during meetings, conferences, or other events.

Lastly, youth advocates regularly engage with diverse audiences to ensure that youth voices are heard and youth issues are addressed.

5. USING EVIDENCE TO MAKE A POINT

When used correctly, evidence can make youth advocacy efforts stronger and more effective. As mentioned, the role of a youth leader is multifaceted. The use of evidence can support a youth leader in many different aspects of their role.

What we mean by this last point is that sometimes youth leaders are asked very general questions that put them in a position of speaking on behalf of all youth. When faced with this dilemma, having data on different groups of the youth population may be useful.

Let's walk through a sample scenario together to illustrate how data can be used to strengthen your participation as a youth leader.

Sample Scenario

The Georgia General Assembly is considering a possible revision of a law related to substance abuse prevention that affects youth. Imagine that you are a youth leader educating Georgia legislators about this revision. You are a member of a group that is described as being at risk for developing substance abuse problems in the policy's draft version.

During a committee meeting you are asked to offer feedback on young people's substance abuse prevention needs. What would you say? How would you want to prepare for that question?

For example, you might say, "Young people face a variety of substance abuse needs," and then list some examples. This response is very general. But if you had data at your fingertips, you could offer a better answer.

If you had researched in advance of the meeting and had data at hand, your answer could include things like the percentage of 12th graders in Georgia who used an illegal drug in the last 30 days and what drugs they used, the average age at which GA 6th-12th graders started using various drugs, the number of GA 6th-12th graders who intended to commit suicide in the last year or a great many other points.

Specific data can be used to add depth to your input as a youth leader and can also be a way of delicately making the point that perhaps more young people should be involved in decision making processes.

For instance, in our example above, imagine if, after sharing a statistic on substance abuse or suicide in Georgia, you could follow that point with an offer to put the GA House or GA Senate committee reviewing a bill in touch with another youth leader in your network who volunteers with a youth team trying to prevent drugged driving by youth. In this case, you could provide even more data related to substance abuse experiences and needs and help make a connection between a decisionmaker and another youth leader. A win-win!

6. SUMMARY

- Youth advocates are important and can bring incredible change to their communities and their state.
- Youth have a right to be engaged in policy education and their involvement will strengthen policy outcomes.
- Youth take on challenging roles that require special consideration.
- Data can be used to strengthen youth advocacy work

Please see Appendix 3 for an article written by a youth advocate about her experience on Substance Abuse Prevention Advocacy Day in February 2020.

Please see Appendix 4 for a poster

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT
FOR BEGINNERS

SECTION

III

RESOURCES
&
REFERENCES

What follows below is a list of organizations that have participated in advocacy education and have very worthwhile advocacy resources, particularly on their websites. Some of the resources below pertain to a specific toolkit, guide or article.

Specific resources used in this toolkit have an asterisk beside them.

Please know that some of the advocacy organizations referred to below may be advocating for issues other than substance abuse or suicide. However, the overall approach to advocacy is basically the same no matter what your specific area of interest in making our world a better place to live in.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Asterisks below indicate where a resource below also served as a reference when composing this Toolkit.

***5 Quick Tips: Here's How Adult Allies Can Support Youth Advocacy**, Club Stories, Boys & Girls Clubs of America. To learn more please visit <https://bgca.org>.

84 Movement is a youth advocacy tobacco prevention group based out of Massachusetts <https://hria.org/projects/84-movement-fight-big-tobacco-ma/>

***Feeling Empowered by Taking Action**, by Madison Foster, Youth Coalition Member, Drug Free Fayette, <https://v4pga.org/newsletters/feeling-empowered-by-taking-action/> Voices in the Know -Voices for Prevention Newsletter.

Georgia Teen Institute, GUIDE, Inc. <https://georgiati.org/>. Teaches teens substance abuse related knowledge and presentation skills that can then be used in advocacy.

National Youth Ambassadors Program, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what-we-do/youth-programs>

***PACE (Policy, Advocacy, Communication, Enhanced) Project**, Population Reference Bureau <https://thepaceproject.org/our-results/building-champions/policy-communication-toolkit/module-9-youth-leaders/>

***Teen Prep Guide**, <https://guideinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Substance-Abuse-Prevention-Day-2018-TEAM-PREP-Guide.pdf>

***Youth Empowerment Toolkit**, Introduction and Part 1: Getting Started, Dover Youth to Youth, <http://dovery2y.org/resources/toolkit/> (highly recommended)

ORGANIZATIONS & COALITIONS THAT CAN HELP

American Foundation on Suicide Prevention (AFSP) <https://afsp.org/> includes advocacy as one their service areas.

American Foundation on Suicide Prevention, Georgia Chapter <https://afsp.org/chapter/georgia> - includes advocacy as one their service areas .

CADCA (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) – <http://CADCA.org> provides policy education concerning substance abuse prevention.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, tobacco prevention advocacy.

Council on Alcohol and Drugs, <https://livedrugfree.org> – resources and programs about substance abuse prevention .

Dover Youth2Youth, <http://dover2y.org> (Substance Abuse Advocacy)

Drug Free Fayette, <http://www.drugfreefayette.org/> (Substance Abuse Policy Education)

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Behavioral Health Prevention and Federal Grants (DBHDD/OBHPFG) <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/bh-prevention/substance-abuse-prevention>
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/bh-prevention/suicide-prevention>

Georgia Prescription Drug and Opioid Abuse Prevention Collaborative, <http://StopRxinGA.org> – This collaborative includes an Advocacy Action Group that provides policy education services.

GUIDE, Inc., <https://guideinc.org/> (Substance Use Prevention and Suicide Prevention policy education)
Heart 2 Heart Coalition / Learn to Grow – tobacco prevention policy education

***Let's Be Clear Georgia**: A Collaborative to Prevent Marijuana Abuse, <https://ClearGA.org> – marijuana abuse policy education and prevention education

National Families in Action, <https://www.nationalfamilies.org/> (Substance Abuse Advocacy)

Vaping Attention to Prevention <https://www.vaping-attentiontoprevention.org/>

Georgia-based Youth Advocacy organization run by the Borrego brothers who are seniors in high school

***Voices for Prevention** (<https://v4pga.org/>) Substance abuse and suicide prevention membership organization – to join go to V4P's website which has webpages on resources, events, V4P Newsletters, and ways to become a V4P member.

***Youth ERA** <https://www.youthera.org/home>

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT
FOR BEGINNERS

SECTION

IV

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: EXAMPLES OF TALKING POINTS ON SEVERAL SUBSTANCES



Tobacco / Vaping Fact Sheet for Legislators

- E-cigarettes come in many shapes and sizes. They can be called “e-cigs,” “e-hookahs,” “mods,” “pod mods” “vape pens,” “vapes,” “tank systems,” and “electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).”
- Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which has known health effects.
 - Nicotine is highly addictive, as addictive as heroin and cocaine.
 - Adolescents are particularly susceptible to nicotine addiction: the majority (90%) of smokers start before the age of 18.
 - Nicotine is a health danger for pregnant women and their developing babies.
 - Nicotine can harm youth brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20s, negatively affecting attention, and learning. It also increases the risk of anxiety and depression
 - Nicotine is toxic with thousands of calls to poison control centers each year about children and adults swallowing, breathing, or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through their skin or eyes.
- Use of e-cigarettes in Georgia increased with grade level.



*9th grade (20.0%) *10th grade (25.2%) *11th grade (29.8%) *12th grade (32.2%)

- Among High School students in Georgia, 26.6% reported that they believed e-cigarettes are less addictive than cigarettes.
- Georgia does not have a comprehensive smoke-free law to protect people from secondhand smoke in all indoor areas of workplaces, restaurants, and bars.
- 116 out of 181 public school districts in the state have adopted tobacco-free policies.
- Since 2014 University System of Georgia campuses have been 100% tobacco-free.
- In FY20 Georgia allocated \$1.8 million in state funds for tobacco prevention, which is 2.8% of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Annual Spending Target.
- Georgia loses \$3.99 billion in productivity each year due to smoking.
- Health care costs in Georgia, directly caused by smoking, amount to \$3.18 billion annually.
- Georgia’s Quit Line invests \$1.06 per smoker; compared to the national average of \$2.21 per line.
- Georgia is ranked 49th in the U.S. for its cigarette tax of \$0.37 per pack compared to the national average of \$1.81. Vapor products are not currently included in the cigarette tax.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019. *Extinguishing the Tobacco Epidemic in Georgia*. Georgia Department of Public Health, Health Protection, Epidemiology, Chronic Disease, Health behaviors and Injury Epidemiology Section, 2018.
Truth Initiative, 2019. *Tobacco in Georgia*.
American Lung Association, *State of Tobacco Control, 2019*



Prescription Drugs/ Opioids Fact Sheet for Legislators

- Voices for Prevention (V4P) along with 58 other prevention coalitions in Georgia work diligently to prevent the misuse of, abuse of, addiction to and overdose from prescription (Rx) drugs, as well as illegal opioids.
- “Opioids” are a class of drugs that includes prescription drugs like oxycodone, hydrocodone and synthetic opioids like fentanyl and illegal drugs like heroin.
- The MISUSE of Rx drugs, particularly opioids, is more prevalent than the use of cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA, and PCP COMBINED.
- The **Prevention of the misuse of, abuse of, addiction to and overdose from Rx opioids** is a complicated problem requiring a strategic, coordinated, and solution-focused approach in order to address the following numbers:
 - In 2018, among Georgia residents; Any opioid-involved overdoses accounted for 5,014 ED visits, 2,345 hospitalizations, and 873 deaths; Heroin-involved overdoses accounted for 1,357 ED visits, 324 hospitalizations, and 303 deaths and fentanyl-involved overdoses accounted for 311 deaths.¹
 - Persons aged 35-44 years died from an opioid-involved overdose more frequently than persons of other age categories.¹
 - Males aged 25-34 years died from an opioid-involved overdose more frequently than any other age category and were 3.3 times more likely to die from an overdose than females of the same age. ¹
 - In Georgia in 2018 the highest numbers of heroin and opioid-involved overdose deaths, ED visits, and hospitalizations occurred predominantly in urban settings like Atlanta Metropolitan Area, Augusta, Macon, Columbus, and Savannah. ¹
 - All drug overdose death categories decreased except for heroin from 2017 to 2018, which was the first yearly decrease in opioid-involved overdose deaths since 2013. ¹
 - Families and friends are the primary ways that people get introduced to Rx opioids.
 - Something every adult in Georgia can do to prevent Rx drug misuse, abuse and overdose, especially regarding opioids, is to use Rx drugs only as directed for the person prescribed, get professional help to address mental and physical health issues, consider alternative approaches in addition to Rx drugs, dispose of all out of date/expired/not needed medicines, and lock up all Rx drugs.



1.. Source: Opioid Overdose Surveillance, Preliminary Report, Georgia, 2018. Georgia Department of Public Health, Drug Overdose Surveillance Unit. Available at <https://dph.georgia.gov/drug-overdose-surveillance-unit>



Alcohol – Fact Sheet for Legislators

- Underage drinking costs \$1.2 Billion in Georgia in 2013.
- In 2019, 8.5% of high school students in Georgia report drinking alcohol in past 30-days, down from 12.8% in 2018.
- In 2019, 4% of high school students in Georgia report binge drinking in the past 30-days, down from 6% in 2018.
- Youth who begin drinking before 15 are 5x more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after 21, **and in 2019, 18.2% of GA high schoolers reported that they had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before the age of 15.**
- Most alcoholics in America begin drinking before age 18.



Social Host Liability

- An adult allowing underage drinking on property they own, rent, or lease is referred to as a “Social Host”.
- 11.4% of GA high school students reported they have used alcohol at home.
- There are gaps in the current laws. Social host laws hold adult hosts accountable by allowing police to issue misdemeanor citations with fines attached to any adult who permits underage drinking in their home or on their property.
- Current Georgia laws only hold accountable an individual that gives an underage person alcohol if they **know** that they will be driving.
- 35 States have adopted Social Host Laws including our contiguous states.

Alcohol and the Teen Brain

- Alcohol use interrupts normal brain “wiring” by slowing down brain activity and development.
- The brain continues to develop into adulthood and undergoes dramatic changes during adolescence. Introducing drugs during this period of development may cause brain changes that have profound and long-lasting consequences.
- The brain goes through dynamic change during adolescence (ages 12 to 21) and alcohol can seriously damage Excessive alcohol use can lead to learning and memory problems, including dementia and poor school performance.

Sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2017. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2016. *Fact Sheets: Underage Drinking*. Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2009). National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015. *Drugs, Brains, and Behavior. The Science of Addiction*. AMA (<http://alcoholpolicy.md.com/pdf/brain3.pdf>)

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The purpose of a letter to the editor is to express you or your organization’s opinion/ point of view about an article you have read. The letters to the editor section is one of the most widely read sections of any newspaper or periodical and offers advocates.

A chance to provide readers with information and insights on an issue. The piece may not only inform, but also inspire readers to take action.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Follow the submission guidelines – Most publications accept letters electronically. They are typically short (200 – 250 words) and all of your contact information should be included. It should be very timely – sent within a day or two of the article

Content – Be concise! Focus on one issue and include it at the beginning. Include your credentials or expertise in the subject area and check your facts. Reference the impact to local community and strengthen with statistics. Proofread your work. Better yet, have a colleague read the letter for you and provide honest feedback.

Call to Action – Powerful letters have a “call to action” that urge readers to do something. Contact and educate policy makers about the issue. Encourage readers to follow an organization on social media and become more knowledgeable about an area.

OUTLINE FOR YOUR LETTER

HEADING

To the Editor: (If writing directly to the writer, substitute Dear Mr./Ms.)

Re: “The headline of your article goes here” and date of article

BODY*

Write 1 to 3 paragraphs that include the case you are making for your issue, supporting statistics, your expertise and the impact on the community regarding the solution you are hoping for.

CLOSING

End with a strong, positive statement in support of your case.

Your full name, city, state

Your phone # (only if requested)

***Example of body of letter**

Re: “Proposed Colorado marijuana edibles ban shows lingering pot discord”

It seems hard to believe that many forms of edible marijuana are made to look like candy and treats that children often eat, yet the public is supposed to believe that the marijuana industry isn't marketing to youth. It has been reported recently that twenty-six middle school children had to be treated at local hospitals after ingesting marijuana edibles.

Now, parents are being warned more than ever before to check their children's Halloween candy, suggesting that if they see anything that looks unfamiliar or strange, it could be a form of edible marijuana and should be thrown out. For these reasons and for the health and safety of all youth in Colorado, educating parents and policy makers about edible marijuana is crucial and needs to be done.

(*Source: Student News Daily)

APPENDIX 3: ARTICLE WRITTEN BY GEORGIA YOUTH ADVOCATE FOR JULY 2020 ISSUE OF VOICES IN THE KNOW (V4P NEWSLETTER).

FEELING EMPOWERED BY TAKING ACTION

By Madison Foster

In the world today teens deal with several stressors and pressures that lead them to use and abuse substances. The competitive nature of school and social media and the glamorization of drugs and alcohol all contribute to teen substance abuse.

The youth voice is important because we are the future. All of the decisions being made now will affect us later in life so it is important that youth are aware and active in advocacy. Our generation has been raised on technology. Unlike any generation before ours, we are enabled to spread information and raise awareness through social media. Many people underestimate the power that social media possesses, but as instantaneous as a snap of a finger, one post can have such a significant impact. As young people we have the power to demand change and make it happen.



As a group we spoke about how substances have affected us personally as well as in our community and schools. Our group's main focus was on the vaping epidemic in the United States and Georgia. Several members of the group know classmates or friends who have had health complications due to vaping. All of us were in some way inconvenienced by others' use of vaping and other e-cigarette products. Unlike other substances, vaping/e-cigarettes do not have strict regulations nationwide. Also, we do not know the long-term effects of use because of how new the products are. Several teens have experienced issues with popcorn lung as well as physical injuries due to the vape itself. Talking to the state legislators felt satisfying and fulfilling. Anybody can talk about wanting to make a difference or anyone can say they want to see a change. Actually, taking action and doing something about the problems I see made me feel empowered. Though I was a little nervous speaking I knew that what I was saying mattered and that these were the steps I had to take to ensure that change would be made. We spoke to State Representatives Josh Bonner and Derrick Jackson. It was reassuring to hear that they were working on bills to lower teen access to vaping.



As a youth advocate I have had several opportunities to voice my opinions in hope of sparking change or raising awareness including participating as a Drug-Free Fayette Youth Coalition member in Substance Abuse Prevention Advocacy Day at the Georgia state Capitol. While there we were able to listen to speakers about their experiences advocating for prevention. We learned about the best ways to present our opinions and ideas to state representatives and senators in order to make sure our words turned into actions.

• Madison Foster is a youth coalition member of Drug Free Fayette, in Fayetteville, Georgia. She is a junior at Fayette County High School.

HOW TO BECOME A YOUTH ADVOCATE



1

Find your passion

It is important to begin advocacy work with a cause you believe in and feel strongly about. This makes advocacy work a lot easier and fun. For example we chose Youth Advocacy against Tobacco and e-cigarettes.

2

Find other people or groups interested in your topic of choice

There are so many advocacy groups out there and they have all worked very hard and paved the way. Don't feel like you have to start from scratch. Go out there and join groups with similar interests. There is power in numbers, especially in advocacy. You will need all the help you can get and advocacy groups are very willing to help you through this process. For example, we are Youth Ambassadors for Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. They have a summer training youth advocate program that ends with a symposium in Washington DC every summer.



3

Do your research

Do Your research and know your topic well. You want to make sure you are advocating for the right reasons and to make sure that you strive to make the world a better and healthier place.

4

Communication

Get ready to email, call, and write your representatives and senators. You can easily get an appointment to meet them at their home town office or in Wasghington DC. Remember they are eager to hear from the people in their districts. Our representatives and senators want to hear from the people that voted them in and they want to hear about the issues that are important to their constituents. They do this, not only to help their communities, but also to get **re-elected**. Dont forget about your local government officials as well.

5

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Practice before going to speak with your senators and representatives. Make sure they clearly know what you are requesting and more importantly, why. They want to hear your personal stories. They want to know why this is important to you. Don't just bring numbers and stats. They are not interested in numbers and stats from you. They can get these numbers from lobbyists and their staff. Remember to bring your heart. Be present and bring personal stories from your community.



Become a youth advocate and join us at VA2P if your are interested in fighting the tobacco and e-cigarette industry.

www.vaping-attentiontoprevention.org

