

PREVENTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE NORTHWEST CORNER

Thanks to the generosity of donors and the dedication of volunteers, a coalition of organizations and community members is continuing to make a measurable impact in its mission to combat substance abuse in northwest Connecticut.

Drug overdose is the number one cause of accidental death in America, with New England facing high rates when compared with similar regions across the country. According to Connecticut's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 279 people died due to drug overdose in Litchfield County from 2012 to 2018.

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's Northwest Corner Fund and the **Foundation for Community Health**, under the leadership of the **McCall Center for Behavioral Health**, have invested in two strategies to address a crisis that greatly affects the families and communities in our region:

- The **Botvin LifeSkills Program**, an evidence-based approach to substance abuse prevention, in the Region One School District
- The mobilization and support of a local coalition of school staff, community members, and health and human service providers known as the **Northwest Corner Prevention Network**

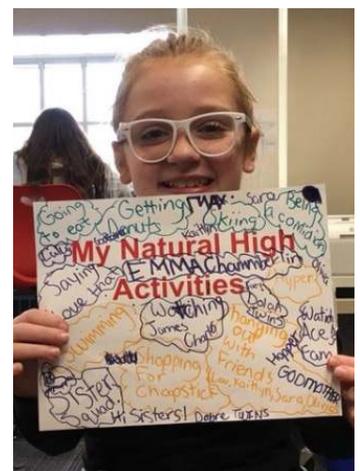
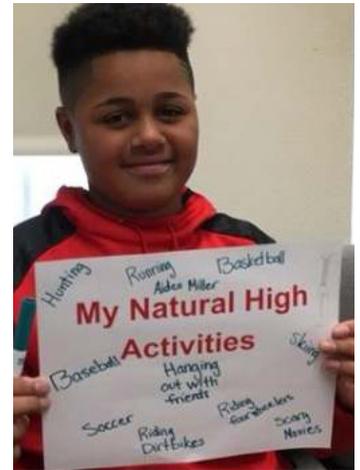
BOTVIN LIFESKILLS PROGRAM

The Botvin LifeSkills program aims to **delay the first use of harmful substances and promote healthy personal development** among young students.

In 2018, **299 Region One students** in grades six through eight participated in the Botvin class. As the program enters its fourth year, it is estimated to reach a total of approximately **330 students**. It is effectively serving students during their transitions to middle school and high school—two key points when they are most vulnerable developmentally.

The curriculum provides participants with the confidence, knowledge and resilience to deal with **social and psychological factors** that initiate risky behaviors. Students learn methods to handle peer pressure and control anger, anxiety and other emotions that could lead toward drugs or alcohol. Instructors also **outline the dangers of all forms of substance abuse**, from vaping to narcotics, to highlight multiple entry points to addiction.

Using these tactics, Botvin has been proven to reduce drug use by up to **75 percent**, alcohol use by up to **60 percent** and verbal and physical aggression, fighting and delinquency by up to **50 percent**. In Region One, initial surveys indicate positive trends in skills relating to relaxation, drug refusal and self-control.



NORTHWEST CORNER PREVENTION NETWORK

The dedicated volunteers of the Northwest Corner Prevention Network hosted multiple community events and recruited new members from multiple sectors in 2018 to raise awareness of this crisis and prevent substance misuse.

- Two **Drug Take Back events** allowed attendees to safely dispose of 180 pounds of unused prescription medication. To date, 460 pounds have been collected.
- The group hosted a **performance of “Dirt” by John Morello** at Housatonic Valley Regional High School focused on bullying, drug use and addiction.
- **Red Ribbon Week**, a national campaign that promotes drug prevention, reached 300 youth through five days of activities in the Region One School District. The theme was “Your Life is Your Journey, Stay Drug Free.”
- NCPN partnered with the Housatonic Youth Services Bureau to organize a **community vigil** for Lukas Kosko, Donald “D.G.” Blodgett and Deanne Silvernail, all former students of Housatonic Valley Regional High School who died in substance-related auto accidents.
- Ten **NCPN meetings** were held throughout the year with a total attendance of 128 participants. Meetings rotated through each of the six Region One towns to facilitate community input and increase awareness.
- The group formed a partnership with a newly formed **task force**, led by administration within the Region One School District, to address youth substance use through changes in district policies and practices.
- NCPN launched a new website, **www.ncpncoalition.org**.

LOOKING AHEAD

This program has entered its fourth year of addressing youth substance abuse in the Northwest Corner, and all of its partners—Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation’s Northwest Corner Fund, the Foundation for Community Health and the McCall Center for Behavioral Health—are invested in its future.

The coalition’s mission is supported through generous contributions to **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation’s Northwest Corner Fund for Substance Abuse Prevention**. We thank everyone who supports this critical initiative, and we welcome partnerships with donors to enhance this vital work.

To make a gift, visit **BerkshireTaconic.org/Prevention**

Berkshire
Taconic
Community
Foundation



460

Pounds of unused prescription medication collected to date

300

Students reached through Red Ribbon Week in 2018

299

Number of students who participated in the Botvin LifeSkills class in 2018

128

Participants at Northwest Corner Prevention Network meetings in 2018

45

Region One faculty and staff members trained to identify signs of suicide

11

Region One faculty and staff members trained to administer Naloxone, a lifesaving opioid overdose medication