

ASAP Youth Prevention Services

A prevention program for young people that provides life skills training, personal growth opportunities and pre-vocational exploration in a safe, supportive environment

Summary

Children who live in high-risk settings where poverty, domestic violence, gang activity and alcohol and drug abuse are prevalent need exposure to positive alternatives. ASAP (Alcohol & Substance Abuse Program) youth prevention programs provide life skills training, personal growth opportunities and pre-vocational exploration in a safe, supportive environment. The focus is on reducing risk factors while building resiliency towards the inevitable challenges these children will face in their adolescent years.

The programs meet daily after school until 6:00pm. Referrals to the programs are made by parents, schools, peers and neighborhood agencies. Priority is given to young people living



Members of HHE and the CAAT Team stand in front of the mural-sized collage that they assembled.



Some of the ASAP Youth Prevention Services take place at Chelsea public housing sites.

in public housing developments within Chelsea, Revere, South Boston and Greater Boston.

Program components include the use of: meditation, Yoga and breathing exercises to help develop inner awareness; dance, music, art and drama to encourage creativity; and training in computer operation and other pre-vocational skills to give these young people a start towards job-seeking.

All participants in the programs are held accountable for their personal development. They participate in weekly self-development sessions where personal goals are discussed and emotional blocks to achieving these goals are addressed within the group. Issues such as individual decision making, limit setting and conflict resolution are presented in practice sessions.

All young participants are encouraged to assume leadership roles within their goal-oriented peer groups. The program helps participants aged 8-13 to build a foundation of self-esteem and social skills so that once a child reaches the age of 14, he or she can become a paid team leader and health educator.

ASAP: Youth Prevention Services

Programs

ASAP Youth Prevention Services consists of two types of programming.

1. Peer Leadership Programs are designed to foster leadership development for teens between 14 and 18 years of age. Participants usually live in public housing developments within Chelsea, Revere, South Boston and greater Boston. The goal of the programs is to provide youths with employment through paid Peer Leader salaries while developing the young person's leadership skills and ability to outreach to peers in prevention efforts, which address substance abuse, tobacco use, violence, HIV/AIDS, and suicide. Currently, there are three peer leadership programs: the *Circle of Friends* programs, the *Chelsea Adolescents Against Tobacco (CAAT)* team, and the *Holistic Health Educators (HHE)*.

Circle of Friends

This program operates within the D Street and West Broadway public housing developments in South Boston. The pre-adolescent children and adolescents (ages 8-13) are trained in substance abuse avoidance, health promotion strategies, stress reduction and suicide prevention. A second, interfacing component involves older adolescents (age 14 and up) who are trained as peer leaders and health educators.

Creating a positive vision for the future is central to the program design. The youths are introduced to several adult mentors throughout the year who explore life choices with them through the sharing of their own career paths. The older teens are taken to college campuses by program staff and assistance is provided in filing for financial aid as well as in filling out college applications. (All of the peer leaders who have graduated from ASAP peer leadership programs to date have gone on to college.)

Holistic Health Educators of Revere (HHE):

Currently the Holistic Health Educators are working with young people from South Boston in a *Circle of Friends* program to train them in peer leadership skills and a variety of health issues. In November, 1997, the Holistic Health Educators (HHE) were invited to present workshops at the third annual "New England Conference on Resiliency." Over one hundred teachers, guidance counselors and youth prevention professionals attended this conference. Seven HHE teens developed and presented all aspects of their workshop which was entitled, "Honor and Respect Yourself — A Workshop on Self-Esteem Building."

Chelsea Adolescents Against Tobacco (CAAT)

Adolescents aged 14-18 provide smoking cessation groups and information to the public on a variety of health issues related to tobacco use. They conduct workshops and fairs at high schools and work with local Boards of Health to change city ordinances to stop smoking in public places. The CAAT Team was successful in getting over 700 signatures on a petition, which led to passing an ordinance in Chelsea prohibiting smoking in municipal buildings. The Tobacco Peer Leaders do compliance checks in local stores in collaboration with local Boards of Health staff to assure that tobacco products are not sold to under age youth.



During the summer months, ASAP coordinates Rookie Ball Leagues in collaboration with the Boston Red Sox and the Chelsea Boys and Girls Club.

2. Youth Prevention "After School"

Programs are prevention programs for children ages 5 to 13 who live in public housing developments within Chelsea, Revere, South Boston and greater Boston. Teenage Peer Leaders from Chelsea, Revere and South Boston serve as mentors for the younger participants in these programs and present information to them on substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, suicide prevention and a full range of health topics. The goal of the programs is to provide a safe environment where young people are offered opportunities to develop leadership skill while learning life skill and prevention strategies that reduce the risk for substance abuse involvement.

Hermana a Hermana (Sister to Sister)

There are two separate programs of this type. One is in Chelsea serving Spanish-speaking girls, ages 8-13, who are living in the local housing developments, and the other program is in Revere which primarily serves English-speaking girls.

The programs work in close collaboration with the Chelsea and Revere School Departments.

Each program uses a peer leadership model where the girls participate in all aspects of the planning and implementation of the program with technical assistance of the staff. The creation of cohesive groups of girls develops self-awareness, heightened self-esteem and leadership roles within an atmosphere of acceptance and nonjudgmental self-exploration.

The program's hours during the school week are daily from 2:30pm to 5:30pm. On weekends and during summer days the program is open from 11:00am to 4:00pm.

A majority of the girls in Chelsea are *Latina* and are exceptionally at risk due to higher than average teen pregnancy rates, higher levels of substance abuse and violence, a high incidence of single female heads of family (over 80%) and below poverty levels of income. Currently, there is a waiting list for admission to this program.



Teenagers in the HHE Peer Leadership Program display the AIDS quilt that they helped to plan and make.

Brothers & Sisters of Chelsea

Youth groups meet from 2:30pm to 5:30pm, four days per week within the Scrivano and Burma Road public housing developments. Program goals are similar to Hermana a Hermana.

Rookie Ball Team

During the summer months, ASAP coordinates Rookie Ball Leagues in collaboration with the Boston Red Sox and the Chelsea Boys and Girls Club. Over 150 families are involved in this activity, which has a focus on substance abuse prevention and family involvement

Program Goals

ASAP Youth Prevention Services are resiliency based programs. Young people are taught how to raise their self-esteem, lower stress levels and make wise decisions. Each participant's progress is evaluated by seven internal resiliency measures:

1. Protective Insight – sensing when something is wrong and avoiding toxic situations;
2. Independence – making healthy choices and disengaging from negative situations;
3. Relationships – connecting to others;
4. Initiative – showing a willingness to work;
5. Humor – learning to laugh, especially about difficult situations;
6. Creativity – composing and shaping one's future; and
7. Morality – judging right from wrong and serving others.

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Chelsea Adolescents Against Tobacco (CAAT) present plaque to the Chelsea Chief of Police.

Staff

All ASAP youth prevention programs are staffed by people with a minimum of six years prior experience working in the field of youth prevention. Supervision is provided weekly to each staff member by a Master's level clinician, and additionally group psychiatric supervision is provided for one hour per week.

Volunteers

Parents are used as volunteers for specific projects throughout the year. Annual events such as Halloween's Haunted House and the Spring Health Fair bring together program participants, family members and community leaders.

Admissions process

Outreach and recruitment is done by ASAP to fill specific prevention programs. Those who are interested in more information about a program and admission may call Karla Guzman at (617) 884-6829

Funding

All Bay Cove ASAP Youth Prevention Services are free of cost to the recipients. Partial funding is provided through the Department of Public

Health, HUD Drug Elimination grants, the Clipper Ship Foundation, the Greater Boston Council on Alcoholism, Rutland Corner Foundation and the Patriots Foundation. The balance is obtained through generous contributions from the program's dedicated supporters.

Population and Geographic Area

Yearly, the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) at Bay Cove serves more than 1,000 adults and children of Chelsea and Revere, Winthrop and East Boston. Its Youth Prevention Services component primarily serves children from Chelsea, Revere, South Boston and the Greater Boston public housing developments.

For more information about ASAP (the Alcohol & Substance Abuse Program), please contact Amy Harris,

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