



## WESTBROOK CHILDREN'S PROJECT

### Our Impact: Prevention Week

Westbrook Children's Project (WCP) unites community partners across sectors to ensure Westbrook youth have the support they need to graduate from high school and reach their full potential. An important part of these efforts is implementing youth substance use prevention strategies. This work is led by the Westbrook Partners for Prevention Coalition (formerly Westbrook Communities That Care). The prevention work is done in coordination with WCP, which provides resources for understanding the community's needs and other activities that support youth.

Critical to the success of this prevention work is engaging youth, families, local businesses, law enforcement, educators, city leaders, community nonprofits, and a wide variety of other community partners. Over 20 coalition members, plus dozens of community businesses, organizations, and individual volunteers, work together to distribute positive messages and support environments and policies that make healthy and safe choices easier for Westbrook youth.

While the youth substance use prevention efforts are year-round, there is one time of year that exemplifies the breadth of the community support and partnerships: Prevention Week. For one week in May leading to prom, Westbrook Partners for Prevention unites the community around programs and activities designed to help keep teens safe during this high-risk time of the school year.

#### Students Play a Lead Role in Prevention Week Activities

Westbrook High School students volunteer to lead activities throughout the year to help their high school peers, as well as middle school students, make safe, healthy, substance-free choices.

One group, the Youth Leadership Coalition (YLC) has nearly tripled in size over the past few years. During Prevention Week, they organize and lead over a dozen different activities in addition to Sticker Shock. Activities include refusal skills and stress management workshops, as well as coordinating substance use prevention training for middle school students.

Another group, Natural Helpers, leads peer-to-peer activities to support mental health/suicide prevention during Prevention Week. They hand out affirmation cards with mental health/suicide resources on the back and hang posters throughout school.

Over the past few years, hundreds of people participated in these events, including 100 high school students who took photos in the YLC "Photo Booth" with messages about why they choose to stay substance-free.

"It can be a challenge to engage youth in prevention activities because it is a tough topic to discuss. What we have learned is that when the outreach is peer-to-peer, the kids get involved," explains Alexandra Hughes, Director of Westbrook Partners for Prevention about the high student participation during Prevention Week.

**"I feel like a lot of people just don't know the risks involved in substance use, but I think everyone needs to be more aware of what it can do to them and how it can impact their future."**

**— Zubeyda S.  
Westbrook High School Student**



## Prom Safety Campaigns

During Prevention Week and prom season, various businesses participate in prevention activities by displaying and distributing prom safety messages. Florists, restaurants, tuxedo rental shops, hair dressers, and other local businesses distribute materials to teens designed to remind them to make safe decisions and stay substance-free.

## Sticker Shock

During Prevention Week, the Westbrook Police Department, Westbrook High School students, and local retailers work together to help prevent adults from selling and serving alcohol to minors. The students help place bright orange “Sticker Shock” messages in stores to remind adults about the legal consequences of providing alcohol to minors.

Large stores like Hannaford, as well as smaller local stores, participate to get the word out. However, this program does more than remind people how they can help prevent underage drinking, it actually helps make the community stronger and more connected as relationships are built between officers, students, and local business owners.

According to Jim Farrenkopf, School Resource Officer at Westbrook High School, “We have heard from business owners that they think Sticker Shock is a great thing. They like that high school students and the police are working together to prevent underage drinking. They want to participate because by displaying the Sticker Shock messages, it shows their support for teens and the community and helps their business’ reputation.”

## Positive Impact on Youth Substance Use

By creating messages, policies, and environments that support youth substance use prevention, the community work led by Westbrook Partners for Prevention and Westbrook Children’s Project has had a positive impact according to student surveys (MIYHS). Some of the most dramatic decreases in substance use are reported by middle school students. Reaching this age group is critical to the prevention work so they know the dangers of substance use and learn refusal skills well before they enter high school.

**“If it wasn’t for programs like this, students wouldn’t participate in these types of activities. We wouldn’t have the opportunity to build relationships with them and we would not be getting out messages like Sticker Shock or prom safety.”**

— Jim Farrenkopf, School Resource Officer  
Westbrook High School

