

The joys and concerns of summertime

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Engagement is essential to keeping kids above the influence during summer break.

The initial joy at the end of the school year can quickly be replaced by a sense of loneliness and boredom if the right activities are not available to a child. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations (SAMHSA), more free time and less adult supervision can make summer an exciting time for many young people, but it also can increase the likelihood of exposure to dangers and substance use. More teens start drinking and smoking cigarettes and marijuana in June and July than any other months of the year.

As the director of Afterschool and Summer Camps at the Brattleboro Area Middle School, I am impassioned about providing engaging programming for students during the times when school is not in session. Engagement is essential to keeping kids above the influence during a time when they are vulnerable to experimenting with destructive and risky behaviors that can lead to poor academic performance and an unproductive adulthood. Youth are also vulnerable to learning loss during in the summer, which can put them further behind each year academically and at risk for making poor choices when they feel they do not have opportunities that interest them. There is substantial data that supports that summer programs make a difference in students' lives both academically and emotionally, and additional research supports that summer programs help to bridge the achievement gap for students from low-income families.

The BEAMS Summer Camp program, offered at Brattleboro Area Middle School to seventh and eighth grade students in the Windham Southeast Supervisory Unit, offers seven weeks of free summer opportunities in July and August to engage youth in fun, but academically beneficial activities. Programs as diverse as cooking, shelter building and video game design, build confidence through time on the ropes course, and inspire positive peer interaction that leads to new friendships. These engaging, positive activities stand in contrast to a summer often spent alone, alienated, inactive and bored. The positive relationships that students form in the summer with their peers and with the staff serve as protective factors to avoiding multiple issues, including substance abuse. The total number of programming hours offered to our students this summer will be 174 Hours.

This year, the 2013 BEAMS Summer Camp is offering exciting programs such as Food for Thought, Fire and Stone Wilderness Adventure Camp, Summer Switch Ropes Course and Summer Learning with Afternoon Adventures. Camps run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, are offered free of charge and are staffed by school teachers, school counselors and para-educators.

In addition to activities to keep youth above the influence during the summer, The Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition (BAPC) offers Tips for a Drug Free, Safe, Summer by encouraging parents and guardians to have an open dialogue with their children about their feelings and problems, establish regular check-in times periodically throughout the day via phone (don't text), get to know your child's friends and their parents and secure all alcohol, and prescription drugs in the home to reduce temptation for youth to

experiment with substances. Additional tips may be found on the BAPC website in the June 2013 Guiding Good Choices Newsletter.

Youth who are looking for a positive influence and engaging activities this summer should visit www.ATI802.com/summer-fun to learn more about opportunities available in the Brattleboro area. Volunteer and community service opportunities for teens will be posted on the ATI802.com website. The ATI 802 campaign is a localized version of the national Above the Influence media campaign, featuring the faces and voices of Brattleboro area high school and middle school students. Large posters featuring the ATI802 message will be circulating in the windows of community businesses throughout the summer to continue the positive message of a summer above the influence.

Betsy Stacey is the director of Afterschool and Summer Camps at the Brattleboro Area Middle School and has submitted this column as a guest writer for BAPC. BEAMS is the afterschool and summer enrichment program at BAMS. The BEAMS mission is to actively engage BAMS students in high interest afterschool and summer programming in order to increase academic achievement, and improve social and emotional development and connections to school and the community. The program is funded in part through a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant from the VT Department of Education. For more information or to enroll in the BEAMS Summer Enrichment program contact Betsy Stacey (802) 451.3588 or bstacey@wsesu.org

Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition (BAPC) a local nonprofit that organizes community efforts to be involved in the ongoing prevention and reduction of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse in the Windham Southeast area. Visit www.BrattleboroAreaPreventionCoalition.org or call 802.257.2175 to learn more about their prevention efforts and to get involved.