

## A Decade in Prevention

After a decade leading the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition, I will be leaving the position of Director on June 13<sup>th</sup>. It seems like an appropriate time to reflect on how substance abuse prevention has evolved over ten years. When I joined BAPC in April 2004, it was housed a small office at the end of the bridge at what was called the Marlboro Tech Center (now the Marlboro College Graduate Center). There were two part time staff people and the work focused on providing Guiding Good Choices parent education classes and programs for youth and families. Fast forward to 2008 and funding for prevention strategies changed to support a broader approach to include media campaigns, policy work and addressing community or population level change. BAPC grew to 3 full time staff, moved to bigger offices and continued to expand to reach a larger audience through environmental strategies. Now, BAPC is addressing tobacco use, prescription drug misuse and collaborating with other non-substance abuse prevention organizations on healthy community design.

Unlike the changes to BAPC, what works to prevention substance use among young people remains unchanged. There are risk factors and protective factors that can contribute to drug and alcohol use and other risky behaviors for youth. Prevention works to decrease the risk factors and strengthen the protective factors. Risk factors are influences in a young person's life that increase the likelihood of engaging in negative or unhealthy behavior. Protective factors are those elements of a young person's life that buffer, protect or insulate them from the development of negative or unhealthy behaviors. Understanding and identifying risk and protective factors helps communities to understand what they need to do to support youth to live healthier lives. BAPC's work has been and will continue to be a data driven approach to address risk and protective factors in the community that influence substance misuse among youth people.

There are some protective factors that BAPC has been addressing consistently over the last decade and even before my time as Director. Those protective factors are all about relationships. Although it may seem redundant, close relationships with parents, caregivers and other family members who are actively involved and who share clear expectations and boundaries around alcohol and other drug use are very important. Having supportive relationships with caring adults such as teachers, coaches, doctors or clergy who encourage goal setting, positive social development and who have high academic and behavioral expectations is also important as are relationships with peers or friends that support a substance free life style and have future plans.

The community also play a role in providing protective elements to discourage substance use among young people. Laws and ordinances need to be consistently enforced, and policies and norms need to encourage non-use of substances for youth.

As we approach high school graduation and times of change in the lives of youth, parents and other teen influencers can have a large impact on choices of whether to engage in risky behaviors such as substance use. Whether as a community we are looking at underage drinking, smoking, prescription drug misuse or heroin, the basic prevention approach can be applied across all substances. Talk. Listen. Support. Be an Influencer.

It has been an honor and a privileged to serve this community as Director of the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition. Many thanks to the BAPC members, partners and supporter for their contribution to prevention over the last ten years. Please continue to support BAPC vision that the Windham Southeast Area is a community that fosters a safe, supportive, and healthy place for all to live and grow.

Beth Shrader has served as BAPC Director since 2004. *“Matters of Substance” is a collaborative column of the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition (BAPC). Our goal is to develop, implement and support a comprehensive community effort resulting in the prevention and reduction of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse in the Windham Southeast area. The coalition meets in Brattleboro on the second Friday of each month at 12pm, from September – June and all are welcome. For more information or to join our prevention efforts, please visit the BAPC website at [www.brattleboroareapreventioncoalition.org](http://www.brattleboroareapreventioncoalition.org) or call 257-2175.*