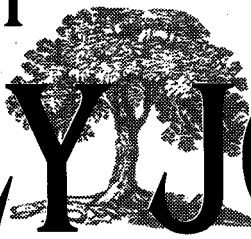




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Social norms

Arbor on Main surveys youth drug & alcohol use



Sarah Baldik/The Daily Journal

Tylor Mateos, hangs posters on a wall that were made based on statistics collected by staff and clients of Arbor on Main and funded by federal funding granted to the county and in collaboration with Arbor on Main.

By CAROLE BRQDSKY
for The Daily Journal

Everyone knows advertisers use sophisticated marketing techniques to influence attitudes and encourage purchasing.

How do advertisers gather information about their market, and can these same techniques be utilized to encourage positive behaviors?

Through a federal Drug-Free Communities Grant awarded by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration, students and staff of the Arbor on Main, in coordination with the county's Health and Human Services Administration, addressed these issues. They created and implemented a social norms experiment which resulted in a novel media campaign focusing on youth drug and alcohol use. The project was part of the Rural Murals program.

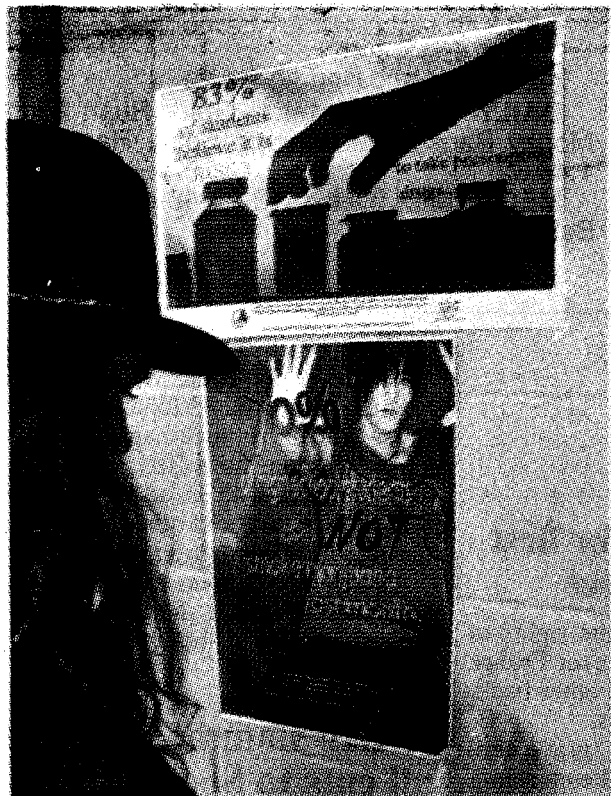
According to HHSA senior programs specialist Meredyth Reinhard, social norms theory states that people's behavior is often influenced by perceptions of what is "normal" or "typical."

"We often severely misperceive typical behaviors or attitudes of our peers," says Reinhard. "If people believe the majority of their peers smoke, they are more likely to smoke."

With adviser support, students designed a survey to help them perceive the difference between existing perceptions about drugs and alcohol with reality. Once survey data was compiled, students created an intensive drug awareness campaign using the information gleaned from the survey to create positive, targeted messages. "Informing people that the majority of their peers are acting in a healthy way can create an environment in which people strive to emulate what they believe is typical of their peers," says Reinhard.

Stephanie Paige, Program Manager of Arbor on Main, Lawrence Lazaro, Arbor on Main Peer Support Counselor and Amy Lovato, the Arbor's Youth Development Specialist were contacted by Reinhard to partner with HHSA in the implementation of the study.

"The Just Say No campaign has proven to be a failure," says Reinhard. "This is a fresh approach



Mateos gives two of the posters a once-over after hanging them on the wall outside of Arbor on Main Friday afternoon.

to changing behaviors."

Students were recruited and trained in normative education. "The students went through a very serious application and interview process," says Paige. "Not everybody made the cut," she notes.

Using sample surveys from other schools nationwide, staff worked with their student team to create survey questions relevant for this community. "Students created and administered their survey at Ukiah and South Valley High Schools in the spring of 2010," Reinhard explains.

The purpose of the surveys was to gather facts and compare them against perception. "Kids may

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think everyone's smoking pot; with a survey, you may discover fewer people are smoking pot. This can change perception, but in order to do that, you have to create a survey to find out what's really happening," Reinhard explains.

Students anonymously surveyed 450 individuals at Ukiah and South Valley High Schools during their lunch hours. This represented a statistically accurate sample. Nine questions were asked, including questions regarding use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes in the past 30 days, the percentage of students the respondents thought have used substances in the past 30 days, whether respondents would prefer dating a smoker or non-smoker, and how great the risk is if students use alcohol and drugs.

Seventy percent of student respondents stated they did not smoke marijuana during the previous month. Thirty-five percent of respondents use sleep as a stress reducer, and 39 percent use music. Thirty-two percent use marijuana and 44 percent of students de-stress through exercise. A whopping 93 percent prefer to date non-smokers, 79 percent prefer dating non-marijuana smokers and 63 percent prefer dating non-drinkers. Three out of four students say they have never ridden or driven with a driver under the influence of alcohol.

Once the data had been collected, the students created seven posters with graphics and stats reflecting the strongest student responses. "Their favorite image with students was a cocktail glass filled with prescription pills, reflecting the response of 83 percent of students who stated prescription drugs were dangerous," says Reinhard.

"The posters were placed in every nook and cranny at both campuses," says Paige. "Creating the posters was exciting for the students. The social norm training was a challenge," she notes.

Last April, an additional survey was given to students to see how the

project was perceived. Students responded to questions regarding how effective the messages on the posters were, how clearly they were worded and how visible they were. Two posters were reported being seen by 80 percent of the respondents, and all posters were seen by at least 60 percent of the students. The group made changes based upon the statistical feedback they received. "Instead of putting all the posters up like we did the first year, we changed out posters every two weeks. We learned a lot of lessons the first year," says Paige.

"Lawrence and Amy coordinated media campaigns. After the first year we had banners on sports fields, at Anton Stadium and on MTA busses. Ukiah Valley Television created rotating ads for their site," says Reinhard.

"KWINE is running two radio spots with some of our stats and KMEC is going to run the same ads. We decided to focus on marijuana and alcohol statistics because they would hit home with most of our youth this summer," says Lovato. "We had a full-page ad in the June fair guide and will do another for the next fair. We're hoping Channel 3 will run the same ads we are running on UVTV," says Lazaro.

The project will be completed in September. "We hope we find funding to do another campaign," says Reinhard.

"It's been great having Amy and Lawrence work on the project. The kids really related to Lawrence during the training aspect of the program. Peer to peer is what it's about, especially if you don't have a previous relationship with the youth," says Paige.

"The partnership the Arbor has with HHSA is a strong one. We're grateful we had this opportunity to collaborate. We met our objectives and the students learned a lot," Paige notes, also thanking principals Dennis Willeford and Antonio Lopez for their support.

"This program empowers youth to get information. Their direct, hands-on involvement helped them to change behaviors," Paige explains.

For information visit
www.ruralmurals.org or visit
www.arboronmain.com.