

Section 3. Executive Summary

Mission – The mission of the Vashon Alliance to Reduce Substance Abuse (VARSA) is to reduce the incidence of youth substance abuse using all available resources in the most efficient and effective manner possible through the implementation of a comprehensive community plan developed and supported by a community coalition. VARSA’s approach to reducing youth substance abuse is twofold: (1) Establish and strengthen collaborations across community sectors to prevent and reduce youth substance abuse, and (2) Reduce substance abuse by addressing community risk factors and promoting factors that minimize risk of substance abuse. One of VARSA’s major initiatives is collaboration with the Vashon Island School District (VISD) to implement school-based prevention strategies.

Area Served –The island community of Vashon is a rural and unincorporated area of King County accessible only by ferry. The island population is 10,500, with 1,500 students attending three schools in the VISD: Chautauqua Elementary School, McMurray Middle School, and Vashon High School. Although Vashon Islanders have relatively higher median household and family incomes than state or national levels, this does not immunize youth from risk for substance abuse and other issues.

Need – Despite many advantages, Vashon youth show high rates of alcohol and marijuana use. Over the last decade, Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) data have consistently indicated alcohol and marijuana usage is higher than state averages across grade levels. Data from the most recent HYS (2010) suggest that VARSA strategies may be having a positive impact in some areas related to alcohol use. Trends from 2008 to 2010 showed a slight decrease in alcohol use by 8th and 12th graders and a considerable decrease in use by 10th graders. Although there were improvements, underage drinking continues to be a major concern as does marijuana use by youth. Other highlights from the HYS 2010 data include:

- Age at first use of alcohol was younger for 8th and 10th grades compared to 2008
- Marijuana use increased among 8th graders compared to 2008
- Current marijuana use among 8th, 10th and 12th graders was higher than state averages, with a statistically significant difference at the 12th grade
- Current illegal drug use is higher than state average for all grades (8, 10 and 12)
- Lifetime use of marijuana is higher than the state average for all grades (8, 10 and 12)

Vashon 8th and 12th grade students had statistically significant higher rates than Washington State students related to the eight risk factors below:

1. (Community Domain) Laws and Norms Favorable to Drug Use
2. (Family Domain) Poor Family Management
3. (Family Domain) Parental Attitudes Favorable to Drug Use
4. (Peer/Individual Domain) Perceived Risk of Drug Use
5. (Peer/Individual Domain) Favorable Attitudes Toward Drug Use
6. (Peer/Individual Domain) Favorable Attitudes Toward Antisocial Behavior
7. (Peer/Individual Domain) Friends Use of Drugs
8. (Peer/Individual Domain) Intentions to Use

Strategy and Goals – The programs implemented as part of the PRI project will focus on enhancing school and community based prevention strategies. There are six project goals:

1. Decrease the risk associated with low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization on Vashon Island.
2. Decrease the risk associated with community laws and norms favorable to drug use on Vashon Island.
3. Decrease the risk associated with the availability of ATODs to youth and minors on Vashon Island.
4. Decrease the risk associated with friends’ use of drugs among children and youth on Vashon Island.
5. Decrease the risk associated with family management problems.
6. Decrease the risk associated with the perception among Vashon Island students that ATODs are not that harmful.