



Prevention Works: My Experience with Youth to Youth

By Cheryl Sells

Cheryl Sells is Director of Youth Prevention at CompDrug. She shares her personal experiences as a young person with [Youth to Youth](#), an organization whose original youth-driven, adult-guided programming has set the standard for youth development and prevention programming across this country and around the world. Youth to Youth has been a key partner in designing and implementing [Project Amp](#).

Ask anybody the definition of prevention and odds are they will say, “Stopping something bad before it happens.” Ask people who work in prevention and they might even mention, “Delaying the onset of first use. Pushing back behaviors as long as you can until youth are more capable of handling those decisions and consequences.”

RESOURCES

[Family Resource Center](#)

Check out this collection of trusted resources for parents and caregivers launched by the *Treatment Research Institute*.

[Drug Prevention for Parents](#)

Download *Mentor International's* substance use prevention resources for parents.

[Generation Rx](#)

Download and review educational materials for teens about using medications safely.

[Cultivating Leadership in Youth](#)

Review the *School-Based Health Alliance's* youth engagement toolkit.

[Webinar on Peer-led Interventions](#)

Register for Canada's *Prevention Hub* webinar discussing peer-led interventions to prevent substance use among young people.

[Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention for Youth](#)

Download the pocket guide for practitioners.

But if you ask me, after 23 years of being involved with prevention, it is so much more than that. ***Prevention isn't just about what you stop or delay; it's also about all the amazing things you get started.***

I like to call myself a product of prevention. As a 7th grade student, I was introduced to a drug-free youth leadership group called [Youth to Youth](#). Twenty-three years later, I am the Director of Youth Prevention at CompDrug, the agency that created that group. Youth to Youth's mission is to engage young people through meaningful discussions, activities, and experiences to develop and implement their own ideas to create positive change. Bringing youth together with a common bond of living free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs allows them to serve as role models to their peers and younger students.

I have not only seen but also experienced what prevention can do for young people. I first got involved as a shy, insecure 7th grader who had been surrounded by resources and assets and wasn't prone to taking risks. I always heard about the dangers of using and I didn't want to take my chances. However, I did not consider myself a leader. I may have felt okay about making the choice to be drug-free, but I wasn't about to stand up in front of a group of people -- especially my peers -- and share why I was proud of that choice. Through my involvement in Youth to Youth, I developed confidence in the choice I made and the skills to express why I made that choice. I became motivated to make a difference in the lives of others. As a sophomore in high school I was asked to speak at a parent program about the reality of peer pressure in my community and how I managed to stay away from it. Afterwards, I had such a sense of pride and accomplishment. I felt empowered. That shy insecure 7th grader had become an advocate for the drug-free choice. Throughout high school, I continued to speak in front of my friends, classmates, teachers, and other community members. I realized it wasn't just about my choice to be drug-free, but also about including and inspiring others to make positive choices. I even had a small part in changing a state law to lower the level of Blood Alcohol Concentration from .10 to .08. That timid insecure little girl was heard, and actually made a difference.

Looking back now, I KNOW I wouldn't be the person I am today if it were not for my involvement in prevention programming. After 10 years of working in the field, I have seen other youth grow and develop the way I did. However, many of the youth I have worked with come from homes where use is prevalent or even encouraged, yet they still find the strength and courage to make the choice to be drug-free. One girl in particular had a very difficult home life, and was involved with Youth to Youth throughout her high school career.

Changing the Language of Addiction

Respond to and share your feedback for the ONDCP's announcement for public comment.

Prevention Institute

Check out tools and guides for practitioners, community groups, and policymakers.

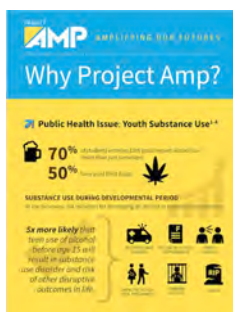


Archived Updates

Check out the archived updates from Project Amp. Read about pilot sites in [Marietta, GA](#) and [Columbus, OH](#) as well as the experiences of a [mentor](#) and a [provider](#).

Why Project Amp?

Download the infographic and share it with colleagues.



Why Now is the Time

Listen to the *t3: Changing the Conversation* podcast on the current landscape of youth recovery supports.

Moving Upstream With Substance Use Prevention

Project Amp's Deputy Project Director, Laura Winn, discusses her personal connection to Project Amp.

I believe her involvement not only kept her drug-free, but also kept her safe and made her feel valuable and important. At one point, I witnessed her share her story in front of an entire middle school. Afterwards, a girl from the audience came up to her crying and thanked her for sharing. She said she didn't think anyone else in the world could understand what she was going through, and now she knew she wasn't alone.

Effective prevention for youth is so much more than stopping something bad before it happens. It is growth, development, support, leadership, confidence, empowerment, and encouragement - and finding ways to spread these skills to peers. To many youth, prevention is life changing and lifesaving.

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