

The background of the image is a complex, black and white marbled pattern. The lines are fluid and organic, resembling liquid or smoke that has been captured in a specific arrangement. The colors range from deep, dark greys to bright, almost white highlights, creating a sense of depth and movement. At the bottom of the image, there is a white, torn-paper-like border that frames the text.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARIN
CADCA 2023 FORUM

MY KEY TAKEAWAYS THAT I BELIEVE WE SHOULD FOCUS ON:

- DE-NORMALIZING PARTY CULTURE
- EDUCATE AT A YOUNGER AGE
- EXPOSE STUDENTS TO REAL DATA THAT CORRECTS MISCONCEPTION
- ACCEPT AND OVERCOME STIGMA/EDUCATE STUDENTS ON STIGMA
- FOCUS ON THE UNDERLYING ISSUES LEADING TO THESE DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS
- TAKING A MORE CARING ROLE INSTEAD OF AN ACCUSING ROLE
- ENGAGING STUDENTS
- ENGAGE IN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

DE-NORMALIZING PARTY CULTURE

- As young people, we are subject to hear all about our peer's experiences with their party lives and their social lives. Often I feel as though many feel that it is a standard or rite of passage that must be fulfilled. There is an expectation that one of the sole purposes in college is to part-take in sex, drugs, and alcohol. Many of us grew up watching tv shows that glorified party hook-ups or beer pong, so naturally we believed this is what we were bound to do, and that it would be as fun as it looks.
- In Order to build resilience against this means to educate at a younger age. When we get to high school, we often get talks about alcohol and substance use but it would be more proactive to debunk party culture in younger generations before it becomes normalized to them as well.
- There are too many competing factors that are prioritized by educators before party culture. I believe that educating kids around 4th and 5th grade (while it may seem too soon) is necessary because students only in 6th grade have already taken place in vaping and substance abuse. With careful thought, we can educate younger kids without subjecting them to content that is too mature for them to hear.

PERCEPTION

Before attending the forum, I was under the impression that vaping and drinking were occurring at higher rates than it truly does. This misconception can lead to peer pressure or justification/reasoning on why to partake in the act.

Statistics show that in the U.S. 27.5% of high school students vape. While this is an undeniably high percent, I had thought it was a lot more predominant than it truly is.

Showing students the flip-side of that, (83.5% students in the U.S. do not vape or have a nicotine addiction) positively highlights that significantly more kids are clean of vape which can end peer pressure, de-normalize the glamourization of vaping, and help students with realization or having an epiphany that vaping is not the way to go.

Showing positive statistics is a very do-able and easy way to encourage prevention without being negative. Along with positive statistics we can also do social norms campaigns and use data to correct these misconceptions.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

- From personal experience, I have observed that one of the motives to drink and use substances is purely out of boredom and looking for an experiment. If we keep our students more engaged, they may find a sense of community within a club of people with the same interest, a motivator to keep going, or the sense of joy they were looking to find in substances.
- In schools we can encourage joining a club or sport more one-on-one to be more proactive. That means more than just announcements but having guidance counselors within the schools help each student find at least 1 thing they can join for a sense of belonging that can be fulfilling to the student. Even if that means the student only goes to two club events in one month, it is still a mentally beneficial thing that can have an impact on prevention.
- A school at the coalition has a social media page called “What is your anti-drug?” and mine is running. Personally, I believe this is why I have not turned to substances yet. An Instagram page like this could be beneficial to see how your peers cope, stay busy, stay out of trouble and etc. I think it would be most efficient if students ran this social media account because peers to peers connect better than kids to adults. “What’s your anti-drug?” events may also be beneficial. Opening up a club that any drug and alcohol prevention believers within the school could also be helpful and give sense of community in unity against the enemy!

ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING ISSUES

- For thousands of kids struggling with mental health, they turn to substance abuse, binge drinking, marijuana, and etc. It is not too “be cool” but to cope.
- Mental health needs to be treated like physical health and this has to happen now. Suicide is the #1 cause of death in young girls between 10-24 years. Mental health concerns SHOULD be addressed way before the thought of suicide crossed their mind.
- Crisis and suicide hotline should be posted everywhere, counseling should be easily accessible, and everyone should be taught and aware of signs to look out for. When a mental health concern is discovered, a more proactive role must be taken. Adults should connect with counselors, psychiatrists, and establish safety plan. We can bridge the gap by early identification of mental illness and address upstream causes and improve implements of evidence-based strategy. Barriers for getting the best help can include parent engagement, health insurance and lack of availability. To combat these barriers, students can be schedule to meet with in-school counselor, receive teacher support, and eventually try to connect with parents regarding this issue if it is safe.
- Thousands of kids turn to substances as their way out of the pain. We need to stop suicide and stop substance abuse, but this cannot happen if all of our youth are poor mental states. We have to start there...

ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING ISSUES

- There is a plethora of ways to combat and prevention substance abuse and suicide:
- Teach EVERYONE the important signs to look out for.
- Actively and continuously advertise mental health help both free of cost and help with cost. (crisis hotlines, techniques, and etc.)
- Begin peer-to-peer support (I will elaborate on this later)
- Reveal the devastating data to high school students to raise awareness
- Erase stigma
- Leaving behind all judgment to help individual struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse
- It is in my interest to gather with other schools and give each other's schools a presentation to bring awareness to this and advocate for mental health and substance abuse because it will, without a doubt strongly impact at the very least a few kids and I am very passionate about this subject and want to do everything I can to bring awareness to the dangerous combination of substance abuse and mental health.

ADDRESSING UNDERLYING ISSUES

- I believe adults and educators must be better educated on what it entails to focus on mental health, within Iroquois, compared to other schools, has pushed homework and did not exempt work during significant crisis and become upset when education is not the #1 priority. I can elaborate on this point as needed. I believe adults should also listen to peer-ran presentation regarding this- one where parents and school staff can watch to better understand the mental illnesses of students today, put on by students today that can speak on behalf of those who have struggled. I think this would strongly prevent substance abuse if adults are more proactive on their kid's mental health that they do not feel the need to turn to substances.
- Circling back to peer-to-peer support, this idea is the probably the biggest stretch of all mine, but I think that anonymous text with other peers for support within the county can help because the peers do not feel like a burden to each other or as though they have a big secret somebody may spill or judge them for. Though, this idea also could very well backfire, it is still an idea we could maybe use in the future.

OVERCOMING THE STIGMA

- Stigma is SO prevalent in students today because we are so ignorant.
- “All the vapers are bad kids.”
- “People who say they want to die and don’t take their life are just asking for attention.”
- “Only people with physical harm are actually depressed.”
- “People who smoke weed do not care about themselves.”
- These are just a few stigmas and there are FAR too many. How can a nicotine addict reach out for help when they are facing JUDGEMENT regarding their character for what they partake in? How can students with depression without physical harm ever feel like their thoughts are valid or reach out when according to others, “they do not have it bad enough”? Religious and racial stigmas as well are out of control. Presentation regarding what stigma is and how to overcome would be very educational and eye-opening. Stigma often goes unrecognized by one who is practicing it.

DOMINO EFFECT: STIGMA

- Stigma regarding nicotine addicts makes them feel inadequate and less than, which reduces willingness to seek professional support, which causes reluctance to ever attend treatment and limits access to healthcare which allows the addiction to further progress, getting stronger and stronger, making it harder and harder to ever stop.
- If Stigma is not properly addressed, thousands of people will never get professional help due to the gaslighting and feeling of disapproval or shame given by other people.

START CARING AND STOP CORRECTING

- Once an individual has reached a point where they are actively participating in substance abuse, reprimanding and educating is no longer an efficient option to prevent this. Once the addiction begins, correcting and teaching the individual will not help when it is a battle with their mind and body. More care and love needs to be instilled to help break addictions. That means not to punish severely or yell at the student but work with them to help them quit. Take an active role in finding help for them through free apps and daily recognition for their efforts and strength they are putting into defeating the thing that controls them. While you cannot help someone who doesn't want to help themselves, I can confidently say, that I know multiple people who have tried to stop and wants to, but the nicotine overrules their desire to stop. More support is necessary.

START CARING AND STOP CORRECTING

- We can start by placing ads for free quitting apps and the statistics of the efficiency so the student can acknowledge that it has in fact, worked and give them hope. But I urge adults to be less judgmental and offer to help the student face their addiction instead of making them feel they need to hide it more. This is 100% one of the most challenging ideas I have brought up because of barriers such as parents finding out and possible legal responses; there ARE ways that adults can care more, even on the sidelines. We must instill this in the younger generations before they fear adults like the high school students do now.
- I want to note that I do know all of our administration does care for the student's health but in the eyes of the teenager, the delivery from the adults appears to be shadowed by power and rules than care for the student. This misunderstanding can be fixed if students keep a more open-mind and adults treat them as equals in a civil conversation as opposed to admin acting more like the father scolding a child. (No offense to any of our faculty and staff- I have witnessed it be handled this way and though I may not be aware of the entire situation I believe we all need to make a change the help with this issue. **It Takes A C**ommunity!

SHAME

Along with stigma and caring not correcting, I feel that those not taking part in these acts but address these acts do not make students feel shameful or guilty or wrong for taking part in substance or alcohol. The judgment makes them feel like they must hide it which even more dangerous. Having a strong support system that is judgement-free is one of the best way to work with an individual because they will not be put down for there acts.

ENGAGING IN FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

- I attended a presentation regarding engaging in faith-based communities and prevention.
- To start, prevention is not just to work with one person—but work on all of the surroundings such as family, education, and community—which has been the goal.
- Faith is known to be a coping mechanism—many share testimonies regarding the struggles of their lives and how their faith has saved them. A faith also provides a sense of belonging to a person. One of the most underutilized resources is placing value and importance of congregations addressing behavioral health.
- We need to educate faith leaders to recognize and respond to signs of mental illness and create a system of restoration and healing. Once there are transformed people, they transform families who can transform churches who can transform cities

ENGAGING IN FAITH COMMUNITIES

- Churches can become trauma informed care certified which is an essential step. Ordinary people such as the faith leaders can get trained to help with prevention.
- My church is a role model of this- it is non-judgmental family with multiple biblical counselors to help.
- An important notes to all faith communities is that you cannot heal who you judge. This ends up re-traumatizing and bringing about church hurt. Unsolved trauma passes on to others.
- “Get all the education you can but then, by God, **DO SOMETHING.**”
- Any faith-based communities can do this, not just churches. As we are based out of a school, we need to look beyond there, send pamphlets or a poster of the sort to local faith-based communities to help better address issues people struggle with within their group and how leaders should properly go about this.

BUT IT IS NOT ONE DIMENSIONAL

What I am about to say next might not make me a good candidate to be an ITAC ambassador, but it is my honest belief. Alcohol and substance use will happen underage, and it is not black and white. I personally feel one can responsibly drink. Of course, it is not ideal, but the world is full of imperfect, and it is much better to know how to drink responsibly compared to recklessness. Other countries thrive with younger drinking ages because it is simply a beverage and not a rebellious culture. They have very strict driving laws in which can revoke your license a lot faster than in the U.S. This prevents ABUSE and not the USE. Obviously, we cannot change our whole countries laws but I thought it was worth recognizing. At the end of the day, there is pros and cons to most everything except things like meth. We know students are going to try them, people on coalitions have tried them I am sure, so I want to recognize that alcohol is not the Devil but needs to be treated properly. I also believe we need to teach how to responsibly react to abuses like they do in health classes to reduce the harmful affects of these poor choices.

CLOSING WORDS

- We are **blessed** to be located in a **fruitful** area with resources that go beyond what they ever thought they could be years ago. Some ideas may sound outlandish or too hard to accomplish but if one is **truly dedicated** and **passionate**, a real change can take place if we are **willingly** to **persevere through** all of the obstacles that come our way. Barriers should not hold us back from reaching multiple communities, schools, families, and businesses. We are taking a **proactive role** in changing our communities. I am a strong believer in, “Go big or go home.” and after attending the forum (which was better than I expected going into it) I feel **compelled** and **passionate** to GO BIG! Seeing the significant changes that coalitions made in their areas were shocking to me in the best way possible. I really did not believe that ITAC could and is this progressive. The CADCA 2023 forum flooded my brain with so much information that I have condensed to a powerpoint. So much information and so many positive ways to use it made me deeply dwell on the changes **WE** could make. After going to the forum, now more than ever I have wanted to be part of that change. Also, if you made it this far, I apologize for my absurd paragraphs, it is currently 11:20pm on a Monday night and I am really in the Zone right now.

THE PARTS SYSTEM

- though there have been and quite possibly will be times in which I have contradicted myself Lastly, not enough people know this but we have a parts system in our brain. The tug-of-war going on in your head to go through with something or to restraint is the different parts of you. It is very possible for someone to want to never drink again one day and the next day want to party all night, it may seem hypocritical, but everyday that individual may be won over by a different part of themselves.
- The happy and carefree Marin might want to smoke Marijuana tomorrow
- But the spiritual and passionate Marin wants to make positive changes for other teenagers.
- The highschooler Marin says, “getting drunk every once and a while is fine- as long as your careful enough.” or “yeah nothing wrong with smoking this week, you do you girl.” IT is fun and can be safe. Addiction is the enemy. Weed can help anxiety just like prescriptions
- But the other Marin says, “There is no point in this.”
- There is so much GRAY AREA in this topic. I have been contemplating on lot this week if I should be considered an itac ambassador because of these thoughts I have and I wanted you to know that I am not the perfect Anti drug and alcohol ambassador because of these things, I do though, stand by what I have said

THANK YOU
ITAC FOR THE
AMAZING TRIP



FREE “LETS GET CLEAN” APPS AND SOURCES

- Mylife.myquit.com
- Truth
- 36072
- 1-800quitnow
- AND MANY MORE SOURCES TO COME