

SOMERSET PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING IN ACTION

SKOWHEGAN STUDENTS ASSESS "RICK'S RISK" AS PART OF IPOWERR

Over 400 Students Participate in Prevention Education



Challenge

Over 30% of middle school students in Somerset County feel there is slight or no risk in having one or two drinks of alcohol nearly every day, according to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. Research from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration shows that a youth's perception of the risks associated with substance influences whether youth engage in substance use. For many schools, helping students learn the risks associated with substance use is just one of many priorities. Even though it is well documented that one of the most effective strategies for substance use prevention is school-based prevention programming, especially when it includes skills training in critical thinking and problem-solving, schools may not have the capacity to focus on it.



Approach

Somerset Public Health (SPH) offered substance use prevention programming to Skowhegan Area Middle School students as a part of the school's iPOWER (Public Outreach With Educational Responsibilities) program. Using engaging questions and discussion, SPH educators Sean and Shaleigh presented "Rick's Risk," a skills-based SEL4ME module that helps students identify different types of risks in different situations. Open discussions allowed students to hear their peers voice opinions about the why certain risks feel healthy or unhealthy. These discussions were especially relevant to substance use prevention in one scenario where the main character, Rick, feels pressured to use alcohol.



Results

Over 400 SAMS students received SPH's substance use prevention education. SPH also led a parent education night providing adults practical skills in talking with youth about substance use. While no formal evaluation process was in place, SAMS felt the program was successful and intends to keep SPH involved in their annual iPOWER programming. Moving forward, both parties plan to develop a survey that can be administered in the future and are exploring ways to engage students in more meaningful prevention activities. In lieu of evaluation results, SAMS School Counselor, Matt Bigelow shared his thoughts. "Our experience with Sean and Shaleigh has been outstanding. Their passion for teaching and genuine care for our SAMS students and community members make them the most awesome duo ever!"



At A Glance

Over 30% of middle school students in Somerset County feel there is slight or no risk in having one or two drinks of alcohol nearly every day. A youth's perception of the risks associated with substance influences whether youth engage in substance use. Somerset Public Health partnered with Skowhegan Area Middle School to reach over 400 students with prevention programming. Through open discussions around substance use and risky behavior, students learned the skills to decide if a risk is healthy or unhealthy. School staff had positive feedback and plan to include/expand the program next year.

Contact: sphinfo@rfgh.net or visit [somersetpublichealth.org](https://www.somersetpublichealth.org)