

GETTING TO 'Y'



Mill River Union High School team after fall GTY training.

Youth Bring Meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019-20

Along with people around the globe, the 14 Vermont school teams participating in the 2019-2020 Getting to 'Y' initiative (GTY) found themselves dealing with a pandemic as COVID-19 led to massive societal changes in the second half of the school year.

Youth and adults throughout Vermont deserve congratulations for their rapid transition to remote learning in the midst of sudden food, financial and health insecurities along with physical isolation requirements. Each GTY school team was at a different point in their work when the public health crisis began — some were still awaiting their 2019 YRBS data while others had conducted data analysis retreats using earlier reports or county-level data. Some teams continued their work remotely after school buildings closed, while others made plans to regroup in the fall.

This newsletter honors the work and commitment of youth and adults from Blue Mountain Union Middle School, Craftsbury Academy, Lamoille Union Middle School, Harwood Union Middle School, Harford Middle and High School, Mill River Union High School, the St. Johnsbury School, Mt. Abraham Union High School, and Vergennes Union Middle and High School.

GTY is an UP for Learning initiative which puts youth voice, validated data, lived experience, and shared stories at the center of efforts to support

youth health and well-being. Using a strengths-based approach, youth explore their own data and engage with peers and adults in meaningful dialogue about assets, strengths, concerns, and the 'why' ("Y") behind the data.

UP for Learning is committed to seeking equity and justice in education. As we continue to navigate an ever-changing world, we must all amplify the voices of marginalized youth and adults and work in partnership to generate the ideas, energy and growth we need to thrive.

Blue Mountain Union Middle School

Wells River, Vermont



Blue Mountain Union Middle School, with support from Northeastern Vermont Regional Prevention Partnership, participated in Getting to 'Y' for their second year in a row! Following up on the work of middle and high school students who set priorities last year using their school's 2017 YRBS data, a team of middle school students and faculty attended the training day and began planning to work with new local YRBS data. Because the 2019 report was not available before remote-learning was mandated, the team is poised to host a data analysis retreat in September 2020. Congratulations to BMU and team members for their ongoing commitment to student voice and youth-adult partnership to create positive change!



Blue Mountain team at the fall training.

Healthy Lamoille Valley Prevention Coalition

**Craftsbury Academy • Lamoille Union Middle School
Peoples Academy • Stowe Middle and High School**

The Healthy Lamoille Valley Prevention Coalition (HLV) has been a long-term supporter of youth empowerment and has provided logistical and financial support to four local schools participating in Getting to 'Y' for a number of years.



At **Craftsbury Academy**, middle school students took the lead in their '17-'18 GTY initiative, analyzing local data, engaging with their community and partnering with HLV to host parent and community education. During the '19-'20 school year, a group of high school students (pictured above) made plans to lead an analysis of new local data as part of their Freshman Seminar class. Although they were unable to complete this before the public health crisis closed school buildings, this is a promising new approach to students taking the lead while integrating youth health data into a classroom setting.

Students at **Lamoille Union Middle School** (above right) led two full data analyses and hosted two community events over the past 3 years to raise awareness and engage the larger community in dialogue about their priorities. They also co-hosted a vaping awareness event with HLV and distributed suicide prevention information. Their most recent plans were interrupted by the March school building closure and late release of their 2019 data, but they



continue to be invested in supporting prevention and building youth health and resilience, and they plan to lead a 'remote' poster contest in May with HLV to address vaping.



Peoples Academy (pictured above) participated in Getting to 'Y' for their 7th time since the 2008-2009 school year! Over the past 4 years, Peoples' Academy Middle Level students have led 3 data analysis retreats and 3 community dialogue events. The student leaders and their peers identified mental health and substance use as top priorities in their

YRBS data. The group has worked with their Student Assistance Program Counselor and HLV prevention experts to implement action steps over the past few years including engaging with suicide prevention curriculum, organizing wellness events, providing education about vaping and other substance use, and creating public service announcements to address these issues. This year, the middle school group focused on strengthening ‘protective factors’ — conditions or characteristics at the individual, family, school or community level that help youth thrive even in the face of challenges.

Stowe Middle and High School has also demonstrated a long-standing commitment to student voice and leadership, with students participating in GTY since 2016. (Pictured at right: The middle school team, top, and the high school team, bottom.) The GTY teams are subgroups of the MADS (Making A Difference Stowe) and BOSS (Better Our School Surroundings) clubs. The GTY process helps inform their priorities based on students’ interpretation of their own health and risk data. Although logistical constraints interrupted the groups’ work this year, BOSS and MADS have implemented numerous action steps based on priorities identified during previous data analysis, including work on on a UMat-ter for Youth and Young Adult suicide prevention



project this year. These strong student leadership groups plan to explore their newly released 2019 data in the fall and will continue taking an active role to improve youth health and wellness in their school.

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In addition to these many accomplishments, students from Lamoille Union Middle School, People’s Academy and Stowe work with the Lamoille Area Youth Council, and have attended the **Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) Youth Leadership Forum** in Washington DC with HLV for the past two years. Students were instrumental in HLV’s successful Drug Free Communities Grant application and the hiring of a new Youth Coordinator to provide more support to local students.

Congratulations to these teams for their work and their strong partnership!

Lamoille County students and adults at CADCA in DC.

Hartford Memorial Middle School and Hartford High School

White River Junction, Vermont



HMMS team (left) and HHS team and at the fall training,

Youth-adult teams from Hartford Memorial Middle School (HMMS) and Hartford High School (HHS) have a strong partnership with Mt. Ascutney Prevention Partnership and Hartford Community Coalition (HCC) and have full support of the school administration and full-time Student Assistance Program counselor. The HMMS team led successful data analysis and community dialogue events during the 2018-2019 school year, identifying bullying, thoughts of suicide, and community connection as top priorities. During the 2019-2020 school year, these concerns were addressed by students, faculty and administration with a month of anti-bullying and kindness activities and advisory discussions, increased mental

health clinician and crisis staffing at the school, and increased Student Assistance Professional time with middle school students. Greater partnership was formed between the school and the Hartford Community Coalition by electing a student onto the HCC board and including the HCC director as a co-facilitator of GTY groups this year.

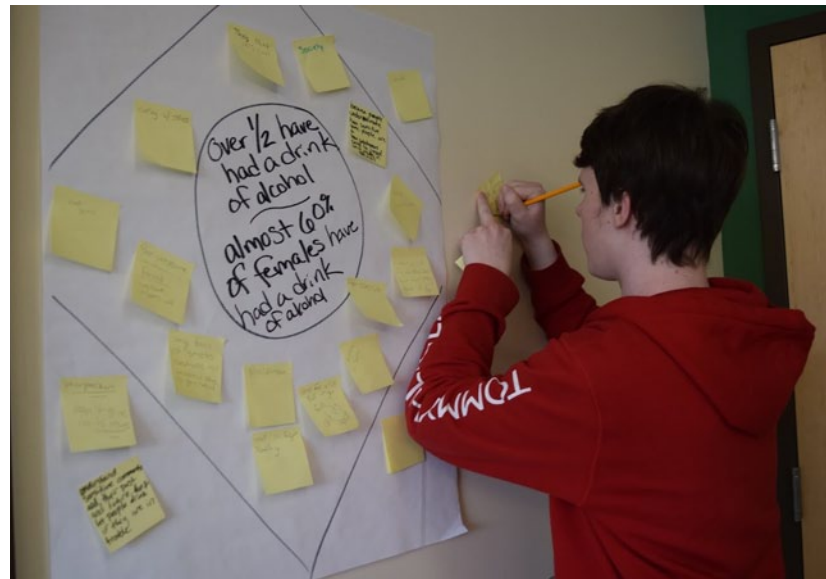
The HHS team met weekly this year to plan a Data Analysis Retreat which they led in March with 26 students of various ages and backgrounds at the White River Junction Department of Health offices. At the retreat, students identified existing assets in their school and community, reviewed the 2019 YRBS Windsor County High School Report,

reached consensus on the top strengths and concerns in the data, and then brainstormed reasons behind their concerns and possible solution ideas. The students coordinated their event to include co-facilitation with HCC and active participation from the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center's Prevention Consultant and the Vermont Department of Health Substance Abuse Prevention Consultant. The group identified good news in the data around plans for continued education after high school, tobacco users who tried quitting, and dropping rates of sexual activity. Their concerns focused on alcohol use (especially among female students), students who had unwanted sexual contact (especially females), and the



increasing number of LGBTQ students who had a plan about how they would attempt suicide. School buildings were closed a few days after their data analysis retreat, so the HHS GTY group held weekly virtual meetings to continue their work. In addition to reviewing the results of the data analysis day, they made plans to reconvene in the fall to hold a Community Dialogue Event and implement action steps to improve health and wellness in their school.

Congratulations to the dedicated group of youth and adults at HMMS and HHS!



Photos this page: HHS Data Analysis Retreat.

Harwood Union Middle School

Moretown, Vermont



Above and right, Harwood team at the fall training day.

Students and advisors from Harwood Union Middle School joined GTY for the 3rd year in a row! In prior years, the GTY group identified strengths and concerns in their local YRBS data and then helped raise awareness and take steps to address concern areas by hosting events for parents and youth around substance use and suicide prevention.

After the initial training this year, the team met regularly to plan and prepare for a Data Analysis Retreat to identify existing assets and decide on top priorities in their local data. Because they were unable to hold their retreat before remote learning was instituted, the Harwood team has decided to reschedule their data analysis retreat for early fall when they will be able to examine their 2019 YRBS data. This will give them time to engage their community and implement an action plan during the 2020-2021 school year.

Congratulations to this dynamic team!



Mill River Union High School

Clarendon, Vermont



Mill River Union High School Data Analysis Retreat.

The Mill River Interact Club joined Getting to 'Y' for the first time this year. The Interact Club is a high school rotary club that focuses on service to others and youth leadership. After attending the training day in Montpelier, the core team organized a February data analysis retreat with 22 students who volunteered to spend an early-release day reviewing their YRBS data with a goal of improving the health and wellbeing of teens in their community. The students created an Asset Web, identifying many programs and opportunities in their school and community partners who support healthy youth development, such as Gay-Straight Alliance, Peer Tutors, student representation on the School Board, Resource Officers, churches, Upward Bound, good school lunches, libraries, the Stafford Technical Center, dance studio, Student Government Association, choral and band programs, team sports, and personalized learning plans. The students then looked closely at their 2017 MRU YRBS report to decide together on areas of concern as well as things to celebrate in their school and community. They identified many strengths in the data, including: very few MRU students drove a car after consuming alcohol; most MRU students have at least one teacher or other adult in the school that they can talk to if they have a problem; and very few students perceive themselves to be underweight or

very overweight. The group also agreed on three areas of concern in the data and spent time discussing 'root causes' — the

'why' behind each concern. The group's top concerns were around the percent of students who have been physically forced to have sex, the percent of students (especially females) who feel sad and hopeless, and the percent of students (especially in 9th and 10th grade) who had been offered, given or sold drugs on school grounds. After dialogue around what might be contributing to these problems, the students brainstormed possible solution ideas.

Following their data retreat, the Interact Club presented a summary of their findings and ideas to the district Equity Committee which includes school board members, administrators, community members and parents. They did a second presentation for the district Wellness Committee. Both committees were impressed by the students' work and committed to support their recommendations and proposals. Although a larger community dialogue event was cancelled due to COVID-19 risks, the Interact Club plans to continue to focus on action steps in the coming year. Congratulations to this dedicated group!



St. Johnsbury School

St. Johnsbury, Vermont

A team of 16 middle school students and their health teacher implemented Getting to 'Y' this year, with support from the Northeastern Vermont Regional Prevention Partnerships and the Umbrella Youth Advocate. The core team organized and facilitated a successful data analysis retreat, on February 19 at the St. Johnsbury Academy Fuller Hall, with 15 students, two teachers, and three adult community members from local health care services. This group spent a full school day working together to delve into their local data. They first used the Circle of Courage format to identify many ways their school and community help young people develop Mastery, Belonging, Generosity, and Independence. The group then reviewed data and discussed their thoughts and insights about what factors played into the results they found. Although the St. Johnsbury School had participated in GTY in the past, they decided to analyze the past three Caledonia County YRBS reports to see changes over time. The group highlighted some good news in the data around seatbelt use and eating dinner with families. They also were impressed with the low number of suicide attempts, since the total number was lower than they expected. (While this was good news to the teenagers, it saddened the adults that they thought the number



St. Johnsbury Data Analysis Retreat.

would be higher.) The students were concerned about how many of their peers made a suicide plan, used e-cigarettes, and felt unsafe at school. A close fourth concern was about hunger. The team, which is part of the Vermont Kids Against Tobacco network, decided they would be more effective working on the first three issues.

Soon after their data analysis retreat, school buildings closed due to the public health crisis. Under-

terred, the dedicated core team continued to meet virtually through the end of the school year to continue their work. They plan to end their year with the Hike for Hope on June 21st to raise awareness and funds for suicide prevention, and will reconvene in the fall to engage their community and implement more action steps to strengthen youth well-being!



St. Johnsbury team at the fall training day.

Mt. Abraham Union High School and Vergennes Union High School

Addison County, Vermont

With the support of United Way of Addison County (UWAC), Mt. Abraham Union High School (Mt. Abe) and Vergennes Union High School (VUHS) formed youth-adult teams to take the lead in defining priorities for health and prevention work using local YRBS data. The Mt. Abe team met regularly and led a successful Data Analysis Retreat in December at the Lawrence House. The leadership team led a fun and productive event with 20 high school students, 2 health teachers, and 2 UWAC staff participating. Since their local 2019 data was not yet available, they analyzed their local 2017 YRBS report, with plans to review and update their work with 2019 data. In addition to finding strengths to celebrate in their data and agreeing on areas they want to improve, the group also identified existing qualities and opportunities in their school and community that promote youth health and well-being. Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, their April 7 Community Event was cancelled, but the group plans to continue their work in the fall. The Mt. Abe team decided to focus their action implementation on one concern area at a time and began the work by designing a media campaign to address impaired driving.

The VUHS team met regularly with UWAC staff and Addison



Above, Addison County teams at the fall GTY training. Right, Mt. Abe Data Analysis Retreat.

Northwest Health and Wellness Coordinator to plan their data analysis event. While they awaited the 2019 data reports, they developed their agenda and promotional materials, reserved space at the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vergennes, worked with administrators to promote and approve the event, and recruited peers. Their event was cancelled due to the public health crisis, but the team hopes to try this again next year.

Students from the Mt. Abe and VUHS teams joined UWAC at the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America Youth Leadership Conference in Washington DC



this year, and core team members Olivia Brooks and Sean Davison now serve as Youth Prevention Coordinators at UWAC.

Congratulations to both teams for their work!

Vergennes Union Middle School

Vergennes, Vermont



Members of the V-RED group who attended the October GTY training.

The Vergennes for Responsible Educated Decisions Club (V-RED) at Vergennes Union Middle School has just completed their third year in a row working with Getting to 'Y'! This dedicated group of students works in partnership with the Student Assistance Professional, School Counselor, and Health and Wellness Coordinator to improve healthy choices in their school. Based on previous years' work, the V-RED group started their year off by organizing a celebration of Red Ribbon Week with the theme "We Are All Connected" and celebrating 'natural highs'. They created colorful posters with related themes that they displayed near the school cafeteria. They set up tables during lunch and invited each student to write their "natural high" on a strip of paper to create a long paper chain which was added to the bulletin board display. Every student that

participated received a red ribbon to tie around their wrist. The V-RED group also spent 8 weeks closely reviewing their local YRBS data during lunch-time meetings. Based on the data, they then created a survey which they asked peers to complete during 'morning meeting' to ensure that all middle school students were able to weigh in on which topics would be most relevant to them. Based on this input, the V-RED group identified vaping, depression and suicide as the concern areas they would work to address. Following this, they invited peers to attend an action-planning retreat at the local Boys and Girls club. Although their retreat was postponed due to the public-health crisis, they plan to resume their work in the fall by reviewing the new 2019 data related to their priority areas and then moving to action. Congratulations V-RED!

“There is no power greater
than **a community**
discovering what it
cares about...

Invite in everybody
who cares to work on
what’s possible.

Acknowledge that
everyone is an expert
about something.



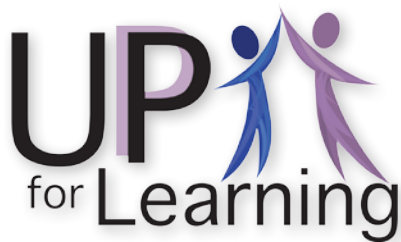
Reading the poem “Turning to One Another” by Margaret Wheatley.



Know that **creative**
solutions come from
new connections....

Rely on human
goodness. Stay
together.”

Left, GTY Facilitation Team members
Xander DeBlois, Andi Tisdell,
Grace Johnson, Pearl Sutton,
and Jenna Krussman.



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Learn more about Getting to ‘Y’ and other UP for Learning
initiatives at upforlearning.org or contact:

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safe during the pandemic.