

Franklin County Asks Their Kids to Say Yes



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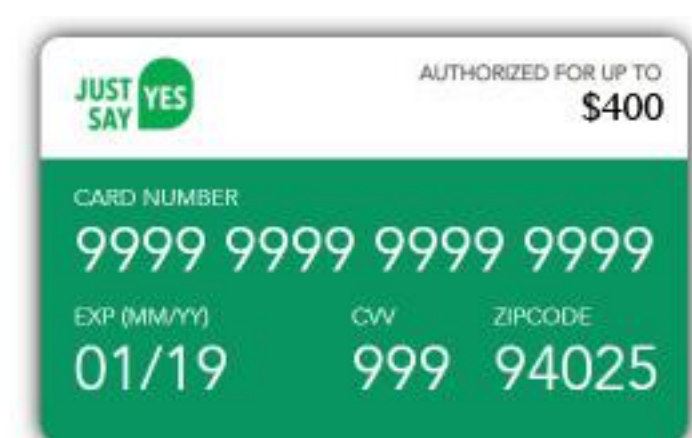
Stephanie Ramsey | May 15, 2023

News

In 2019, the Franklin County Health Department (FCHD) took a unique approach to lowering substance use in their community that focuses on their youth. Under a Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center CDC-funded Overdose Data to Action mini-grant, FCHD launched the Just Say Yes initiative created with guidance from Iceland-based Planet Youth. Iceland has seen significant reduction in the number of its young people who use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco after employing a community approach to adolescent substance use prevention that focuses on reducing known risk factors for substance use while strengthening a broad range of parental, school, and community protective factors.

"Just Say Yes in Franklin County was born out of a tragic story that is certainly familiar to everybody in Kentucky," said Just Say Yes Director Amelia Berry. She shared a graph of the dramatic increase of drug overdose deaths in Kentucky residents from 2002-2019. "What many of us have come to know is that each of these lines (on the graph) is a precious life."

To combat this, FCHD introduced Planet Youth's Yes Card to engage youth with activities within their community to prevent substance use and other risky behaviors. FCHD recognized that using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs at a young age puts youth at higher risk of substance use and dependence in adulthood. The Icelandic Prevention Model has shown that keeping youth engaged in activities encourages them to not use or wait to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. FCHD's Yes Card is an electronic debit card loaded with \$400 that students can use to pay for activities outside of school. The pilot program, launched in the fall of 2020, included 300 middle school students, with the intention of the card moving up grade levels with them to track effectiveness. For each of the two school years since the launch, FCHD has been able to expand the pilot group to include incoming 6th graders at the pilot school, bringing the total number of participants to 500 students in sixth through tenth grades.



The Just Say Yes initiative allows for multi-sector collaboration in the community by working with parents, youth, schools, local government, churches, and other community partners to stop youth substance use before it starts. The program currently has 30 activity providers, including the Kentucky Dance Academy, Canoe Kentucky, Frankfort Martial Arts, and more. Providers must submit to a background check and attend up to six hours of prevention training per year.

Despite the launch of the program coinciding with the shutdown caused by the pandemic, the cards have been successful, with a 72% utilization rate in 2021.

Results from annual surveys administered to Franklin County youth showed an increase in extracurricular activity participation since the program was implemented. In December 2020, 16% of surveyed students responded that they participate in music, art, drama, or dance outside of school once a week or more; that number rose to 21% by the fall of 2021. Likewise, in December of 2020, 24% responded that they played organized sports three times a week or more; that number had risen to 32% by 2021.

Results from the surveys also showed that 9th and 10th graders who participate in organized out-of-school activities once a week or more are 2.3 times less likely to vape daily, 3.4 times less likely to have been drunk in the last 30 days, and 2 times less likely to have used cannabis.

"The main take away for us from the survey results is how much the Yes Card impacted out-of-school participation, which encouraged us to continue expanding the Yes Cards and making sure the program continues," said Berry. The next survey to track progress is planned to be given in spring of 2023.

For survey results and more information on the FCHD Yes Card, visit fchd.org/just-say-yes-ky/.

For more information on the Planet Youth evidence-based approach to adolescent substance use prevention, please visit <https://planetyouth.org>.

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