

# YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE IN GLOUCESTER



## WHAT INFLUENCES YOUNG PEOPLE TO USE SUBSTANCES IN GLOUCESTER?

The Gloucester Health Department (GHD) held focus groups with high-schoolers, caregivers, and social workers to learn what factors encourage or prevent youth from using alcohol, marijuana, vape products, and illicit drugs.\*

### RISK FACTORS

Factors that increase chances of youth using substances:

- **Mental Health Challenges**, including anxiety, depression, and experience with trauma
- **Pressure to Succeed in school**
- **Instability at Home**, such as caregiver use of substances, divorce, and fighting at home
- **Peer Pressure**  
*"One person says, 'Hey look I'm drinking.' That triggers a bunch of other kids because they want to do it too."  
- High Schooler*
- **"Alcohol-Saturated" Community**



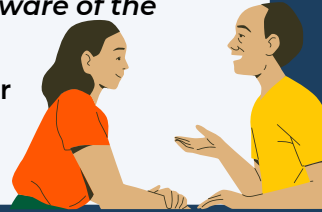
### PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Factors that decrease chances of youth using substances:

- **Recreational Activities**, such as sports, fine arts programs, clubs, and more
- **Sense of Community** gained from peer groups or activities
- **Open Communication & Trusting Relationships with Caregivers**

*"My mom is like, 'I want you to be honest with me, and I want us to have a transparent relationship. And I know you probably will do this stuff at some point, so I'd rather have you tell me and we know and if anything happens, I am already aware of the situation.'"*

-High Schooler



## RESIDENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO PREVENT YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE:

1. Create a safe, fun, and affordable drop-in center for youth of all ages
2. Teach caregivers about how to model healthy behaviors at home
3. Educate students about healthy coping mechanisms to deal with stressors

\* There were 18 participants in the focus groups, most of whom identified as female and non-Hispanic white. These themes are only reflective of their responses and cannot be generalized to other populations.