



COMMUNITY

4-H & YOUTH

ENVIRONMENT

AGRICULTURE

FOOD

UNIVERSITY OF
VERMONT

EXTENSION

CULTIVATING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Health Rocks!



Health Rocks! is an innovative program for students in grades 4, 5 and 6 that emphasizes smoking, alcohol, and drug use prevention while helping youth learn skills such as decision-making, critical thinking, and stress management.

Health Rocks! uses experientially based activities to help participants:

- Understand tobacco, alcohol and drug use
- Take control of their choices
- Make decisions based on solid information

The Washington State Life Skills Evaluation System was used to assess life skills learned in the program. The Life Skills Evaluation Instrument has been tested and is valid and reliable for youth programming. The instrument uses a retrospective pretest/posttest and was administered one-week after the conclusion of the program. To date we have captured evaluation data from 341 youth.

Seventy-six percent (76%) of the participants made gains from pretest to posttest. As measured by the self-report, the youths made gains in knowledge and behavior of the life skills in the areas of decision-making, communication, healthy lifestyle choices, and self-responsibility. From this information we find that the Health Rocks! program is helping youth learn the life skills of decision-making, communication, healthy lifestyle choices, and self-responsibility.

We also asked the youth open-ended questions about what they liked and disliked about the program. A typical response to what participants liked was "Everything!" One student wrote, "I liked it best when we acted out skits based on real situations." Another said, "I liked that I got to learn a lot of things about stress, alcohol and drugs, and I loved all the games and activities that we did. It was great." "I liked the game show day because we were in groups and we learned new facts about alcohol. The instructors were great!!!!," wrote another participant. Finally, one student wrote, "I loved Health Rocks. It was the coolest thing I have ever learned that was so much fun!"

Classroom teachers were also given an evaluation. The questions revealed that overall they liked the program. One teacher commented, "This was great! We had nothing like this in our curriculum before. It made the learning fun for my students."

Another said, "The emphasis on skill development to resist peer pressure to smoke/drink or do drugs was a very important component, rather than informing students what the particular substances look like. Presenting the health risks associated with the use of the substances made it very real for the students." And, a different teacher wrote, "Initially, I had concerns about the program and its success in my fourth grade classroom. However, given the myriad of problems with these substances in our society, I now believe that 9 and 10 year old students are not too young for such a program. The sooner we can teach them these skills the better choices they will make because they have the knowledge to support those choices. The skills they learned will help them be good problem-solvers in other areas of their lives as well. Thank you!"

Overall, the 4-H Health Rocks! program is successful in teaching youth necessary life skills to lead a healthy life and resist peer and societal pressure to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.

The University of Vermont Extension 4-H program has been offering Health Rocks! for the past 4 years, mostly in Lamoille County where the program was first piloted. To date, the following schools have participated in our program:

Hyde Park Elementary School (Lamoille)
Bishop Marshall Elementary School (Lamoille)
Stowe Elementary School (Lamoille)
Cambridge Elementary School (Lamoille)
Wolcott Elementary School (Lamoille)
Morrisville Elementary School (Lamoille)
Waterville Elementary School (Lamoille)
Eden Elementary School (Lamoille)
Gilman Middle School (Essex)
Central School (Windham)
Saxtons River (Windham)
Charleston Elementary (Orleans)
Alburgh Community School (Grand Isle)
Union Street School (Windsor)
Benson Village (Rutland)

For more information about Health Rocks, please contact Lauren Traister, 4-H Educator, at 1-866-260-5603 x 103 or lauren.traister@uvm.edu.