

## VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY UNIT TACKLING PORTER COUNTY DRUG PROGRAM

The Community Research and Service Center (CRSC) at Valparaiso University (VU) is participating in a new federally-funded initiative which aims to reduce substance abuse among young people in Porter County.

VU is partnering with other local organizations which collectively received the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant—funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and awarded by the State of Indiana—in 2007.

Porter County is one of 12 Indiana counties to receive the grant, which provides about \$193,000 annually to help at-risk communities measure and reduce substance abuse.

In a statement released on Tuesday, CRSC Director Larry Baas said that VU will use its research expertise to help the community better understand the problem of substance abuse in Porter County and evaluate the impact of drug prevention efforts.

Partners in the initiative include school corporations, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, coalitions, and substance abuse treatment providers who have agreed to share data with the CRSC for analysis or who have agreed to volunteer their services.

“The government is demanding more data in its decision-making so that it can put money into programs that are shown to be working,” Baas said. “Substance abuse is a complicated problem with a number of causes and consequences, but by partnering with other agencies and people we can help move toward solutions.”

The 2008 Porter County Profile, completed earlier this summer, tends to show that Porter County “faces significant problems,” the statement said:

- In 2007, 7th through 12th grade students from the region had alcohol consumption patterns significantly higher than the state average.
- Meanwhile, 10th through 12th grade students from the region had higher consumption rates of marijuana than did their state cohorts, while 8th through 12th grade students had higher percentages of cocaine and heroin use than did their state cohorts.
- Heroin treatment episodes are higher in Porter County than in the rest of the state and have increased in recent years.

The CRSC will be responsible for filing a similar annual report next year in order to track substance abuse trends, raise awareness of substance abuse problems in Porter County, and assess the success of the initiative’s efforts, the statement said.

Elliott Miller, interim program director for the initiative, said that a strategic plan, based on information analyzed by the CRSC, has been completed to begin to address those patterns of substance abuse during the coming year.

Department of Political Science - Valparaiso University  
"Valparaiso University is playing an extremely important part in the initiative," Miller said. "We're fortunate to have that level of expertise right here. It puts us at a great advantage when researching, understanding, and addressing the problem."

Although the initiative has been awarded funds for four years, the intention is to build the capacity for the drug prevention efforts to continue beyond that time frame by building a data center for the monitoring of substance abuse issues in Porter County.

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