Southeastern Wisconsin SBIRT Project
Grantee: Impact Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, Inc.
Dates: 4/01/2014 – 2/28/2018
Amount Spent: $222,472
Grant Program: Community-Academic Partnership Fund

The Challenge: Adolescence is a time of substance use experimentation for many young people and problematic substance use for some. Among eighth graders, 22.8 percent have tried or drank alcohol, 12.8 percent have used marijuana, and 8.9 percent have used illicit drugs. Rates of substance use increase progressively in early high school. By tenth grade, these rates increase to 43.4 percent for alcohol, 29.7 percent for marijuana, and 14.0 percent for illicit drugs. [Citation: Miech RA, Johnston LD, O’Malley PM, Bachman JG, Schulenberg JE, Patrick ME. Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2016: Volume I, Secondary School Students. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan 2017.]

Project Goal: This project implemented an evidence-based alcohol, tobacco and drug Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) program with youth (ages 14-19) at nine high schools across southeastern Wisconsin. The goal was to identify teens engaging in risky behaviors and refer them to needed treatment. The intervention also can delay the age at which current nonusers begin using illegal substances, which reduces probability of future alcoholism and addiction. Implementing SBIRT in a school instead of a clinical setting, provided access to a much larger percentage of the youth population, and lowered costs by using paraprofessionals to deliver SBIRT rather than healthcare professionals.

Results: The project demonstrated the feasibility of implementing SBIRT as a universal prevention and intervention strategy in diverse high schools. The team screened more than 2500 students (76 percent of student population) from nine high schools in six different school districts between January and June 2016. Because it worked with rural, suburban and urban school districts in southeastern Wisconsin, and schools that varied widely in their racial and socioeconomic makeup, the project provided some preliminary evidence for the feasibility of universal SBIRT across a variety of school contexts.

The connections made between the community drug abuse prevention coalitions and the schools contributed to the project’s success. Project challenges included: identifying and training appropriate personnel to deliver the intervention, assuring participants’ confidentiality, and establishing consent and referral procedures.

Project partners are working with the UW Population Health Institute’s Evidence-Based Health Policy Project (EBHPP) to host a legislative briefing to inform state policymakers about the benefits of SBIRT and youth substance abuse services in Wisconsin.

The project’s paper was published in January 2018, in the Journal Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment (SART). The full report can be read for free online at doi.org/10.1177/1178221817746668.

Due in large part to the groundwork done through this project, Wisconsin was chosen as one of only five states to participate in a national effort to improve insurance coverage for early screening and intervention services, increase the number and types of locations where youth can access those services and boost the number and type of professionals who can conduct screening and brief intervention. Lessons learned will be gathered and disseminated nationally.

Finally, State Representative LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee) drafted preliminary legislation that would require the Department of Public Instruction to include SBIRT in its alcohol and other drug abuse intervention and instruction programs and to offer SBIRT training to a school district upon the district’s request.