

*NEW HAMPSHIRE
GOVERNOR'S YOUTH
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND
PREVENTION*

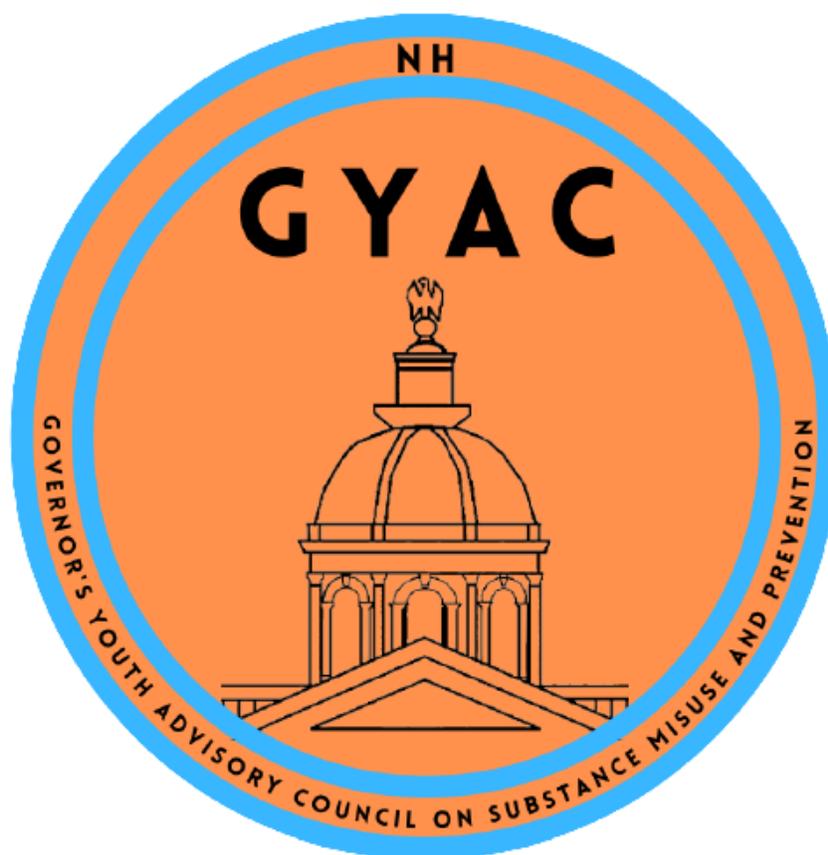
2020-2021

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INTRODUCTION

(WHO WE ARE, A LOOK INTO OUR YEAR, AND OUR GOALS FOR THIS YEAR)

WHO WE ARE:

The New Hampshire Governor's Youth Advisory Council on Substance Misuse and Prevention (GYAC) was created in 2017 by Governor Christopher T. Sununu. The Council serves to offer a youth perspective on the substance misuse crisis in the State and to advise the Governor on relevant issues, such as prescription drug abuse and general mental health concerns with teens. The importance of the voices of youth when approaching such issues cannot be understated. After all, it is the youth who know the habits and minds of their peers best, and who are best equipped to reach out to them. This is pivotal when it comes to prevention, but also in identifying problems among youth that are exacerbating the crisis.

The 2020-2021 year welcomed new struggles and crises to address with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. With students' access to in-person school, social life, and general resources being restricted, diverse, new and youthful perspectives offered insight and solutions to everyday battles of the New Hampshire teen. To begin, the Governor's Youth Advisory Council welcomed returning and new members in a variety of roles. General members for GYAC 2020-2021 include Olivia Archard, Jayda Bogert, Kayla Bogert, Grace Burnett, Hailey Dubois, Abigail Noetzel, Autumn Pelletier, Issac Piette, Evan Piette, Kaycee Reagan, and Kaylee Truong. In addition, there are roles of leadership that were selected in an election process to fill that of Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and the Executive Officers. The Chair runs the monthly meetings and works behind the scenes to ensure members stay on task and complete needed assignments. The GYAC Chair of 2020-2021 is Aron Silvestre. Accompanying him is Grace Lunney as Vice Chair, and Lyla Buxton as Secretary. Finally, our Executive Officers are Vidhur Narayan, Elsa Rogers, and Quincy Roy. Additionally, GYAC is advised by Timothy Lena, Sara Shea, Mary Forsythe-Taber, and Greg Williams, with David Mara and Eliza Zarka serving as the Governor's liaisons.

THIS YEARS RECAP:

This year we discussed having a larger impact on our peers and being able to challenge their thinking on issues such as drunk driving, nicotine use, and mental health surrounding the pandemic. The first project that we tackled this year were public service announcements. To tackle this, members broke off into four groups, with the topics of drunk driving, nicotine abuse, quitting vaping, and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked with Media Power Youth to create our public service announcements and we published them on our Instagram page (@nh.gyac).

A significant project we took on this year was creating a logo to promote our group. We discussed the importance of making it visually appealing to youth, while representing the values of the group and our pride in the Granite State. Including feedback from the Council, GYAC member, Autumn Pelletier, can be credited with the final design of the new logo. This logo will help spread awareness about Governor's Youth Advisory Council, and leave an imprint on our work. We are happy to announce that you can now find the finished product on our Instagram page and website (www.sites.google.com/view/gyac).

We were delighted to have Governor Sununu attend our January meeting and to have the opportunity to present drafts of our public service announcements to him for his feedback. As a group, we discussed how to improve our public service announcements, and how to best distribute them on various platforms to reach the most audiences. In addition, we discussed our future plans and questions we had for the Governor. We also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of youth. This discussion was very beneficial, and helped inspire many ideas for the Governor's Youth Advisory Council's work on the issue in the future.

IMPORTANT ISSUES:

During our March 20th meeting, the Governor's Youth Advisory Council met with Special Agent in Charge, Jon DeLena, from the New England Division of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). DeLena spoke about the spread of counterfeit Adderall pills containing methamphetamine in the New Hampshire community. In recent years, meth usage has become a major problem in communities in New Hampshire, with its accessibility rising immensely. Meth

dealers are currently manufacturing and selling counterfeit Adderall pills made with methamphetamine and caffeine. Adderall is a medication prescription given mainly to those who have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Over the years, the use and abuse of Adderall has become common within youth, specifically high school and college students, due to the false belief that it increases academic performance. With the illegal purchasing of Adderall on the streets, buyers are not aware of the true makeup of the pill they are purchasing. The DEA sees meth dealers targeting the youth population with these pills. Signs of counterfeit pills include a non-prescription bottle, crumbling or powdery pills, smooth surfaces, and a difference in pill colors with the same imprint. Methamphetamine is highly addictive and dangerous and with the use of a counterfeit pill, more meth is ingested into your system than if it is smoked or injected. GYAC is spreading this information, as instructed by Jon DeLena, in order to warn youth users who may be unaware of the substances within these counterfeit pills, and to hopefully decrease illicit buying in general.

The prevalence of mental health struggles within youth is undeniable and with the entering of an isolating time such as that of COVID-19, this only rises. Isolation is a known promoter of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, as many outlets for aid or positive social interaction is highly limited. The Governor's Youth Advisory Council has always made this a topic of discussion, but the global pandemic caused a reigniting of conversation surrounding mental health struggles in New Hampshire. After each member shared observations of their own community's youth emotional health, a common thread was seen that the transition from in-person to fully virtual presented challenges. With a departure from "everyday normal", youth's standard support systems were either no longer available, weakened, or in some cases crumbled all together. Furthermore, there was less checking in on one another, or access to aid that continued this isolation and deepened mental struggles. This only intensified the stigma around asking for assistance with the lack of in-front-of-you resources and decreased promotion to reach out when struggling. GYAC in this discussion found that it was necessary for youth-to-youth conversation about emotional health and to highlight the importance of aiding one another in this difficult time.

GOALS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR:

Our year is not finished, and we have many goals to round it out. First and foremost, we plan to continue releasing the public service announcements. Our hope is to release them through several social media platforms in order to reach the widest audience. By doing so, we hope to both spread our messages about drugs and alcohol misuse, and to introduce ourselves to more people across the State. This will expand our reach so we have a stronger platform for future projects.

As this year is coming to an end, we also have to begin our recruitment for the upcoming 2021-2022 school year. We will take action in several ways to recruit talented youth advocates in New Hampshire to be members of our Council. Members will aim to recruit students in their community and we are reaching out to youth coalitions in New Hampshire to ask for their help finding qualified and interested candidates.

GOALS FOR THE NEXT YEAR:

For the 2021-2022 school year, we hope to shine a spotlight on youth around NH who are promoting healthy habits and exemplifying a positive leadership role for which they are advocating for a drug free/substance free lifestyle. We also hope to attend in-person meetings and events (as allowed by COVID guidelines) as this past year has withheld us from interacting in person. By holding social events and in-person discussions, we hope to better our relationships with each other and our communities. Another one of our main goals is to emphasise who we are. We hope to get gear with our logo, so we can publicize who we are as a group and what we do. By doing so we hope to engage more youth who are driven to prevent substance misuse and drug abuse so that we can build our Council and create a more impactful, far-reaching message.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNOR:

- We recommend that the Governor promotes GYAC on his social media pages by presenting what GYAC does and the PSAs created to reach a larger audience.
- We recommend the Governor supports an event/forum hosted by GYAC that reaches out to youth from communities across New Hampshire to get input on the issues they are facing.
- We recommend the Governor gives GYAC a list of goals and recommendations that we as a group can work together and try to accomplish.
- We recommend the Governor uses his office to raise awareness of, and direct more state resources to, the teen mental health crisis.
- We recommend the Governor promotes more information directed at youth about how taking drugs not prescribed to you can affect your body and mind, as well as put more resources out about drug take backs.
- We recommend the Governor creates a campaign to normalize how being substance-free is a viable option for teens, allowing them to see that there are many other positive ways to use their time.
- We recommend the Governor advocates for mental health education standards in schools across New Hampshire.
- We recommend that newer outreach efforts be created that do a better job with prevention messaging to youth and how to access help with mental health and substance use issues.

GYAC State Site: www.governor.nh.gov/youth

GYAC Google Site: www.sites.google.com/view/gyac

GYAC Instagram: www.instagram.com/nh.gyac/

(@NH.GYAC)