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Practice Sharing: Waterloo Region Youth Champions Initiative

Presented by:

Ruth Cordukes, Region of Waterloo Public Health and
Paramedic Services

Heather Berry, Waterloo Region District School Board

Tonja Clark, Waterloo Region District School Board



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
PARAMEDIC SERVICES

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe partnerships between Region of Waterloo Public Health and local school boards to address youth cannabis and vaping use.
2. Recognize the importance of community relationships in promoting the wellbeing of youth and students.
3. Explain the steps to develop, implement and evaluate a school-based peer-to-peer-model for addressing youth substance use.
4. Reflect on opportunities and strategies for building partnerships within their own communities.



Public Health and School Board Partnership

Establishing the Partnership



- Waterloo Region school boards identified cannabis and vaping as an emerging and concerning issue to Public Health
- Public Health proposed implementing a Youth Champions Initiative model that trains and supports students to deliver peer-led youth engagement activities
- The *Ontario Cannabis Legalization Implementation Fund* was utilized to support training, games, incentives, promotional materials, and celebration events

Co-Development of Youth Champions Initiative

- Public Health worked with each school board independently
- School Board contacts
 - Mental Health Leads
 - Safe and Healthy Schools Consultant (WRDSB)
 - Healthy Active Living Consultant (WCDSB)
- Fundamentals of the Youth Champions Initiative implementation
 - Youth engagement and peer-led activities
 - Youth trained on substance use prevention to engage their peers
 - School staff support provided to youth

School Board Involvement and Role

- Importance of the initiative to schools and school boards
- School board commitment to initiative
- School board goals the initiative helps to fulfill
- How the school boards and schools prioritized the initiative amongst competing priorities
- Role of school boards



Youth Champions Initiative Implementation

Youth Champions Training



- Staff Leads and Youth Champions trained together
- Location
- Costs
- Goal of the training is for
 - Youth Champions to leave with an understanding of their role and how to use their resources, and at least one activity planned
 - Staff to leave with an understanding of how to support Youth Champions

Role of the School Staff Lead

- Recruit Youth Champions
- Support Youth Champions by
 - Supporting and being present for youth
 - Ensuring youth have access to games and promotional materials, as needed
 - Encouraging youth to lead the planning of activities
 - Coaching
 - Checking in with youth on a regular basis
- Communicate with school board or public health with questions and concerns



Meta AI

Youth Champion Initiative Activities



Youth Champions deliver a wide variety of activities.

Examples include:

- Grade 8 student and parent nights
- Interactive games and displays
- Morning announcements
- Classroom Education
- Support for elementary (feeder) schools
- Events utilizing games supplied to them and created by Youth Champions

Year-End Celebration

- The celebration is an opportunity to
 - Acknowledge accomplishments
 - Collect evaluation data
 - Generates new activity/game ideas and creates excitement for next year
- Includes:
 - Feedback on how their initiative went in their schools
 - Formal evaluation survey
- Delivery options



Annual Review of Initiative



- Review feasibility, budget, timelines and evaluation plan for next school year
- Review previous year's feedback and emerging issues to incorporate into student messaging
- Revise, create and utilize existing resources

Learnings

Evaluation of the Youth Champions Initiative

Youth Champions feedback about the initiative:

- “Getting to see the students having a break doing our activities, while also learning”
- “Sharing info through fun and exciting ways!”
- Raising awareness on substance use to a wide audience, such as students, teachers, and parents. And “doing it through fun activities”



Evaluation of the Youth Champions Initiative



Staff Lead's feedback on what resonates about the initiative

- “Having students lead this event and be involved in bringing awareness and prevention”
- “Connecting with students and helping to promote healthier substance use habits”

Lessons Learned: Youth Champions

Training/Resources

- In person training preferred over virtual
- Allow enough time for youth to learn to facilitate games, less time presenting
- Youth valued the resources provided

Games/Prizes

- Youth input on effective games/activities
- An effective way to engage youth, key to youth engagement
- Introduce new games, key messages, and promotional materials in new school year



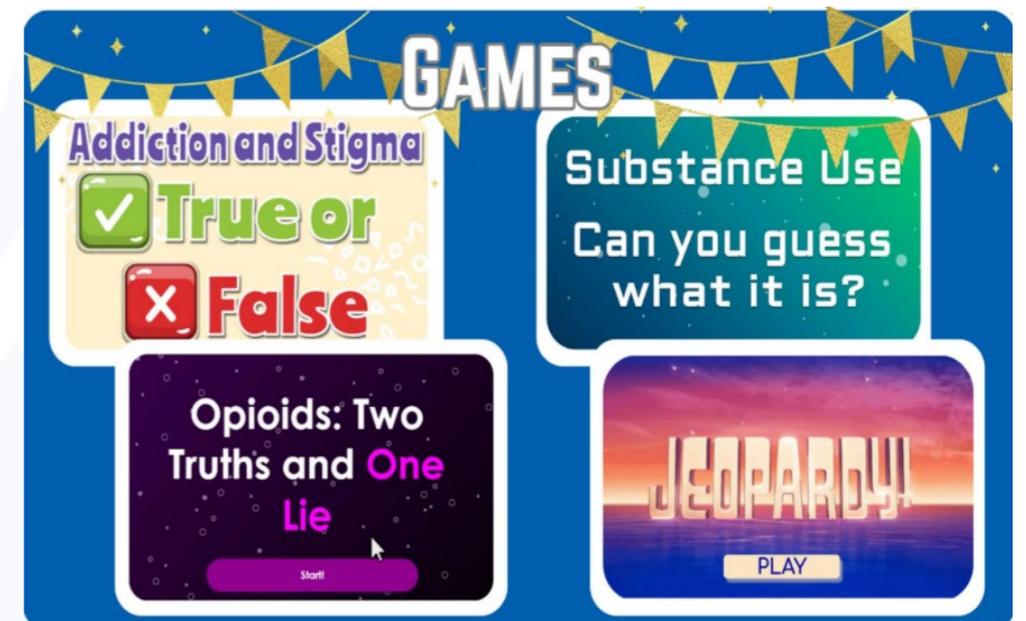
Lessons Learned: Schools, School Boards and Public Health

School Implementation

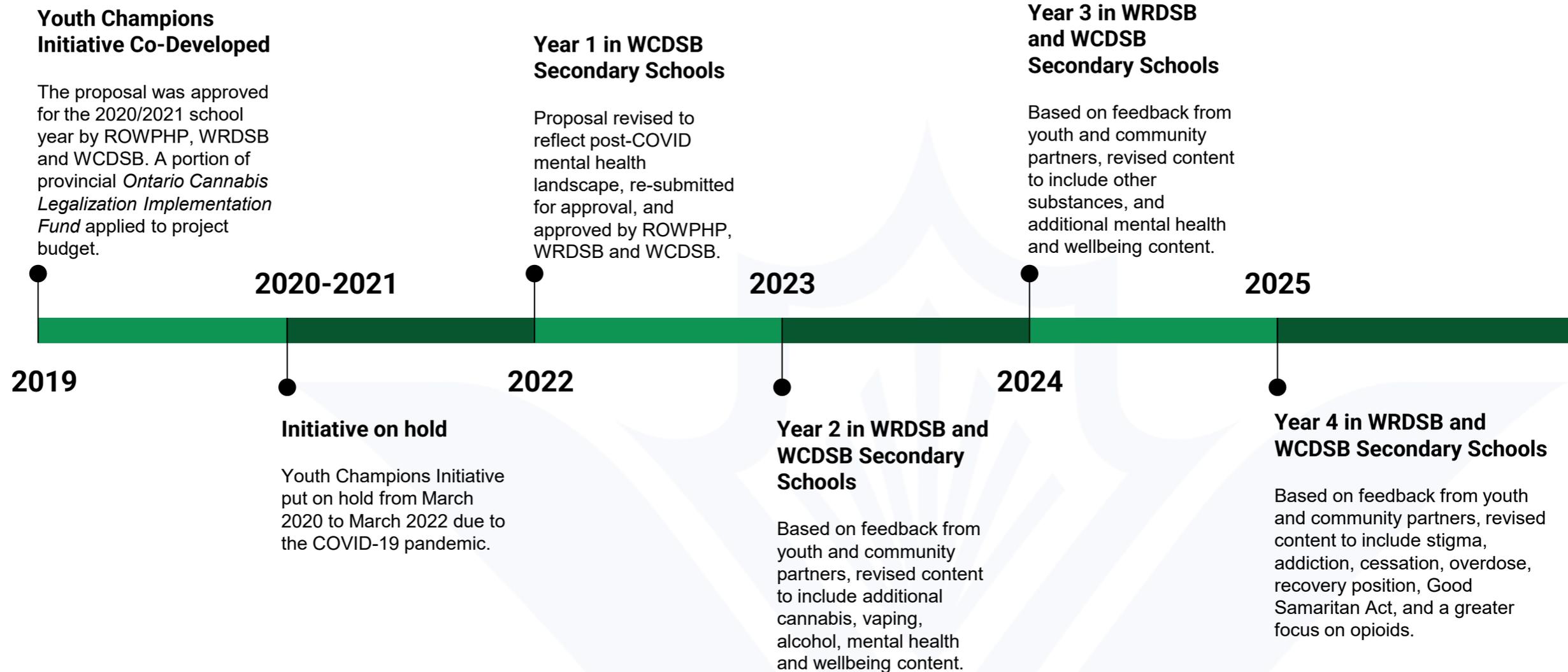
- Implementation can vary by school. Hear what activities other schools are doing
- There is crossover with other student programs. Opportunities to collaborate

Evaluation

- Evaluate activities for effectiveness
- Evaluation done by school boards simplifies process
- Investment of staff time is less intensive after the first year



Key Milestones in the Timeline



Key Takeaways

1. School boards want and value public health content knowledge and assistance with achieving their goals.
2. The Youth Champions Initiative partnership provided an opportunity for Public Health and school boards to develop additional partnerships on a variety of projects.
3. Let the school boards do what they do best!

Questions