



Student-Athletes Standing Up to Substance Abuse

*Although Vermont and New Hampshire have differing strengths and weaknesses when it comes to the health of their citizens, they share one issue of increasing alarm: youth substance abuse. A recent [news article](#) reported that NH and VT are among the 7 states **tied for last place in the percentage of teens who misuse drugs or alcohol (7%)**. The article points to prevention as the most promising – and least expensive – way to deal with teen drug and alcohol abuse problems. In this blog post, Laleh highlights one local prevention program that she had the pleasure of participating in.*

The opportunity to contribute to local prevention efforts came last month when I was approached by Dartmouth undergraduate student and rugby player, Gayne Kalustian. She was organizing a weeklong fitness and leadership camp for local high school athletes as part of her internship with [Second Growth](#).^{*} Gayne asked if I would come speak to them about healthy nutrition and lifestyle for competitive athletes, because, she said, “after talking to some coaches, it is apparent that kids haven’t had a lot of guidance on nutrition.”

This opportunity appealed to me on several levels. On a personal level, as a competitive athlete I have a very strong passion for coaching athletes of all ages, especially young athletes with limited resources, and I am always looking for volunteer opportunities.

I was even more enthusiastic when I learned that the camp was based in Claremont, with the majority of student-athletes living and going to school in Claremont. As you may already know, ReThink Health: UCRV has a strong partnership with the Claremont community stemming from the health survey we did there last summer.

Finally, at ReThink Health: UCRV we are passionate about supporting collaborative projects that engage people from across the community. This project certainly fit the bill, bringing together Dartmouth College and Second Growth, as well as a number of other local organizations and community members who volunteered space, time, or their professional expertise (see the end of this post for a list of all the partners and how they were involved).

So, I enthusiastically agreed to lead two sessions with the students.

I started the first day by telling them “my story” and, upon students’ request, ended with a 15-minute bodyweight exercise drill.

On the second day, I talked about how to properly fuel your body, not only to compete as an athlete, but also to stay healthy for life. I’m a big believer in active learning – so, instead of a quiz at the end, we played a game to test their new knowledge and, more importantly, to ensure they remembered what they learned that day for the rest of their lives.

My experience with the students was both fun and rewarding – and it felt even more gratifying when a few students said that the nutrition education and game was the highlight of their week. It was certainly the highlight of mine!

Educating at-risk youth and promoting a healthy lifestyle are essential strategies for addressing the substance abuse issues affecting both adolescents and adult citizens in the UCRV. I encourage others to take the opportunity to engage our youth through prevention programs such as Second Growth!

*[Second Growth](#) is an organization based out of Hartford aimed at improving the lives of the citizens of the Upper Valley by positively impacting the drug and alcohol abuse epidemic sweeping the area.

Here is a more detailed description of Second Growth's *Start Ready!* program, and its many partners, in Gayne's words:

As an intern for Second Growth's Coaching for Captains program, I helped to organize *Start Ready!*—a weeklong fitness and leadership camp for local high school athletes. The camp is offered at no cost to students who wish to work on their personal fitness goals before their fall season—a sort of pre- pre-season. Due to the low-budget nature of the program, many outside resources were sought out to make the week, not only possible, but truly enriching for the participants—and the community did not disappoint.

A trainer from the physical therapy clinic, **Cioffredi & Associates**, donated an hour of his time to talk through safe body positions to prevent and nurse injuries the athletes might face. Doctor Laleh Talebian of **ReThink Health UCRV** & The Dartmouth Institute came out twice—once to share her personal story with the athletes and lead them through a quick but grueling leg work-out and then again to teach the athletes about proper nutrition. The **Claremont Savings Bank Community Center** gave us space where we would do leadership activities, ab workouts, and mobility-style exercises. **Dartmouth College** not only donated space for an afternoon workout and leadership activity, but employee Hilary McNamee planned a team problem-solving exercise based on workouts done by Dartmouth athletes. Doug Beaupre, the Athletic Director of **Stevens High School** (where most of the students go to school), acquired a bus for the program so the students could spend the last day in Hanover. Kara Toms, the director of **Coaching for Captains**, dedicated countless hours to the success of the program and Barbara Farnsworth offered valuable oversight and help with the insurance documents for the day at Dartmouth, while women's rugby player Audrey Perez (Dartmouth class of 2017) came out each day, all week to share her passion for fitness with the kids. To say the very least, it was a community production.