

Vaping Diversionary Program

End-of-Year Report

Fiscal Year 23/24

(7.1.2023 – 6.30.2024)



Students Served: 130¹

- 88% students of color
- 52% male
- Average age of participant at enrollment: 15



¹One student was referred to the program twice.

Post-Class Referrals to Services:

18 referrals (7 of those to Liberation) were made on behalf of 18 students.

About the Program:

The Vaping Diversionary Program is a volunteer partnership among Domus, Liberation Programs, the Stamford Public Schools (SPS), and the Stamford Police Department (SPD). Students served are first-time vaping/marijuana/THC offenders in 6th through 12th grade in SPS schools, referred by SPS. The program educates middle and high school students on the dangers (behavioral and health) of vaping, marijuana, and/or THC and encourages them to re-think their decisions through education and outreach. The goal is to incorporate a restorative response to the behavior by reducing student suspensions and school-based arrests for vaping/marijuana/THC, which research shows further disengages students from school. Educational classes are held monthly with families and students who have been referred.

Domus staff conducts an intake with the student and family to assess the situation and identify concerns regarding substance use and mental health. Then both student and parent are expected to attend the scheduled class.

Class components include:

- How Vaping Impacts Learning: Strategies and Skills to Re-Engage Students (led by SPS)
- The Impact on the Brain of Alcohol and other Drugs: What We need to Know (led by Liberation)
- Police Interaction: Pathway to Incarceration (led by SPD)
- Impact speaker from the community

The Domus Relational Model:

The entirety of our work is based on the undeniable power of love to transform lives. Our staff work relentlessly to engage young people, never giving up until they feel a sense of safety and belonging. We use a unique and powerful combination of trauma-responsive, anti-racist practices, positive youth development, loving relationships, and Thoughts, Emotions, & Behaviors (a form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) skills-building. Together, these elements engage a young person's entire nervous system to increase their safety, health, wisdom, resilience, and skills. Fundamentally, they help youth regulate, relate, and reason as they practice shifting from a chronic stress response (“fight, flight, or flee”) to engage their “calm and connect” systems. Thus, when facing life’s inevitable challenges, youth can interrupt unproductive, automatic reactions and respond more skillfully. Through these loving, evidence-based interventions, Domus empowers young people to achieve life-changing outcomes.

FY24 Organizational Highlights:

- The Domus organizational focus this year was *A Year of Wellness and Healing*. Activities included connecting program youth with nature as well as providing 400 families with *Spring into Spring* gifts they could use together as a family. The year culminated in providing \$100 wellness scholarships to 80 Domus young people to support their mental and physical well-being.
- Domus partnered with the City of Stamford on the Stamford Kindness Project. During the month of December, Domus youth and staff made kindness walls at all our program locations. Domus then provided breakfast to all youth and staff to celebrate kindness.
- Domus provided holiday gifts and food to 476 families and Thanksgiving support to 357 families across all our programs.

FY24 Program Highlights:

- The VDP staff member became a certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist through the UMass Cessation Program.
- Staff tailored the vaping presentation this year to fit the needs of students, addressing the reason for their vape usage and making the presentation more interactive to keep them engaged.
- Domus worked with Liberation Programs to go into Stamford High School to educate English Language Learners about the dangers of vaping.
- The VDP staff member participated as a member of the Stamford Youth Prevention Council.
- Staff added to the vaping class a segment featuring an individual from the Stamford community who shared their lived experience with students about addiction, motivating them to think about the consequences of their actions before they use substances.



It's encouraging to see the collaborative's efforts contribute to positive changes within the broader community including revised zoning regulations specific to vaping shops. By working together, we're sending a clear message: the health and well-being of our youth is a top priority in Stamford.

—Matthew Laskowski, Stamford Public Schools

