

[Home](#) > [News](#)

## News Details - Youth Services Middle School Program Receives National Recognition

A recent national conference highlighted success of a local program which encourages healthy life choices by middle school youth.

Tompkins County Youth Services Department Planner Kris Bennett, who also serves as the Assistant Coordinator for the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, delivered a workshop presentation entitled "10 Tips To Successful Implementation of a Middle School Social Norms Campaign" at the National Social Norms Institute's annual conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota July 12. Kris, along with co-presenters Judy Epstein from Ithaca's DeWitt Middle School and Dr. H. Wesley Perkins from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, presented the workshop to a national audience of academics and practitioners who work to change risky behaviors by correcting misperceptions through the use of social norms marketing campaigns in colleges and high schools.

"The County Youth Services Department administers a federal drug prevention grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration," notes Nancy Zahler, Tompkins County's Director of Youth Services. "Over a five-year period at DeWitt Middle School, Kris and Judy worked with a school team to regularly expose students to posters and classroom activities that conveyed actual data on the use of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and bullying gathered through surveys of DeWitt students."

Since students were significantly overestimating the risk behaviors of their fellow students, the campaign to correct their misperceptions helped students see that by making healthy choices they could fit in with the positive norms of their peers, Director Zahler adds. The evaluation performed by Dr. Perkins showed statistically significant reductions in risk behaviors over time.

The findings also will be published in a professional journal this fall.

07-17-2009