

# YouthRecoveryCT

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# Background



A need was identified for teen and young adult specific recovery support in Connecticut

The CROSS (Connecticut Recovery Oriented Support System for Youth) Initiative was developed to address this need

The initiative was originally funded in 2017 by SAMHSA State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis (STR) funds and then by State Opioid Response (SOR) funds through the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)

DMHAS contracted with the CT Department of Children and Families (DCF) to develop and implement a statewide substance use recovery support system specifically oriented to the needs of youth aged 16-24 years

DCF contracted with Wheeler through the Connecticut Clearinghouse for Prevention, Wellness, and Recovery to implement CROSS, which is now known as YouthRecoveryCT



# Goals and Process



- Build a Statewide Youth Recovery Network of sites that facilitate:
  - SMART Recovery meetings for Teens (ages 16-18) or Young Adults (ages 18-24)
  - SMART Family & Friends meetings for caregivers, supportive peers, adults
  - Alternative Peer Groups
- Maintain, support, and grow the network to serve a diverse population of young people and families affected by substance use throughout the state
- Non-profits, organizations, and institutions have received mini-grants to implement the program



# Collaboration and Networking



**Wheeler**  
Innovative Care. Positive Change.



Over the past 5 years, 51 unique agencies, organizations, and institutions including behavioral health providers, community nonprofits, faith communities, high schools, colleges, and prisons have been within the YouthRecoveryCT network.



Grantees across the state have had the opportunity to meet monthly to network and receive support for the implementation of their SMART Recovery meetings, SMART Recovery Family and Friends meetings, and Alternative Peer Group Activities.



Ongoing support and education is available to group facilitators and program locations



# Our Model



YouthRecoveryCT uses SMART Recovery, the leading, evidence-informed approach to overcoming addictive behaviors and leading a balanced life. SMART is stigma-free and emphasizes self-empowerment.



SMART Recovery's international model incorporates materials from cognitive-behavioral therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy and motivational interviewing into a facilitated, mutual support meeting format.

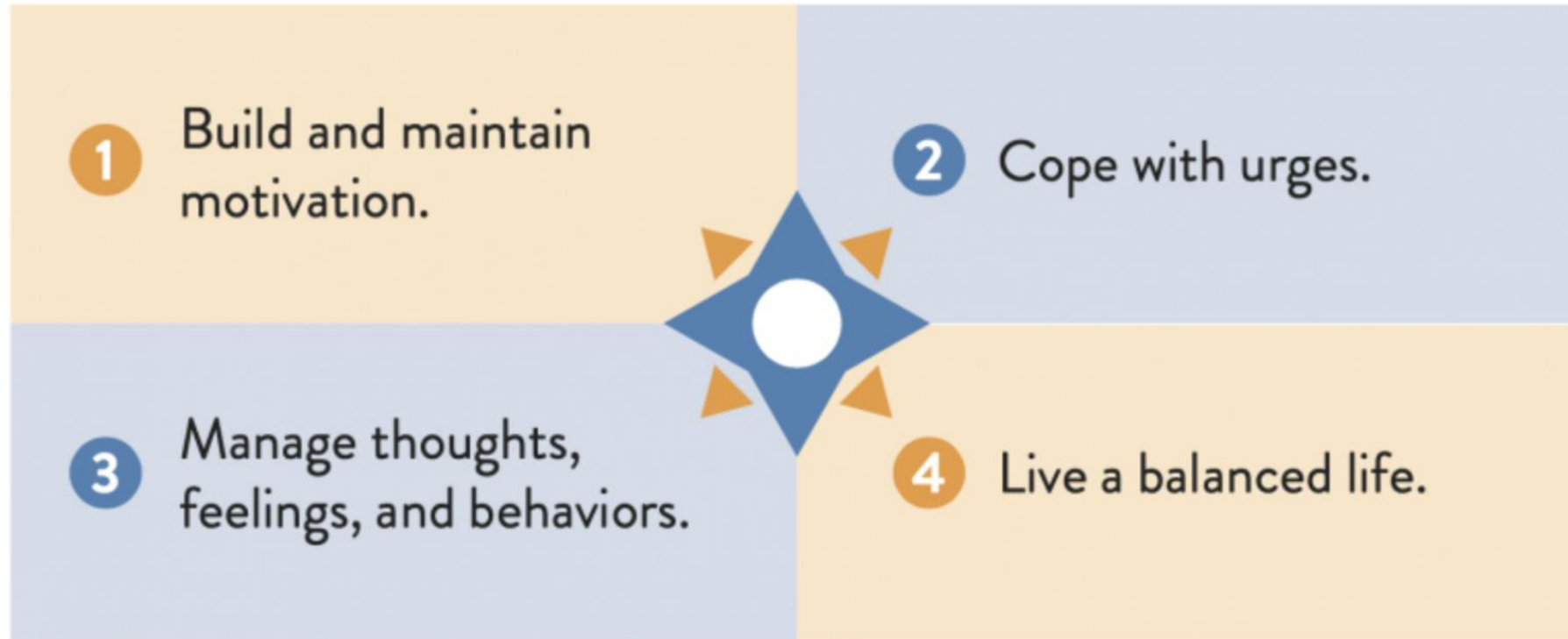


SMART Recovery was created through the collaborative efforts of substance use disorder treatment professionals and peers in recovery.

# SMART Recovery's 4 Point Program



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# Advantages Of SMART Recovery



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Secular yet anyone is welcome to incorporate spirituality into their own recovery

Can be combined with any other recovery pathway, such as 12 Step meetings, clinical treatment, medication assisted recovery

Does not require anyone to label themselves or adhere to any specific recovery goal

Encourages peers to speak directly with one another, with the support of a trained facilitator

Is accessible due to being offered freely to participants as well as being available on virtual platforms and in a free app



# Family and Friends Groups



A SMART Recovery Family and Friends meetings are based on the tools of SMART Recovery and Community Reinforcement Approach & Family Training (CRAFT). Studies have shown that CRAFT results in a significantly higher rate of treatment entry for Loved Ones than Al-Anon or Johnson Intervention.



## Meetings have a two-pronged approach:

- The wellbeing of the attendee is strongly emphasized. Tools based on cognitive therapy are taught to help participants manage their emotions. Additional tools focus on balance and self-care
- Tools are shared for providing effective, non-confrontational support for a loved one who is using substances or engaging in harmful behaviors:
  - Effective Communication Skills
  - Boundary Setting
  - Learning about the recovery process and dispelling myths





# Alternative Peer Group Activities



**An opportunity to improve social skills in a sober environment while potentially making new friends**

**A way to structure one's time**

**Introduction to new hobbies or activities**

**May serve as an introduction to the recovery community**

# Site Specific Implementation: Examples of Network Groups



A lunch time group at a high school



An intensive outpatient program offering a SMART meeting as an option to attend during a treatment day



A college inviting parents/guardians to attend a Family and Friends group based on their child's participation in SUD counseling (with permission from the student)



SMART Recovery meetings in 10 DOC facilities



The SMART Recovery national Young Adult meeting



# Site Specific Implementation: Examples of APGs



Yoga, Sports, Outdoor Activities



Board games, art and crafts



Cooking



Music production class and performance



Sober parties, events, outings



# Year Ending September 2023



- Number Of Meetings Held: 921
- Total Number Duplicated Participants: 8693
- Total Number of New (Unduplicated) Participants: 2343

Numbers include all types of meetings and represent in-person, hybrid (in-person and online), and online meetings (including the National Young Adult meeting)



# Challenges

Covid-19

Staff turnover,  
competing  
priorities

Closed to the  
public  
meetings

Effective  
advertising

Transportation

Siloed  
agencies

Population  
specific  
challenges

Stigma

# Innovations In Progress



Reinvesting in committed programs

Increasing reach of SMART Recovery statewide network by add “all ages” groups

Adding national platform meetings

Increasing internal staffing to support community outreach efforts, additional meetings and APGs, and to increase SMART Recovery Facilitator training capacity

Website rebranding

High school specific offerings, in collaboration with Jordan Porco Foundation, in addition to SMART Recovery

Advertising directly to potential referral sources

Working with SMART Recovery national, The Phoenix, Toivo, HeyPeers

DMHAS workforce and Recovery Support Specialist Facilitator Training

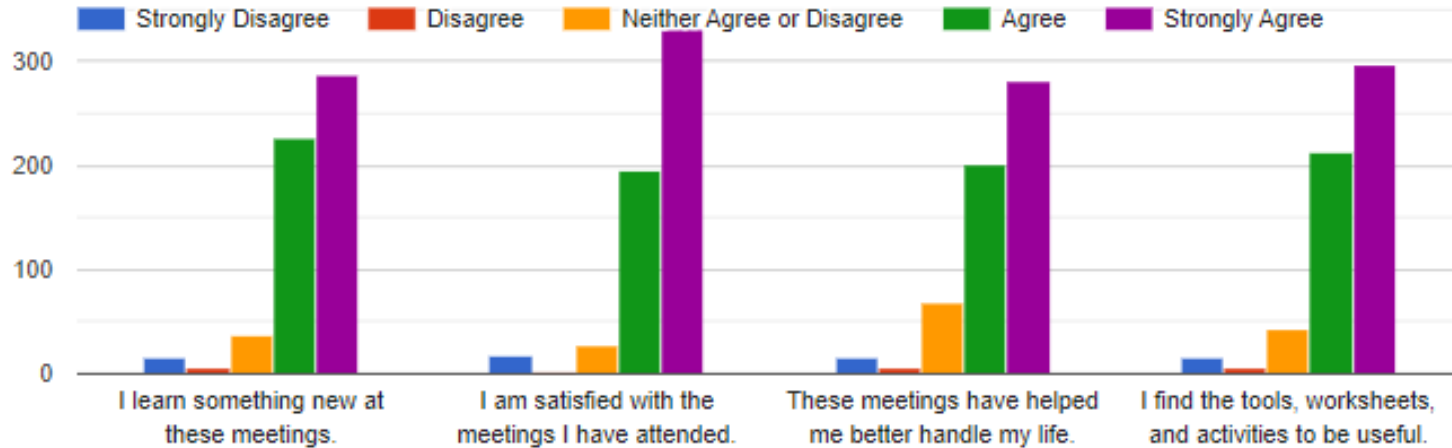
Statewide Youth Recovery Needs Assessment

Working with the Connecticut Healthy Campus Initiative to reach college population

Opening the monthly network meetings to any interested professionals



# Feedback From Participants



Out of 573 participants responses in one our surveys:

**88.1%** shared they attend meetings “Because I find value in it”

**26.5%** attend because “I am required”

**15%** attend “to support a friend or loved one”

Note: survey allowed multiple answers

# Feedback\* From Participants About “What You Found To Be The Most Helpful About YouthRecoveryCT Meetings”



- There are more young people in recovery than you think and I found that out through this meeting
- Super action based and helpful for actually helps you find strategies to deal with things. SMART is helpful for anyone in recovery even if you don't think abstinence will work for you
- SMART meetings reinforce what I have learned in rehab and IOPs
- I was ashamed for a while to seek help but it has been one of the best decisions I've made in my life.
- I get excited about my future and my recovery
- It helps me to understand that my way of thinking needs to change
- The most helpful part is being heard
- Smart is great for people who don't click with the twelve-step program or don't like the spirituality aspect of AA. I personally joined because of these reasons but I stayed because of the like-minded members my age that are committed to making a positive change in their lives

\*Note: edits were made to spelling and capitalization in some quotes






# More Feedback From Participants About “What You Found To Be The Most Helpful About YouthRecoveryCT Meetings”



- I look forward to meetings every week
- The discussions that we have and the tools that we have acquired for self care are extremely important to me in my journey to support my family and to take care of myself
- Finding good habits to do instead of smoking
- 115 days sober because of the community I feel from SMART. Experiencing homelessness and the support really is getting me through it
- Smart teaches me how to look at life at a different angle and not put my self down
- That there is life beyond drugs
- I feel like smart meetings are my safe place. Helps me have an open mind.
- I feel the meetings help me become a better person
- SMART is part of why I'm still alive





# YOUTH RECOVERY CT

**What We Are About:**  
Using Science For Habit Change  
Creating Social Events  
Supporting Families and Friends



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