

December 3, 2025

CHOOSE YOUR PATH ANNUAL REPORT YEAR 5



LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we move through 2025, we are reminded more than ever of the urgency and importance of our shared mission: to shift attitudes through efforts, encourage action, and empower all community members — especially young individuals — to combat substance misuse effectively.

At Choose Your Path Coalition, our work is about more than prevention. It's about protecting lives, nurturing potential, and building a future where every young person in Wauconda Township has the opportunity to thrive — free from the dangers of substance misuse.

The challenges facing our youth remain profound. Substance use continues to endanger health, disrupt emotional and academic development, and strain families and community systems. When young people struggle, entire communities feel the ripple effects — through increased crime, overburdened healthcare services, and fraying social connections.

But there is hope — and we see it every day in the strength and unity of our community. Over the past year, our coalition has continued to make meaningful strides. Through collaboration with schools, parents, law enforcement, local businesses, and nonprofit partners, we've strengthened our foundation and expanded our reach.

Some highlights from this past year include:

- The redesigned of our Recruitment Flyer increases recruitment efforts in our coalition are crucial for building strength, ensuring representation, and expanding impact.
- Empowering youth voices through the Youth Advisory Board's "Vape Take Back Day", promoting awareness, prevention and safe disposal of over 100 vapes.
- Expanding Narcan knowledge, distribution and training to members of the community gives Wauconda back the power to protect each and removes helplessness with preparedness.
- Wauconda and Island Lake Police Department representatives in our coalition, implementing Tobacco and Alcohol Compliance Checks to further the safety of our community.

These milestones reflect the heart of what we do — mobilizing community-led action to create a safer, healthier, and drug-free environment for all.

Yet, we know our work is far from over. In 2025 and beyond, we remain focused on strengthening prevention strategies, increasing access to mental health and addiction resources, and fostering a supportive network that empowers youth to make informed, healthy choices.

We are proud to present the 2025 Choose Your Path Coalition Annual Report, which highlights the progress we've made — and the direction we are headed. We extend our deepest gratitude to every supporter, volunteer, partner, and advocate who continues to walk this path with us.

Together, we are creating lasting change. Together, we are building a brighter, drug-free future for our youth and our community.

With heartfelt appreciation,
The Executive Board

ABOUT US

In December 2020, the Wauconda Area was awarded federal funding under the Drug Free Communities grant program administered by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This funding was awarded as a five-year cycle for \$125,000 per year. The Drug Free Communities grant program requires communities to focus on the prevention of substance use amongst underage youth. Choose Your Path is currently focusing on underage drinking but will also address underage Marijuana use, underage Tobacco/E-Cigarette use, and underage Prescription Drug use. The funding has allowed us to hire a Project Director and Project Coordinator to assist in developing the capacity and functioning of the coalition in advancing the goals and strategies of the Drug Free Communities program.

MISSION

OUR MISSION IS TO SHIFT ATTITUDES THROUGH EFFORTS, ENCOURAGE ACTION, AND EMPOWER ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY YOUNG INDIVIDUALS, TO COMBAT SUBSTANCE MISUSE EFFECTIVELY.

VISION

WE ENVISION A SAFE, HEALTHY, DRUG-FREE ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR YOUTH AND COMMUNITY.



MEMBERSHIP

CHOOSE YOUR PATH EXECUTIVE BOARD

President: Chief of Police David Wermes, Wauconda Police Department

Vice President: Chief Of Police Jennifer Paulus, Island Lake Police Department

Treasurer: Vacated, Not Yet Filled

Secretary: Deena Krieger, Matthews Middle School Guidance Counselor

Members at Large: Tim Staton, Executive Director of Wauconda Park District

CHOOSE YOUR PATH SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES

Youth: Abbie L.

Parents: Tara Simonelli

Schools: Dr. Brian Wegley/ Dr. Todd Leden

Youth-Serving Organizations: Tim Staton

Law Enforcement: David Wermes/ Jennifer Paulus

Religious/Fraternal Organizations: Daniel Drescher

Business: Tracy Lehman

Media: Maria Weisbruch

Civic/Volunteer Organizations: Mark Kisselburg

Healthcare Professionals: Keeley Gallagher

State, Local, and/or Tribal Government Agencies: Senator Darby Hills

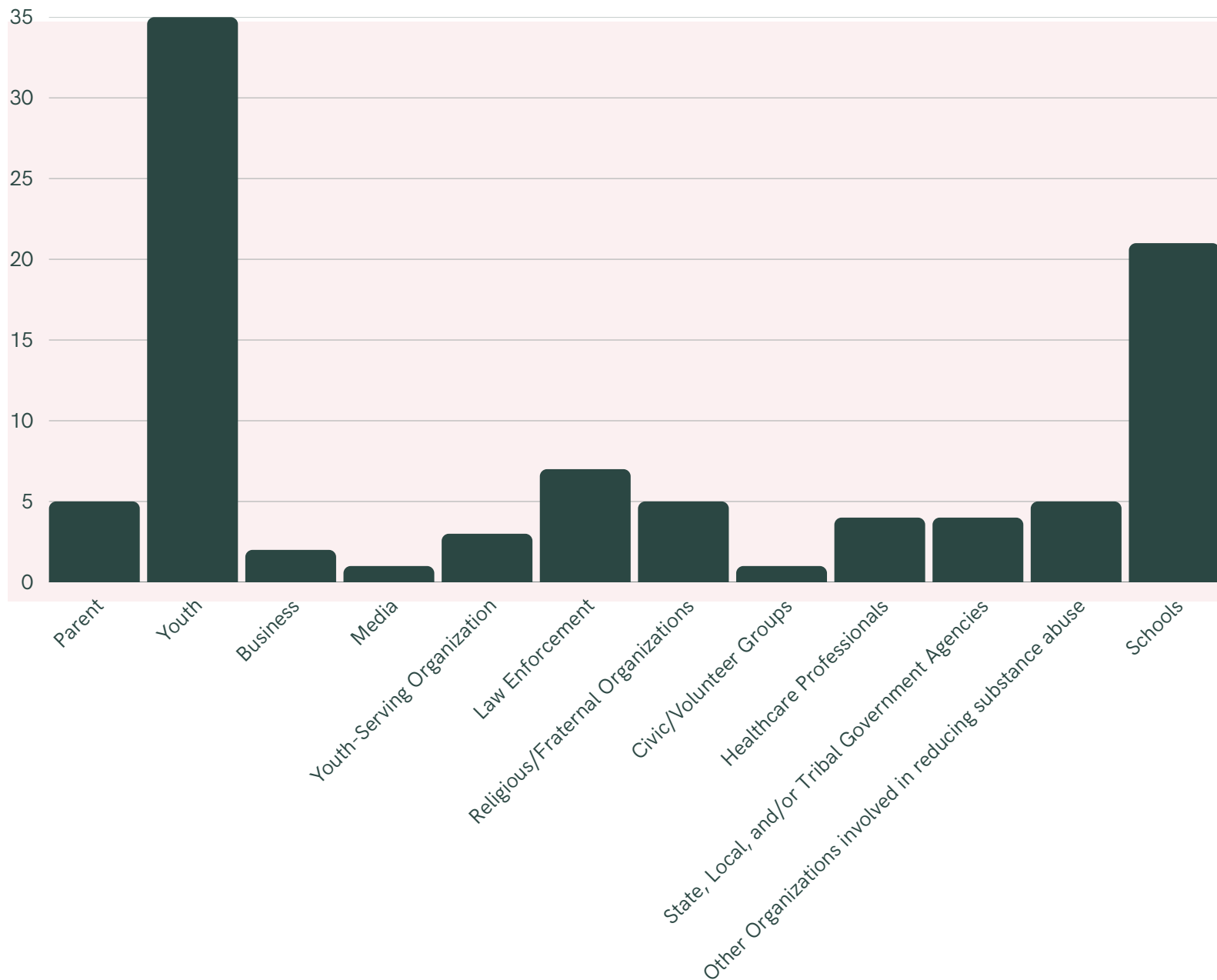
Other Organizations involved in reducing Substance Abuse: Danielle Ryan

- Choose Your Path members attended **25** different events throughout the year.
- Choose Your Path had a total number of **78** meetings throughout the year to complete the work of the coalition. This included monthly coalition meetings, Executive Board meetings, Youth Advisory Board meetings and Committee meetings.
- Choose Your Path coalition members contributed a total cumulative number of **1318** volunteer hours throughout the year. This includes attending events, attending monthly meetings, and attending committee meetings.

That equals to \$33,965 to in-kind contributions for the year!

MEMBERSHIP

Choose Your Path currently has 89 members, 47 of those members are Youth.



WHAT IS BEING DONE TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP?

- At every community event we encourage those who come up to your table to get involved with the coalition.
- Our Recruitment Flyer is shared regularly on all of our social media accounts and can also be found on our website.

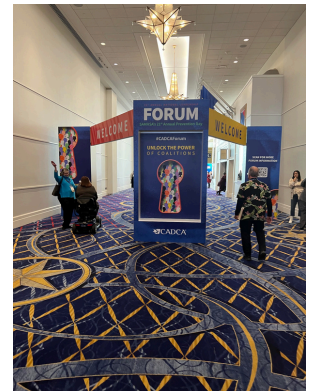
DRUG-FREE COMMUNITIES GRANT GOALS

The Drug-Free Communities Grant Program has two goals for all coalitions awarded the grant.

1. Establish and strengthen collaboration among community stakeholders and organizations to address youth substance use.
 2. Reduce substance use among youth and, over time, reduce substance use among adults by addressing the factors in the community that increase the risk of substance use and promoting factors that minimize the risk of substance use.
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DFC GOAL ONE - INCREASE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Choose Your Path has been able to meet this goal throughout Year 4 in various ways. We have been able to partner with other organizations to put on events and we have brought community members from the Wauconda area to work together.



DFC GOAL TWO - REDUCE SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH

Choose Your Path has been able to meet this goal as seen in our Illinois Youth Survey Data. The four Core Measures are what we look for in the data.

1. Past 30-Day Use
2. Perception of Parental/Guardian/Caregiver Disapproval
3. Perception of Peer Disapproval
4. Perception of Risk

Comparing the 2024 Illinois Youth Survey Data to the 2018 data we have seen a lot of change!

- Past 30-Day use decreased
- Perception of Parental/Guardian/Caregiver Disapproval increased
- Perception of Peer Disapproval increased
- Perception of Risk increased

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

During the past year Choose Your Path has been able to collect data needed for the prevention efforts put forth by the coalition. We need both quantitative and qualitative data. All of the data relates back to the Drug Free Communities Core Measures. Below is the list of all the data that was collected in the past year.

- Student Focus Groups
 - Compliance Checks
 - Illinois Youth Survey (IYS)
-

STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

This year we were able to conduct a focus group with 11 students from Wauconda High School. In this focus group we asked the participants questions related to our Core Measures along with questions about the Wauconda area.

COMPLIANCE CHECKS

The Wauconda Police Department conducted liquor compliance checks on the below listed dates.

April 23, 2025	Uncle D's and Nina's Place were non-compliant	(19) establishments were checked
July 16, 2025	Volo Meats was non-compliant	(6) establishments were checked
October 7, 2025	Citgo Gas Station was non-compliant	(13) establishments were checked

The Island Lake Police Department conducted liquor compliance checks on the below listed dates

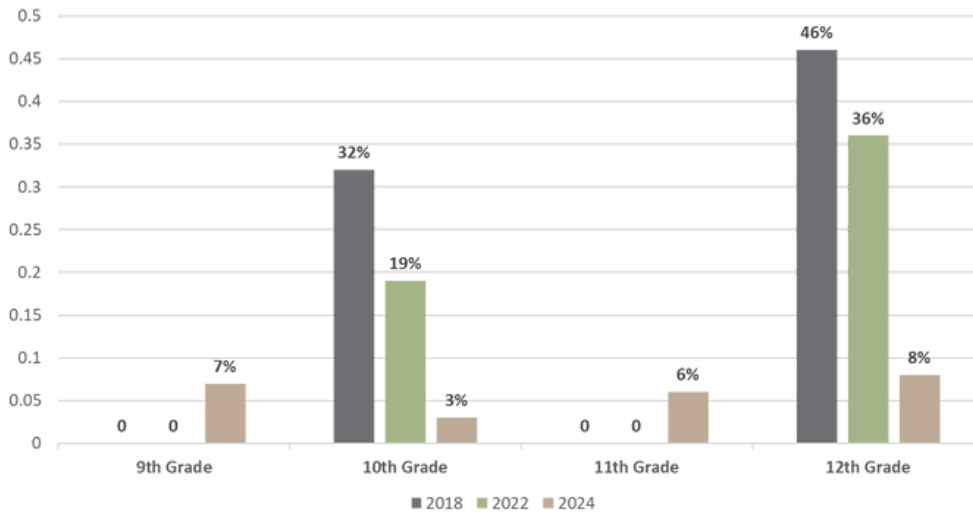
September 28, 2025	7-Eleven was non-compliant	(11) establishments were checked
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ILLINOIS YOUTH SURVEY (IYS) 2024

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has funded the administration of the Illinois Youth Survey (IYS) biennially since 1990. The IYS is a self-report survey administered in school settings and is designed to gather information about a variety of health and social indicators including substance use and perceptions, bullying, school climate, nutrition, and physical activity.

When looking at the results of the IYS 2024 Survey for 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in the Wauconda School District all our of Core Measures were trending in the right direction! You can see some of the highlights on the next page, otherwise the full presentation can be found on our website.

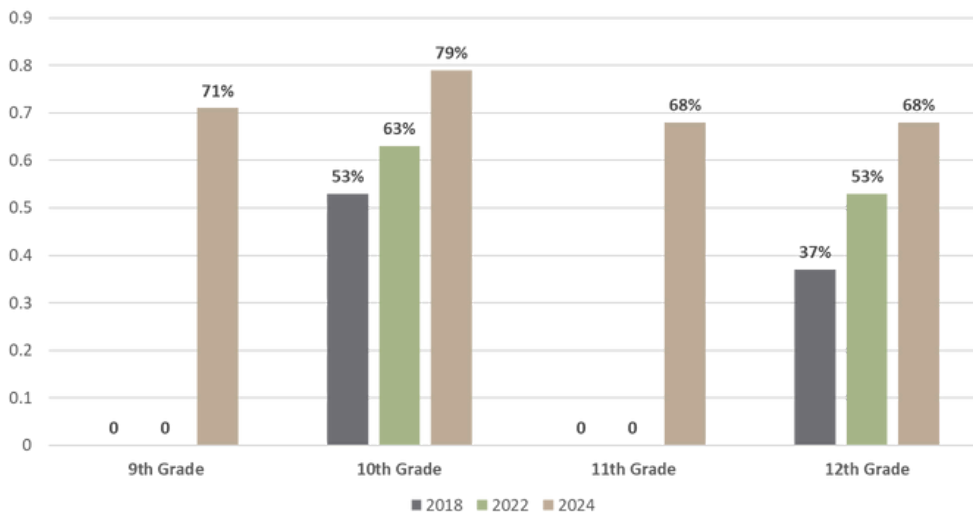
ILLINOIS YOUTH SURVEY 2024 DATA*



This graph represents the percentage of High School students reporting Alcohol use in the past 30 days.

We can see that for 10th graders the percentage dropped 29% from 2018 to 2024.

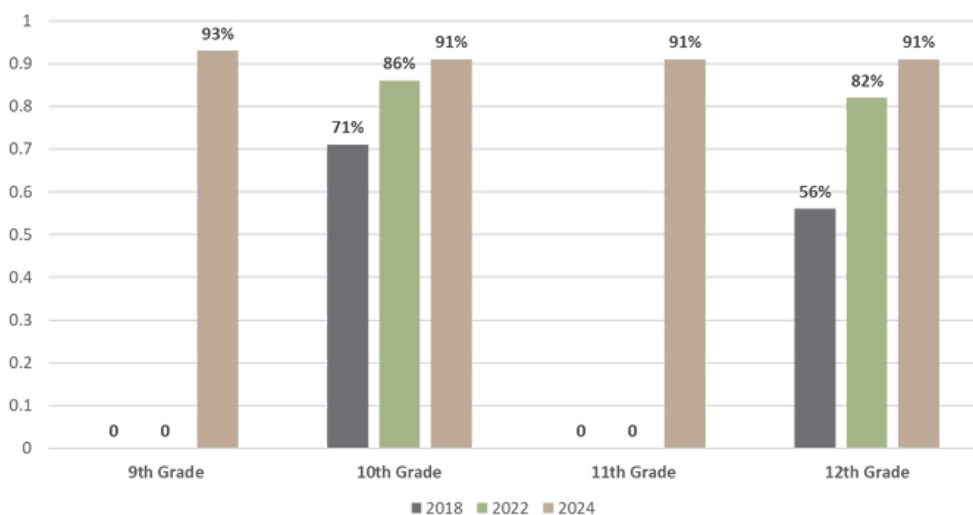
We can see that for 12th graders the percentage dropped 38% from 2018 to 2024.



This graph represents the percentage of High School students reporting Marijuana use as a risk to people physically or in other ways.

We can see that for 10th graders the percentage raised by 26% from 2018 to 2024.

We can see that for 12th graders the percentage raised 31% from 2018 to 2024.



This graph represents the percentage of High School students reporting how wrong their friends would feel if they used Tobacco.

We can see that for 10th graders the percentage raised by 20% from 2018 to 2024.

We can see that for 12th graders the percentage raised 35% from 2018 to 2024.

The entire Illinois Youth Survey Presentation can be found on our website at chooseyourpath118.org.

**We will continue to use 2024 data until we have 2026 IYS data.*



YEAR 5 IN REVIEW

09/30/24 - 09/29/25

OCTOBER

- Our Strategic and Action Planning Committee met this month.
- Our Sustainability Committee met this month.
- Our Youth Advisory Board visited Wauconda Middle School for Red Ribbon Week.
- Wear Red Day was on Wednesday October 30th and we had great support for this!
- Our Wauconda Safety Campaign Committee met this month.
- Our coalition co-hosted a webinar with the Illinois Prevention Network and the DEA.
- The Youth Advisory Board started their annual fundraiser this month.

NOVEMBER

- Our Youth Advisory Board hosted their first Informational Session. This session was on Alcohol.
- Our Youth Advisory Board shared their Vaping Social Norm Campaigns.

DECEMBER

- Our Spring/Summer ad for the Wauconda Park District was submitted.
- Our Annual Meeting for Year 4 was conducted.
- During our Annual meeting we announced our Coalition Member of the Year award winners.
- Our Youth Advisory Board hosted their second Informational Session. This session was on Nicotine.
- The Youth Advisory Board was able to raise \$3,281.40 from their fundraiser.

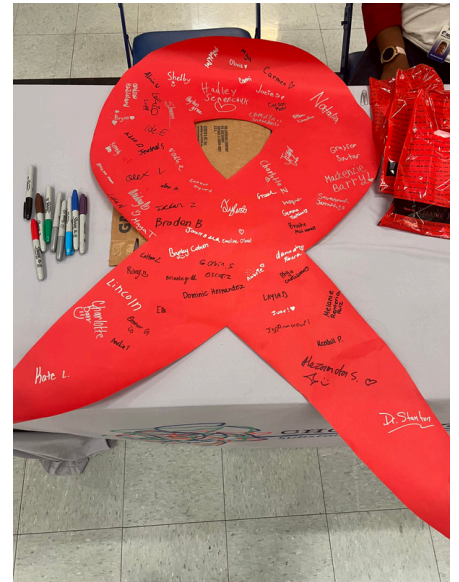
JANUARY

- The Youth Advisory Board started planning their Sticker Shock Campaign.
- The Youth Advisory Board shared their Marijuana Social Norm Campaigns.
- Choose Your Path was in attendance at the WHS Future Freshmen Expo.
- Our Youth Advisory Board hosted their third Informational Session. This session was on Marijuana.
- The coalition reviewed the ads from the Wauconda Safety Campaign.
- 9 students from our Youth Advisory Board attended the CGTI conference.



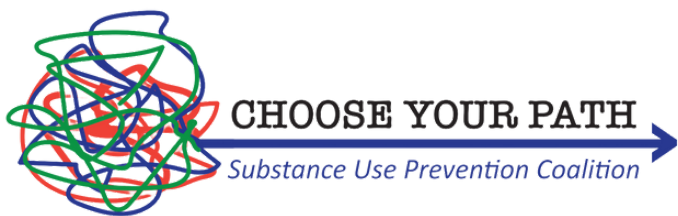
The theme for this year was, “Life is a Movie, Film drug Free.” Choose Your Path worked with the Wauconda area to celebrate this week!





Our Youth Advisory Board visited Wauconda Middle School to provide a presentation to their 8th grade class. They also hosted tables at WHS to encourage students to reflect on why they do not use substances.





YEAR 5 IN REVIEW

09/30/24 - 09/29/25

FEBRUARY

- Choose Your Path attended the 35th annual CADCA Leadership Forum.
- The Youth Advisory Board hosted their final Informational Session. This session was on Amphetamines.
- Choose Your Path attended the Wauconda Area Chamber of Commerce's Business Expo.
- Members from the Youth Advisory Board attended the Snowball Leaders training.

MARCH

- The Youth Advisory Board hosted their third annual Sticker Shock Campaign in the Wauconda area.
- Students from our Youth Advisory Board attended the NLCC Snowball Leadership retreat.
- Our Youth Advisory Board created their Peer Pressure Social Norm Campaigns.

APRIL

- Choose Your Path hosted a Drug Take Back event with the Wauconda Township and the Wauconda Police Department. Illinois State Senator Darby Hills also joined our event.
- The Youth Advisory Board had elections for their Officers Board.
- Choose Your Path shared resources for Alcohol Awareness Month.
- The coalition celebrated their Coalition Member of the Year award winners during National Volunteer Week.
- Members from our Youth Advisory Board attended the Operation Snowball awards banquet and received an award.

MAY

- Choose Your Path hosted a Narcan training.
- Choose Your Path shared resources for Mental Health Awareness Month.
- The Youth Advisory Board hosted tables at Wauconda High School during finals week.
- Choose Your Path shared resources during National Prevention Week.

Informational Sessions

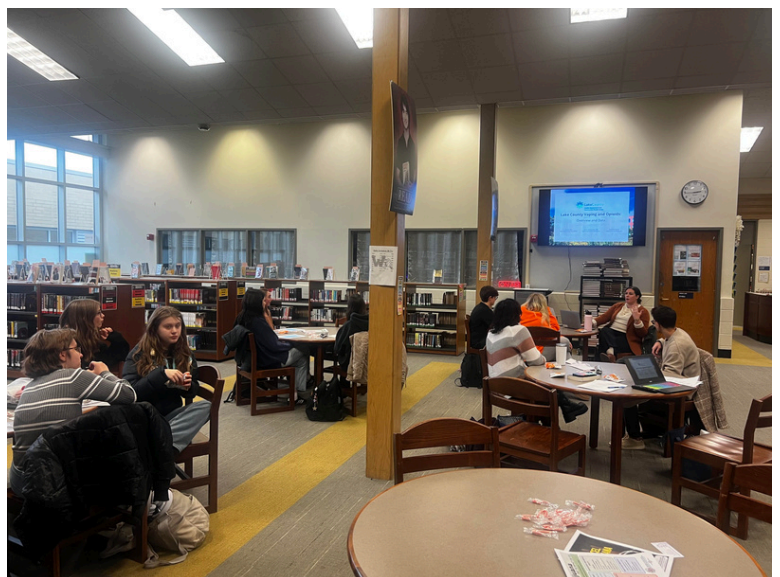
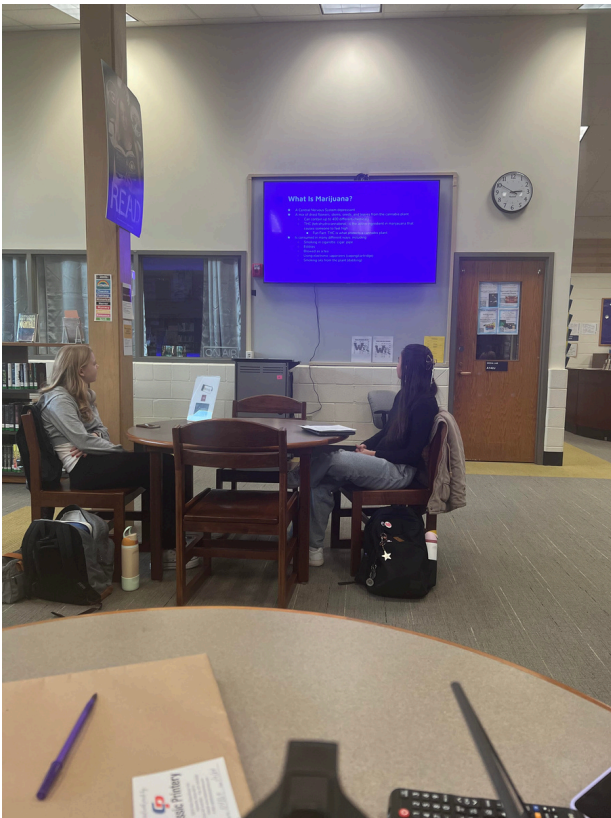
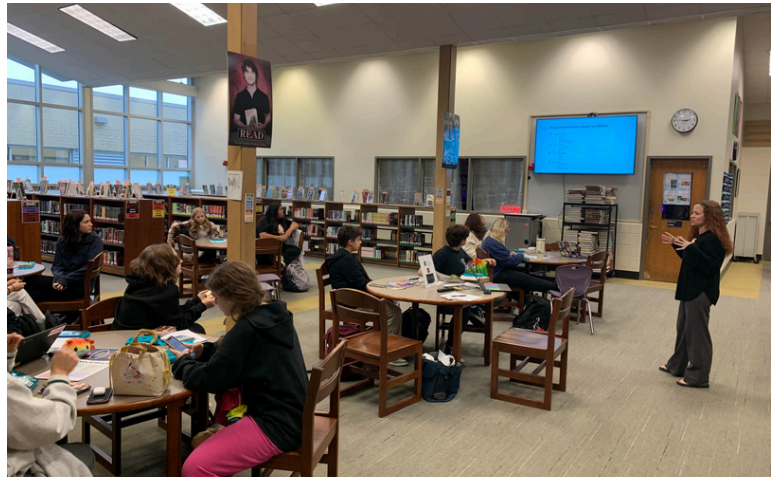
Wauconda High School Library 2:40PM

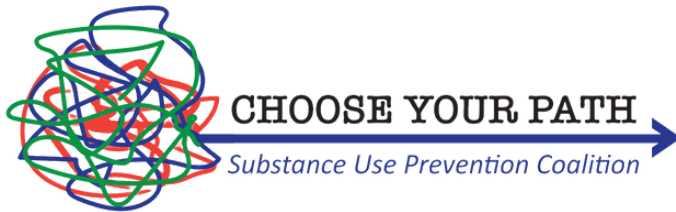
Informational session will include a video explaining the negative effects related to each drug!

NOV. 14	ALCOHOL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central nervous system depressant Affects your mood, behavior, and coordination Highly addictive Both long term and short term health effects
DEC. 12	NICOTINE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central nervous system stimulant Found in cigarettes, vapes, and e-cigs Highly addictive Both long term and short term health effects
JAN. 09	MARIJUANA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains over 480 constituents THC produces the psychoactive effect Highly addictive Both long term and short term health effects
FEB. 20	AMPHETAMINES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central nervous system stimulant Triggers the release of dopamine Highly addictive Both long term and short term health effects

CHOOSE YOUR PATH Substance Use Prevention Coalition

Our Youth Advisory Board hosted four Informational Sessions this year. All of these were open to Wauconda High School students.





YEAR 5 IN REVIEW

09/30/24 - 09/29/25

JUNE

- The Youth Advisory Board was accepted into the SPARK mentor program.
- Our Youth Advisory Board had their first meeting with the SPARK mentorship program.

JULY

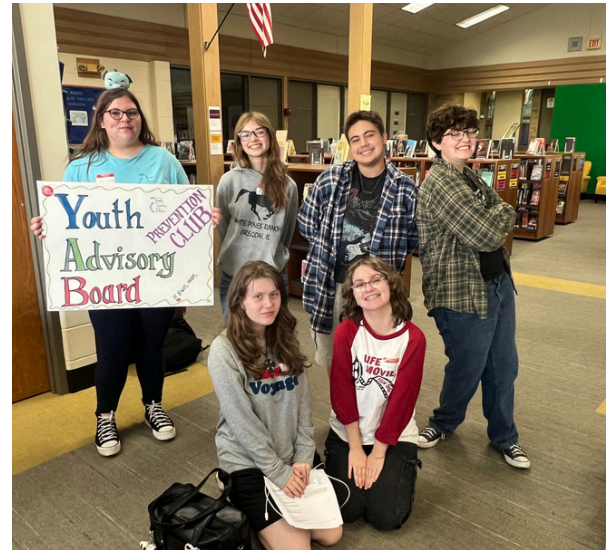
- Students from the Youth Advisory Board attended the CGTI Summer Conference.
- Choose Your Path attended the Wauconda Farmers Market.

AUGUST

- Choose Your Path attended the Wauconda Farmers Market.
- Choose Your Path attended National Night Out.
- Choose Your Path welcomed their new Project Officer - Marissa!

SEPTEMBER

- Choose Your Path and our Youth Advisory Board hosted a Vape Takeback Day on the 18th.
- Redesigned of Recruitment Flyer



CHOOSE YOUR PATH
Substance Use Prevention Coalition
founded 2019

YOU CAN HELP BUILD A STRONGER HEALTHIER WAUCONDA COMMUNITY.

WHAT IS CHOOSE YOUR PATH?
The Choose Your Path Coalition is comprised of community members concerned about making positive impact to the Wauconda area, most importantly amongst the youth. We have been awarded the Drug Free Communities Grant which will help reduce youth substance use and provide drug prevention education.

OUR MISSION
Our mission is to shift attitudes through education, encourage action and empower all community members, especially young individuals, to combat substance misuse effectively.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED
Attend our monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of every month at the Wauconda Area...

Statistics:
From 2018 to 2024 the Alcohol Use amongst 12th graders has dropped by 38%.
Our Youth Membership has grown from 3 students in 2021 to 34 students in 2024.
This is a 1,033% increase!

*Illinois Youth Survey Data 2024



COMMITTEE REPORTS

We had 5 committees meet throughout Year 5 of the grant.

- Executive Board
- Youth Advisory Board Prevention Club
- Wauconda Safety Campaign
- Strategic and Action Planning Committee
- Sustainability Committee

Each committee met for various reasons and helped move along the work of the coalition. Choose Your Path members are always encouraged to join a committee to work on a specific goal.

Executive Board

The Executive Board meets a total of 4 times each year. The Executive Board is responsible for providing leadership for the coalition. The Executive Board met on various topics that helped the coalition work towards it's goals.

Wauconda Safety Campaign

This committee this year focused on finalizing the PSA and then working on the ads to go along with the campaign. The PSA was finalized and was shared on various social media accounts.

Strategic and Action Planning

This committee met to discuss Focus Groups and what those would look like. The questions that were going to be asked in the Focus Groups were brought to the coalition meetings so everyone could have an input.

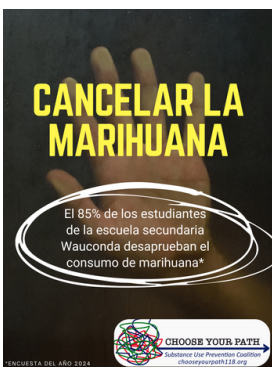
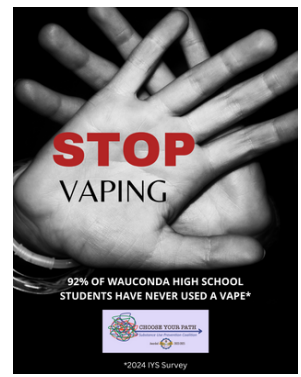
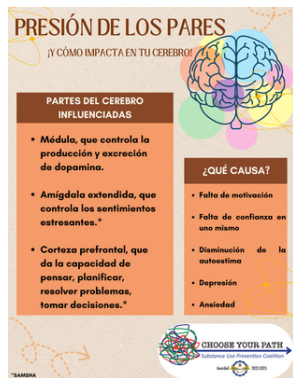
Sustainability

This committee met to look over the coalition's current Sustainability plan. This committee had a lot of discussions about the 501 c3 process.

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD PREVENTION CLUB

The Youth Advisory Board has grown tremendously since the start of the grant and continues to work hard to spread the mission of the coalition.

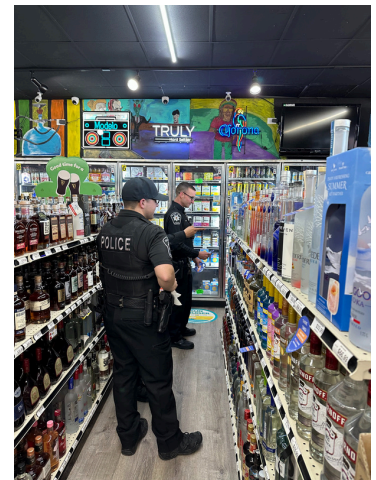
- The Youth Advisory Board had a total of 15 meetings throughout the year.
- The Youth Advisory Board grew to 34 members this year. This is the largest number of students we have had in the group and this is a 1,033% increase in membership since 2021.
- During the meetings the following topics were discussed - Vape Take Back Day, Homecoming, Social Norm Campaigns, Red Ribbon Week, Middle School Presentations, CGTI & NLCC trainings, Fundraising opportunities, Sticker Shock Campaign, Illinois Youth Survey, and various community events.
- The Youth Advisory Board created 5 Social Norm Campaigns.



YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD PREVENTION CLUB

The Youth Advisory Board had their third annual Sticker Shock Campaign this year.

We would like to give a special Thank You to the Island Lake Police Department for joining us!



WHAT IS COMING UP IN 2025/2026

Here are just some of the things Choose Your Path will be focusing on during the next year.

- Bringing back some of our committees - a lot of the coalition work can get done in smaller groups so we are hoping to bring back the following committees: Strategic and Action Planning, Outreach, and Sustainability.
- Postcard Mailing - This was a success during our first year and we should look into bringing this back.
- More education for our Youth Advisory Board - this was feedback received from the students this past year. We have four topics already planned!
- Data Collection - we are planning to collect 2026 IYS Data from our schools.
- Future Social Norm Campaigns - These will be created by our Youth Advisory Board and hopefully shared with the middle schools.
- Wauconda Community events - we are planning to continue to support the community through attendance at our regular events.
- More community involvement - we would love to see our membership numbers rise and have more involvement from the community.
- New streams of funding.



CHOOSE YOUR PATH
WOULD BE NO WHERE
WITHOUT THE HARD
WORK AND DEDICATION
FROM ALL IT'S MEMBERS!
SO THANK YOU FOR ALL
THAT YOU DO!