

### Why get involved with reducing substance abuse?

**Substance abuse is a serious factor in the disintegration of the family.** According to child welfare agencies in 2000, drug abuse was associated with 80 percent of substantiated abuse and neglect cases. A report by the American Enterprise Institute estimated that the number of children in foster care increased about seventy percent because of crack cocaine usage.

**Substance use undermines brain development.** Children who regularly use alcohol or other drugs before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become addicted and experience other social, legal and health problems.

**Substance use is harmful to the unborn.** Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) develop in some unborn babies when the mother drinks too much alcohol during pregnancy. A baby born with FASD may be seriously handicapped and require a lifetime of special care.

Because churches and other houses of worship serve those from all walks of life, the faith community has its finger on the pulse of the community, and is in a pivotal position to both prevent and intervene on substance abuse.

### What's in it for the faith community?

Partnering with a coalition in your community whose aim is to prevent or reduce substance abuse will give you broad-based support in a number of crucial areas.

**Strengthening families**—local coalitions have access to proven programs designed to strengthen family connections that can augment this important focus of the church.

**Developing resiliency in youth to resist substance use and other high risk behaviors**—This is where the missions of the church and the coalition meet. Resiliency research tells us that a strong moral compass is key to developing resilient young people. Church and family build that moral compass. Preventing substance abuse and other high risk behaviors requires that we think and plan together about the welfare of the whole person, the whole family and the whole community.

**Building community**—another area in which both missions converge. Churches have long focused on the importance of developing a community that cares for and serves each other. Local coalitions are about creating the collaborative relationships across disciplines and perspectives that will support innovative infrastructure and policy and change community norms.

**Garnering additional resources to serve your congregation and the community at large**—the church is an ideal setting for family-oriented events, educational activities, after-school programs and other needed neighborhood or community functions. State and federal funding sources are looking for opportunities to involve the faith community in dealing with community-wide issues.

Chronic substance use can decay a person, a family and a community from the inside out. Involvement by communities of faith is crucial in conquering this important societal epidemic.