

## CASE STUDY: Community Change Through the Power of Collaboration

In a concerted effort to combat drug use, **Cambria and Somerset** counties in western Pennsylvania joined forces in 2011 to implement Botvin *LifeSkills Training*.

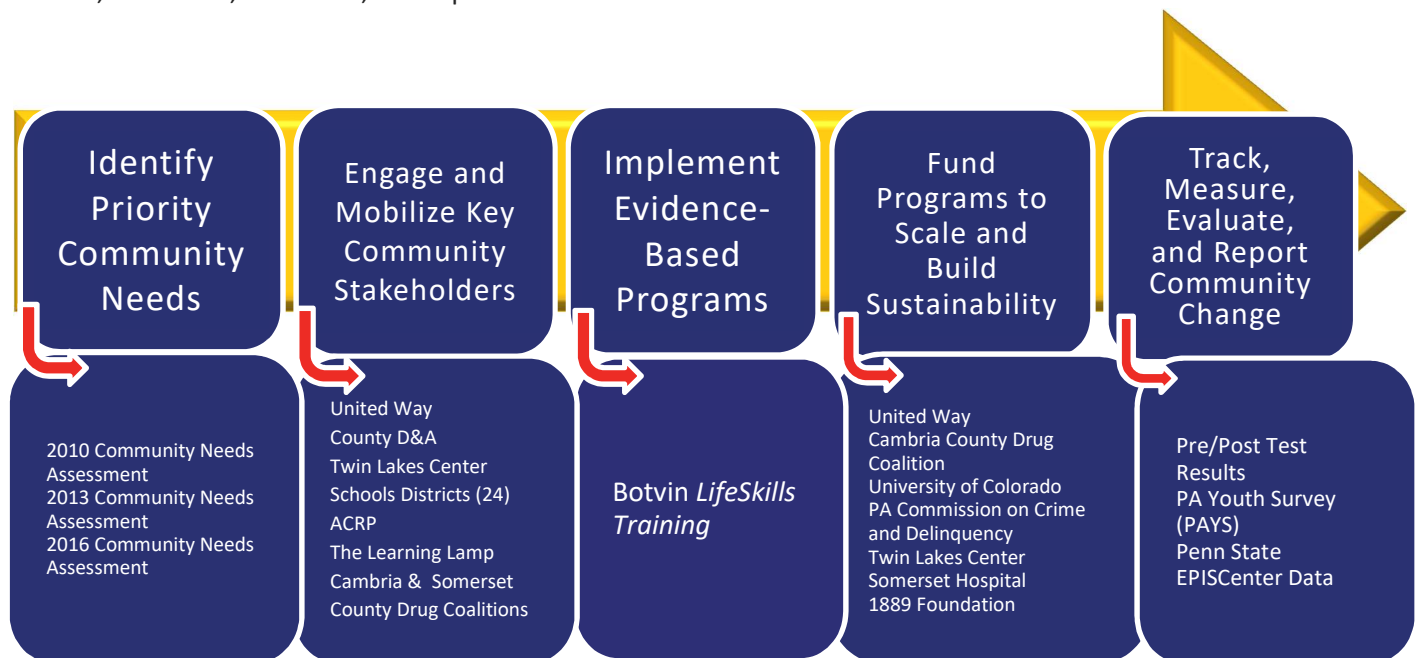
Over the last six years, classrooms across the region have received the **evidence-based program** thanks to **strategic focus and funding** by the United Way of the Laurel Highlands, 1889 Foundation, Twin Lakes Center, Cambria County Drug Coalition, Somerset Drug Free Communities, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and the University of Colorado.



More than 7,000 eligible students in all 24 school districts have learned the skills necessary to avoid substance use.

### Social Change Initiative

Botvin *LifeSkills Training* was first introduced in a county-wide approach that used the Enhanced Community Impact Model<sup>®</sup> developed by the United Way of the Laurel Highlands as the foundation of "how" to accomplish this work. The model creates positive social change by addressing priority community needs. Throughout the process, progress is tracked, measured, evaluated, and reported.



*"This systematic approach is unique. It's practical and promotes purposeful, aligned action."*

*-Ronna Yablonski, Executive Director, Cambria County Drug Coalition*

*The last Botvin lesson that I remember was about how to control our ever-changing emotions. Especially about anxiety, how to get help with that, how to control breathing and a bunch of different techniques that we learned through the Botvin program. Also, about depression and how to talk to people instead of turning to substances. And anger -- I know that's a big problem in schools and the Botvin program taught us different methods to cope with it."* --  
**8th Grader, Meyersdale Area School District  
Somerset County, PA**

## RESULTS

The completion of the 2015-2016 school year marked the first cohort of 8th grade students who had successfully completed 3 consecutive years of the Botvin *LifeSkills Training* program. The results were impressive.

The data extracted from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey showed **significant decreases** across all areas surveyed, including **alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana**. All 18 risk factors measured showed a significant reduction (48% on average) in risky behaviors, including binge drinking, marijuana usage, and **prescription misuse**.

## SIGNIFICANT DECREASES HAVE BEEN MEASURED IN THE TOP 3 CRITICAL AREAS WHERE ABUSE IS MOST PREVALENT—ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND MARIJUANA (BOTH 30-DAY & LIFETIME USAGE).

### WHAT EXACTLY IS BOTVIN *LIFESKILLS TRAINING* (LST)?

The LST program fosters youth development by teaching personal coping skills, general social skills, and skills for resisting pressures to smoke, drink, use drugs, and engage in other risky behaviors. Through the LST program, not only do students learn how to resist pressures to smoke, drink, and use drugs, but they also learn important life skills such as how to make informed decisions and solve problems, how to manage stress and anxiety, and how to communicate clearly. The combination of drug resistance skills and life skills has proven to be a powerful formula for preventing drug use and even violence.



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*"It's so important we have this program sustained for a long period of time. We're looking 5 years, 10 years, 20 years out... to make sure we're able to see the long-term benefits."* –Bill McKinney, CEO United Way of the Laurel Highlands

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