

# YOUTH MJ PLANNING INSIGHTS



# AGENDA

- **PLANNING OBJECTIVES**
- **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**
- **AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN**
- **KEY INSIGHTS**
- **PLANNING PLATFORM**
- **REASONS TO BELIEVE**

# PLANNING OBJECTIVES /

- 1** Understand the **attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, and motivations** of the general youth and Hispanic youth populations surrounding the use of marijuana.
- 2** Understand how friends, parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, and other influencers affect their decision to use or abstain from marijuana use.
- 3** Understand what prevention messages resonate with these audiences.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY /

## Secondary Research

Existing primary research conducted by OMNI, Suple, The Denver Office of Drug Strategy, Healthy Kids Colorado, and additional reporting from media outlets was used to inform the strategic planning process. The reports helped Cactus understand the current youth usage rates of marijuana, the perception of risk associated with using marijuana, and the leading deterrents. Our goal was to build upon the existing research.

## In-School Visits N=317

Cactus planners visited a number of schools in Colorado to learn more from students about their experiences, beliefs, and opinions regarding marijuana use. The students were 14+ years old with an average age of 15.3.

Schools visited:

- Horizon High School
- Legacy High School
- Loveland High School
- McClain High School

## Friendship Groups N=19 groups, 57 participants

Cactus in partnership with the AND Group conducted friendship groups (triads) in Denver, Pueblo, and Boulder.

The way friendship groups work is one friend recruits two friends, which helps the group feel comfortable and candid. Groups were broken up by life stages: Middle School, High School, and Post HS, as well as by usage: not likely to try MJ, likely tried MJ, and tried MJ.

## In-Depth Phone Interviews N=10

Phone interviews were conducted with youth from rural areas including: Norway, Ridgeway, Telluride, and Ouray. The rural youth were asked identical questions as the students from in-school visits and triads. The main objective of the phone interviews - understand if youth living in rural areas of CO have varying opinions regarding MJ to those attending larger more populated schools.

# AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN

# AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN /

**Middle School  
(12-14)**



**Early High School  
(15-16)**



**Late High School  
(17-18)**



**Post High School  
(19-20)**



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS / MIDDLE SCHOOL

## KEY BEHAVIORS

- Closely tied to their family
- Eager, open-eyed, absorbing everything and taking it all in
- Innocent, even naive age group, “I would never use drugs.”
- Two key transitions: 6th grade - beginning middle school and 8th grade - transitioning to high school
- Receive and believe health class messaging
- Not much exposure to marijuana
- Talk to parents and see them as a trustworthy source
- Aren’t planning concretely for the future - but they know they want to be happy

## REASONS TO ABSTAIN

- Don’t want to disappoint parents
- Concerned about alienating friends
- Don’t want to get in trouble with the law
- Think about the health effects (brain development)
- Not going to parties with substances/ not a social norm yet

## REASONS TO PARTAKE

- Older friends/siblings smoke
- Peer pressure (don’t know how to say no)



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS / EARLY HIGH SCHOOL

## KEY BEHAVIORS

- This is the time in their life when it's crucial to 'fit in'
- Want to fit in and gain respect/cool factor from peers but also worried about potential consequences
- What they have learned from their families is their foundation for choices
- Most are exposed to MJ by this point and have been asked to try
- Older friends and siblings are bigger influences than classes or parents
- Curiosity peaks at this point
- Still weighing pros and cons of usage

## REASONS TO ABSTAIN

- Don't want to disappoint parents
- Concerned about alienating friends
- Sports/extra curricular activities becoming important
- Could affect their grades

## REASONS TO PARTAKE

- Older friends
- Perception of prevalence, feels like everyone is doing it
- Less dangerous than alcohol
- New school (new friends, new environment)





# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS / LATE HIGH SCHOOL

## KEY BEHAVIORS

- More independent - driving, and faced with more mature decisions
- MJ use is prevalent and no longer as scary
- Feels like everyone is doing it
- Skeptical of the public health statements
- Don't trust facts/feel like sources are biased
- Think that by and large, nothing terrible happens from smoking weed
- See little danger in occasional use
- Becoming a social norm, assume more of their peers smoke than actually do

## REASONS TO ABSTAIN

- Friends don't use
- Sports/extra-curricular activities
- College/future plans
- Setting example for younger siblings
- Productivity

## REASONS TO PARTAKE

- Parties/socially acceptable/friends use
- Less dangerous than alcohol and other drugs
- Stressed/bored
- Creativity
- More money for weed because they are working/easy to get
- Can function while high - doesn't disrupt daily life (class, homework, social life)



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS / POST HIGH SCHOOL

## KEY BEHAVIORS

- Embarking on a new life, exploring independence
- Have made their choices about MJ use and are largely sticking to them
- Don't think MJ is a big deal
- Skeptical of the public health statements
- Prevalent mentality of “nobody cares if you use or don't use”
- Those who don't use have developed their own reasons and don't need help or validation for saying “no”
- Start of adulthood, feel old enough to make the ‘right choice’
- Disappointing parents messaging not motivating
- Play an influencer role on younger siblings

## REASONS TO ABSTAIN

- School/grades
- Career/grad school plans
- Friends don't use
- Too busy, working, school, etc.
- Grew out of it

## REASONS TO PARTAKE

- Parties (much more substance use of all kinds)
- Less dangerous than other drugs
- Independent/living on their own for the first time
- Close to legal age/see self as an adult
- Easy to get MJ
- Can function while high - doesn't disrupt daily life (class, homework, social life)



# CONCEPT STATEMENTS TESTED

REFER TO APPENDIX FOR FULL STATEMENTS\*

- **You're gonna need your brain.**
- **It's not meth. It's not heroin. But it still has consequences.**
- **Your choices matter.**
- **You're not you when you're high.**
- **Knowledge is power.**

# THE HEALTH CLAIMS /

Though many youth have heard the “harmful to brain” claim, a significant number of older kids do not believe there is conclusive evidence to support it and said they’d question such a claim presented as fact.

**THE FACT:** “Drugs like marijuana can negatively impact your growing and developing brain” - Public Health Statement

**THE RESPONSE:** Negative health claims stating “may or can” vs. “will” were called out as propaganda especially by current users.

**WHAT DOES WORK?** What they found indisputable was that there is ***memory loss, and loss of productivity*** from smoking.

# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

# KEY INSIGHTS /

## **A MENTAL RELIEF**

Of the youth whom choose to smoke marijuana they typically do it to numb some sort of physical or mental pain. They see marijuana as a way to relieve stress, or to have a good laugh with friends. To users, regardless of how often they smoke, MJ is not considered a risky drug.

## **THE PERSONAL AFFECT**

Though youth are less likely to believe there are negative health effects from MJ use, they do believe there can be negative life consequences. They imagine that MJ could get in their way of being their best self.

## **THE STRENGTH OF STORYTELLING**

Stories that reinforce how MJ disrupted other peoples lives was said to be something that would make them think twice about MJ use.

## **IT'S NOT JUST WHAT WE SAY, IT'S HOW WE SAY IT**

Youth rejected any language that was preachy or presented as a scare tactic; and were quick to judge content laced with “someone’s biased point of view.”

# THE #1 DETERRENT /

THE most compelling reason not to use MJ across age groups was that it could get in their way of achieving goals.

“To **achieve my goals** so I have potential in the future. I would like to go to college so I can better myself and become what I want to be and **make myself happy**.” – Middle School Student, Denver

“To be able to have a **good future** and stay on track, and not affect my body and not get in trouble and lose trust with my parents, because, they would not let me be around friends and experience opportunities.” – High School Student, Pueblo

“The fact that you can get addicted and it could affect your future and **goals**, because, you may want to give up and only think about MJ.” - Middle School Student, Pueblo

# PLANNING PLATFORM



# PLANNING PLATFORM INSPIRATION /



g how|

# KEY MESSAGE /



Don't let getting high get in your way.



# THE KEY MESSAGE IN THEIR EYES / MIDDLE SCHOOL & EARLY HIGH SCHOOL

Don't let getting high get in the way of your relationship with your parents.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your friendships.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your grades.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of making the team.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your health.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of making good choices.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of who you really want to be.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of getting your drivers license.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your future.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your happiness.



# THE KEY MESSAGE IN THEIR EYES / LATE HIGH SCHOOL & POST HIGH SCHOOL

Don't let getting high get in the way of your friendships.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your relationship with your girlfriend.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your relationship with your boyfriend.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of making the varsity team.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of getting into college.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your productivity.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your job.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your future.  
Don't let getting high get in the way of your happiness.



# REASONS TO BELIEVE /

- An aspirational message focused on what they can gain from not using MJ may be compelling
- They want to make decisions that lead to happiness today and in the future
- The public health statements are not based in substantial evidence, and therefore should not be the leading message
- The message is elastic, and can be stretched across the age groups, relevant in each life stage

# APPENDIX

# PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR PASSIONS /

## KEY INSIGHT:

Youth are busy with so many different activities and interests. When asked to hash-tag their favorite activities, the long and varied list included:

#outdoors

#puttinginwork (at the gym)

#hike

#peace

#selfie

#insidejokes

#Starbucks

#football

#welding

#family

#youngchefs

#family

#soccer

#worldhistory

#chemistry

#bandboys

#venting

#minecraft

#school



# CONCEPT STATEMENTS /

**You're gonna need your brain.** No matter what you want to do with your future, you're going to need a brain to do it—but you only have one. Drugs like marijuana can negatively impact your growing and developing brain. Give your amazing brain every chance that it needs to reach its full potential. Research shows that regular marijuana use is linked to trouble learning, remembering, and poor math and reading skills. Your future is in your brain, so why risk it?

**It's not meth. It's not heroin. But it still has consequences.** Yeah, marijuana isn't as scary as meth or heroin. Marijuana use by adolescents and young adults - even occasional use - is associated with future high-risk use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs like cocaine, ecstasy, opioids and methamphetamine. And just like tobacco, marijuana can be addictive. Youth that begin using marijuana regularly are more likely to become addicted than those who wait until adulthood to use. This can lead to a future that is different from the one you're envisioning for yourself. Keep control over your future.

**Your choices matter.** In the moment it can be hard to say no- it seems like everyone is doing it, and it's only just this one time. But know that 4 out of 5 Colorado High Schoolers don't use pot. Marijuana use by adolescents may be associated with low achievement, such as not graduating from high school or attaining a university degree, lower income, and more unemployment. Make your own choices. Take your life in a direction that you really want.

**You're not you when you're high.** When you're high, you're not yourself. You're a different person; you can't remember simple things, you do worse in school at math and reading. You could even have mental health problems like depression, anxiety and psychotic symptoms. Marijuana can change you. Don't let marijuana get in the way of you being you.

**Knowledge is power.** When it comes to marijuana, the more you know, the better. Knowing how marijuana laws and health effects impact you and your future will equip you to make your own decisions about what you want to do with your life. It's amazing how powerful you can feel when you're well informed. After all, it's good to know.