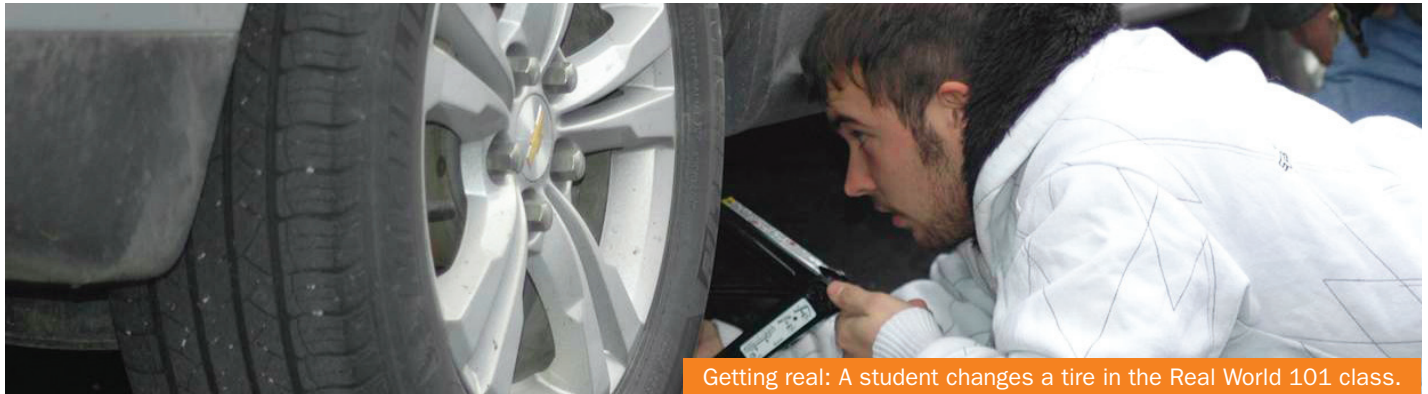




Deer Isle, Maine

# Quick Action Builds Community Support

See how a community increased demand for improving and expanding youth services by immediately launching a new approach even while developing long-range plans.



Getting real: A student changes a tire in the Real World 101 class.

**W**ant to know what a wake-up call for a community looks like? For Deer Isle, the call came on the front page of the *Portland Press Herald* on a Wednesday morning in March 2010: “10 Schools Branded as Lowest-Achieving in Maine,” declared the story, which revealed that Deer Isle-Stonington High School was on the state Department of Education’s list of “the persistently-lowest achieving schools.” In a state with over 700 public schools, that was a jarring blow to this rural coastal community of three villages, 4,000 people and one high school.

The news got worse. A youth risk behavior survey at the school found widely favorable attitudes toward drugs coupled with low commitment to school. The latter wasn’t surprising: Teens here can out-earn their teachers during one good summer hauling lobsters.

Few of these youths, however, have the skills they will need as adults – skills such as balancing a checkbook, buying a car, starting a business, caring for their families and advocating for themselves.

Local leaders realized that too many young people in the villages of Deer Isle, Stonington and Sedgwick were not ready for successful lives. Amy Vaughn set out to change that.

## Making Change with Little Cash

Vaughn runs Healthy Peninsula, a nonprofit that aims to improve the health of area residents through a holistic approach. “To really get at substance abuse, you can’t just bring in a substance abuse counselor,” she says. “We were looking for a larger model.”

**“We are looking for ways to increase our collective impact. That’s what Ready by 21 is about.”**

– Amy Vaughn, Director,  
Healthy Peninsula

The Princeton grad (Master of Divinity) found it at the University of Maine in Orono. At a youth development institute there in July 2010, Karen Pittman, CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment, shared the Ready by 21 strategies. Vaughn saw that Ready by 21 could make a difference for Deer Isle youth. Money was no object; she had none to spare.

Armed with free tools from the meeting and from [www.readyby21.org](http://www.readyby21.org), Vaughn and community organizer Kimberly Hutchinson took the first step: They invited educators, business people, concerned citizens, leaders of community organizations and students to a meeting; 80 people came.



Using images like the Ready by 21 Insulated Education Pipeline, Healthy Peninsula ignited a community conversation about the needs of local youth, and showed residents how they could partner to build better youth supports and opportunities.

A group of leaders created a Ready by 21 coalition under the management of Healthy Peninsula and supported by start-up funds from the Maine Community Foundation. About a dozen core members meet monthly to map out assets and goals for local youth, and to develop long-term strategies through focus groups (on subjects such as early childhood and career exploration). But they also wanted to take action right away to build community excitement and to help young people now. That excitement, it turns out, can be generated by such subjects as lobster licenses and small engine repair.

### Quick Action

Twice a week, students at the high school gather for Real World 101: a 50-minute life skills course taught by a revolving team of community leaders. The man who runs the island's auto dealership talked about how to buy a car. Two women who started a coffee roasting company offered insight into how to start a business. Students taught each other how to change a tire. Other speakers have covered cooking, parenting and banking.



Balanced skills: Classes include checkbook management.

Sophomore Abby Knowlton attended the banking and cooking sessions. "I'm really interested in money," she says. "I'd like to go into accounting. And I'd really like to be able to manage my own checkbook." She says the classes "definitely" provided practical lessons that she can put to use right away.

The most popular sessions, Vaughn says: "Anything to do with fishing." For example, teens who think the state should increase the number of lobster traps they're allowed to set are learning how to take their case to the regional lobster council. "We're teaching them how they can advocate for themselves," she says.

The course started in fall 2011, with the school providing the space during its "open choice" periods. The principals of the high school and both elementary schools are leaders in the Ready by 21 council, serving on the steering committee and supporting community-school partnerships. "They loved the idea of having community members come into the school," says Vaughn, who manages the course with input from the youths.

The youths aren't the only ones who benefit. "Having a program that is starting right away has given more visibility" to the overall Ready by 21 effort, Vaughn says. The local news has featured the coalition's meetings and the class.

Meanwhile, the work toward long-term changes continues, as members of the work groups gather data, forge connections and plan next steps. "Ready by 21 has been very helpful for us as a way to explain and organize our work," Vaughn says. "The messages really resonate well with our community."

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For more information, visit [www.readyby21.org](http://www.readyby21.org)