

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Rationale: "Don't Drink" is a message teenagers constantly hear but many do not listen, so we must change our approach to educating them in order to grab their attention. Because my generation is tuned into technology, my program will be web-based. This also enables it to be customized to the individual student's needs. This will send a message that the individual teen is the center of the program's focus. Most teens feel that they can handle alcohol and stand up to peer pressure and not drink. However, not only does this require the ability to understand oneself but also to have support when one needs it the most. Many teens do not possess this self awareness nor do they have the support. To meet these needs, my program consists of four services: completion of a self assessment appraisal, customized, weekly text or email messages, access to a blog, and the availability of a toll free telephone help line, 24/7.

Roll Out: My program is called, "Txt 4 Choice" (T4C). T4C would be introduced at a Pep Rally. This rationale and process to participate in T4C would be presented to the student body by celebrities such as Charlie Batch, a Steeler, or Kelly Frey, a WTAE news anchor. Their presence would create the excitement needed to catch the interest of the students in T4C. Counselors from Community Social Services agencies and representatives from the community police departments will also be in attendance and will be introduced to the student body. These professionals will provide education and guidance for T4C.

Incentive: Given that incentives encourage individuals to participate in these lifestyle programs, tickets to a high school sporting event, or a free download of music will be offered to any student enrolling in the program and completing a self assessment.

Services: Txt 4 Choice Self Assessment: This self assessment is very important to the entire program. It is a ten question survey that requests students to answer Yes or No questions such as: "I drink to be popular." This assessment would identify the individual's risks, readiness, and confidence to make changes and/or follow the recommendations. The participant would receive his results with recommendations by text messaging within 24 hours. These results would alert the student to his potential to drink or if he drinks due to emotional problems such as depression. For T4C to be successful, the participant must have a good understanding or insight into his behavior. For example, if the teen is shy in social gatherings, he may turn to alcohol to make it easier for him to socialize. The participant's results report will demonstrate this to him. He will then have the opportunity to seek advice through the blog or telephone hotline. Opening up dialogue between the teen and his peers, parental figures, blog participants and/or callers to the helpline is essential in keeping teens sober. In this example, the teen would be taught coping mechanisms to help him deal with his shyness and not turn to alcohol.

Txt 4 Choice: Text messages and emails based on the results of the individual's assessment will be sent to every student once a week offering assistance. These weekly messages would help pre-teens and teenagers not only learn the consequences of underage drinking and driving, but also provide support to them when they are challenged or tempted to drink. Students who enroll but do not complete the self assessment will also receive messages but will be encouraged to participate in the assessment. These messages will be provided by community agencies that employ experts on the subject matter.

Two types of text messages will be developed for Txt 4 Choice. The first category will deal with educating teenagers on how to deal with peer pressure. Should they find

themselves being pressured, they could either text or call the 800 number for support: (1-800-TXT-4 CHOI). Because feedback is immediate, Txt 4 Choice supports the teen when he/she needs it the most, at the time of peer pressure. The second category of text messaging will deal with educating the student to drink responsibly and not to drive "buzzed" or drunk. These text messages will deal with the issues of self-control. For example, if you are going to a party and you know there will be alcohol, be prepared. Tips will be provided to encourage the teen to plan ahead: chose a soda or water instead of alcohol when offered; change the subject of the discussion to sports or a news event if someone is insisting that you have alcohol; or just leave the party if you become uncomfortable.

Finally, another very important message that will be delivered is how to deal with emergencies. For instance, if a student sees another individual passed out from drinking or who appears to be inebriated, they must seek help for the person by either calling 911 or taking the person to the Emergency Room for treatment.

www.Txt4Choice.com: T4C will have a website with a blog. Since my high school already has a website, the blog would be inexpensive to run. This website would be accessible to students twenty-four seven. They can blog about their most recent experiences with alcohol or they can ask questions about alcohol and receive answers. Participation in the blog will be confidential.

Conclusion: Txt 4 Choice will achieve its objective because of the individualized approach based on the self assessment and the use of technology providing timely 24/7 support. Both will encourage teen participation. My roll out plan creates excitement for Txt 4 Choice. The incentives will entice teenagers to enroll. The use of text messages and blogs will appeal to this technologically savvy generation. Since Txt 4 Choice will be a co-operative effort between the community and the school district based on existing technology, it will enable the school district to deliver the message "Don't Drink" in a cost-effective manner.