

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

Amanda Bowes



My proposal to discourage teenagers from drinking and driving is really quite simple. The title, "Words to be Heard," sums it up. I believe that school districts should recruit family members of deceased victims of drunk drivers to tell their stories and possibly show pictures of their loved ones in an assembly every school year. I feel that if students could see the pain caused by drunk driving from real people in their community, it would discourage them from driving under the influence of alcohol.

To get a "Words to be Heard" program started, I would first go to the school board for approval. Once their approval is obtained, I would decide on a date to hold the event with the help of the school principal. A good time of the year to host the "Words to be Heard" assembly would be prior to the prom season. Statistics show that most underage drinking occurs in the months of April, May, and June.

The next step would be to ask people who have lost loved ones due to drinking and driving to speak at the assembly. They could start out by talking about their loved one: what their personality was like, their interests and hobbies, and possibly show a picture of them via PowerPoint or a large poster. If students see a picture of the life lost, it makes everything more real. Then the speaker could move on to discuss the details of the accident that took the victim's life. They could explain what they were doing when they got the news, what it was like driving to the hospital or morgue, and the days following the accident, including everything that the family went through. I realize this will be very difficult for the speakers; however, I truly believe that it will speak volumes to the listeners.

At this assembly we could also ask lawyers to talk. They could speak about the consequences of what happens to a drunk driver who has seriously injured or killed an innocent person. They would know best the fines, jail time, and of course, the cost associated with an accident of this magnitude. The lawyers could share their experiences with the victim's family and their rights to file a lawsuit against the drunk driver. Young people are not thinking about being sued and the prices they have to pay, both financially and spiritually, when they are consuming alcohol; therefore, this could bring reality into their minds.

Months before the "Words to be Heard" assembly, I would start a teen program. It would be called "Teen Power." It would be nice to gather as many students as possible to become involved. "Teen Power" would be a group of students dedicated to setting good examples for other students. Meetings would be held to discuss other ways to get more students involved in our group. There would be fun activities after school and on weekends to show other students that you can have a good time with friends without having alcohol involved. Of course, we will not be naïve and believe that everyone will stop drinking. This group will provide reassurance that if they are drinking, they can count on anyone in the program to give them a safe ride home, no questions asked or punishments received, only encouragement to never do it again.

Another aspect of the program would be to have a drunk driving or underage drinking incident read on a weekly or daily basis for a month on the morning announcements leading up to the assembly. This does not have to be a local incident. I believe that the story should be from anywhere in the United States so that the students understand this is a big problem, and it is felt nationally. I feel that the student group "Teen Power" could find articles relating to underage drinking and driving under the influence easily on the Internet. Students could research an article and read it over the announcements, with a different student being responsible for doing this every day. This would give the students doing the research a way to continue to spread the word about this very important cause.

To get more of the community involved, we could ask members of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) to attend one of the "Teen Power" meetings. They have been campaigning for a long time, and I believe that the student group could learn and grow from MADD's experience. The local police department and paramedics could also be speakers. As you can see, this program could be as big or as small as the group chooses.

I honestly believe that school boards and all faculty and staff would embrace this program. It is run by the students with little or no cost to the school district. This is also a program that could expand over the years. As new students join and continue to meet to discuss the program, new ideas will arise that can be implemented.

This program is by far the best way to reach young adults. It is meant to teach them what can happen through the actions of those that choose to drink and drive, and is also meant to inspire teenagers through the good work and examples of others. This program will leave a lasting impact on all the students that attend the assembly and listen to true accounts of what has happened in their own community due to underage drinking and driving.