

# “Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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## Carrie Clippard



Being close to a person active in Alcoholics Anonymous, I have heard many a strange story about the effects of alcohol on a life. I have endured firsthand accounts of broken relationships, raging tavern fights, and ridiculous drunk drives home. I am very adamant about preventing alcoholism because of my personal ties to someone who has lived with it, and I am especially passionate when the subject turns to underage alcoholism. Therefore, I would be honored to create a proposal for a program about underage drinking and drunk driving.

The purpose of this program would be to show the effects of alcoholism on the abuser and the people surrounding the person in order to discourage both pre-teens and teenagers from drinking. I would effectively get the message of "Don't Drink" across to the appropriate audience by presenting stories about the path of an underage alcoholic via the perspective of all parties affected, i.e. people from Alateen (for kids up to 16 who have either a sibling, parent, or grandparent alcoholic), Alanon (for adults who usually have either a spouse or sibling abuser), and Alcoholics Anonymous (for the abuser).

This project would first need to be coordinated by an employee in order to be school-based and professional. It could be a guidance counselor, teacher, principal, etc. who initiates or sponsors this project. That person should act as a mediator between his or her school and the three groups mentioned before (Alateen, Alanon, and AA). He or she would have to arrange for speakers from the person's area, and from there on simply act as a go-between for the school and support groups. Preferably, the abuser scheduled to speak should be the same age as the audience, so as to achieve a more

intimate connection with those listening. Also, the audience should be relatively small, about 20-30 students, to again maximize the effect of the speakers' stories.

If it is possible, the school should try to have people whose stories overlap (even if it were only two of the three who were affected by the same person, it would make a difference). However, the three people in Alateen, Alanon, and AA do not have to know one another, and each speaker can have a separate story. Also, for the purpose of addressing drinking and driving and underage drinking in general, presenting scenarios about these topics is absolutely crucial. It should be up to the mediator to find a person who would be willing to discuss drunk driving and drinking thoroughly on a personal level, while staying on subject. Media, pictures, pamphlets, items having significance to a presenter's speech, or any other sort of visual would also need to be welcomed into the presentation to help lend itself to the authenticity of the speakers' stories. Most importantly, the mediator must encourage honesty on the part of the presenters.

First up to talk to students would be the Alcoholic Anonymous member. He or she would need to go first because this person would most likely have the greatest effect on the students and would grab their attention. Once again, this person should be someone students know at the school to have the greatest effect. They should share stories, including what the worst part of their experience was, how they found help, etc. An emphasis should be placed on the lows and highs of their path, to exemplify to students that no matter the severity of their problems, a solution can always be found. This person should also introduce the other speakers and tie in how his or her own family and friends (equivalent of the Alanons and Alateens) were affected by drinking.

Next, the Alateen member would speak. This person is NOT the abuser. The purpose of this speaker would be to simply share his or her story about alcoholism and/or drunk driving and show students in-depth the effects it has on friends of the abuser. This person should emphasize that it is important for people surrounding an abuser to help that person find the assistance he or she needs.

Finally, the Alanon member would speak. This adult would talk to kids about his or her experience with alcoholism and/or drunk driving. He or she should focus on emotionally based subjects to try to convey to underage drinkers the effects that their decisions have on their families.

This meeting with the three persons affected by underage drinking would wrap up with a question and answer seminar for students who are curious about anything mentioned during each speaker's narrative. All speakers should encourage students who are too shy about asking anything in front of peers to feel free to contact them after everyone has left, or even by directing their questions through the moderator. It is very important for students to be able to reach out for help through outlets like these.

Basically, this program should encourage those who do not drink to stay away from drinking, and for those who already are drinking, this will hopefully motivate them to get help for their addiction. However, in all cases, students must take the first step in asking for help. I'll end with a very profound quote, "The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death." (Alcoholics Anonymous, The Big Book) The dangers of drinking are real, and hopefully this program will help.