

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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The program I propose has two main goals: (1) educate teenagers about the risks, dangers, and tragedies associated with alcohol abuse; and (2) show participants that you don't need to drink to have fun! I believe that the best way to get the message "Don't Drink" throughout my "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" program would be to have activities scheduled for both in and out of school, to reach out to as many students possible and get them involved as much as possible.

To begin, a student activity group with an elected leadership committee would be created to help drive this program. This group would meet periodically to help plan events both in school and out of school and brainstorm for ideas to make the program grow, improve each year, and sustain viability.

In School Activities: During school, scheduled presentations and events would be held to promote "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" Each presentation would have at least one highlighted speaker come and educate students on the risks, dangers, and detrimental effects of alcohol abuse. They would speak about their own personal experiences with alcohol abuse, how it has affected them, what it has done to them, how their life has changed, and/or the dangers and health risks associated with such behavior. Maybe a parent could come in and speak about how her child was killed by a drunk driver; a doctor could come in to describe what alcohol abuse can do to your body; or a police officer to give his perspective on what he sees as relating to alcohol abuse, especially among teens.

Each of these speakers would serve the purpose of bringing the message home in a resounding and lasting manner. Teenagers can read newspaper articles or textbook

sections about the health risks of alcohol, the dangers of underage drinking, drunk driving and their victims, etc until the cows come home. More often than not, the same message that is sought to be delivered via paper is much more effective when people get to see and hear from a real, living person who speaks about these experiences. It is at that point that the message "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" will truly take light. Materials will be distributed at these in-school events with time provided to answer questions. Overall the goal is to deliver the message sternly but lighthearted enough to reach out to as many teenagers as possible.

Other activities to be held in school to get the student community involved include a t-shirt design contest. We could ask for submissions from the student body for a design depicting the message "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" The student activity group would narrow down submissions into finalists, and then allow the entire student body to vote on a winner. The winner would receive some sort of prize, and t-shirts would be distributed during the next program activity. In addition, the student activity group would plan fundraising events to raise money to support the program, especially the out-of-school events.

Such fundraising activities would include: a bake sale of goods donated by students or teachers; auction events of various items donated by students, local businesses and other individuals or sources from the community; a dance-a-thon; penny wars between grade levels, and so on. All of this student involvement will serve to keep the program and its message relevant for as many teenagers as possible, since typically the more ownership an individual has, the more important, significant, and enduring the message will be.

Out of School Activities: To supplement the scheduled speaking engagements and other in-school events, it is important to also have out-of-school activities to remind teenagers that you don't need to drink to have fun and enjoy life! A portion of the costs of these activities will be paid for using money generated from fundraising efforts in order to make them more affordable for as many students as possible. Ideas for

out-of-school activities include, but are not limited to: movie night with popcorn in the school gymnasium, weekend ski trips, tailgating before home football games, dance parties, organized team sporting events, after school pizza parties, and so on.

All of these after school or out-of-school events would be rampant with the message "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" and at each event, buttons, pamphlets, t-shirts, key chains or other items would be given out to those who attend. In addition, the main message would be augmented with a reminder that you don't need alcohol to have fun! In part, peer pressure is a driving force behind underage drinking, and unfortunately too many teenagers and pre-teens are filled with the incorrect notion that it is 'cool' to drink alcohol, and it is the 'popular' thing to do to have fun.

This message is horribly wrong and detrimental on so many levels, and therefore having fun, alcohol-free events such as weekend ski trips or after school dances would help drive home the program's message of "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" All of a sudden, dedication to a non-alcoholic lifestyle would become the 'cool' thing to do!

Finally, what would be great is if different area high schools or middle schools all established individual "Don't Drink, Enjoy Life!" school programs, and from time to time scheduled a multi-school event, like a dance or semi-formal. These would be exciting events for students to meet other students around the area from different schools, all dedicated to the message of promoting non-alcoholic teen life, educating students about the adverse effects and consequences of alcohol abuse and underage drinking, and reminding students of all ages that fun certainly does not have to come with alcohol nor does it need alcohol to exist.