

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

John B. Pearson



Objectives:

- To educate preteen and teenage students
- about alcohol use and related consequences
- To educate parents of teens and communities
- about alcohol use and related consequences

Due to media sources and advances in technology, today's youth have exposure to the outside world like never before. As a result, kids in general tend to "grow up" at younger ages. Along with the given pressures of growing up, they are both consciously and subconsciously pressured into activities that in the past have been reserved for older people. Unfortunately, one of those activities is alcohol consumption.

The following is a proposal for a school-based program that would teach students about the negative aspects of alcohol use. The main goal of this program is to educate and leave a lasting impression. This lasting impression would be one that a person would never forget, just like the lyrics to a good product jingle.

Step #1 Building Confidence

Throughout our lives we need to be taught right from wrong so that we can make intelligent, responsible choices. In order to have good choice making skills we need to have confidence.

This alcohol awareness program would begin in the middle school grades. The main emphasis would focus on building confidence. Educators of all subjects would be instructed to provide individual positive feedback to students as much as possible. Special projects could be developed that would allow for opportunities to give positive

feedback. The feedback would in turn provide confidence. Just like a sports team, academic teamwork opportunities would also help to build confidence. Academic teamwork could be interjected in all school subjects.

The program would also include parent involvement. Teachers and parents would interact and develop ideas and activities that are used at home to promote confidence. Parents would be asked to require simple responsibilities of their children and encouraged to remember to say, "Job well done." A guide sheet for parents could be utilized. Activities as simple as baking cookies, washing the car or helping to mow the yard could promote positive feedback.

Community volunteer organizations could also be used to build confidence. There are many organizations that can use extra hands. A requirement for students at some point during the middle school years would call for students to perform several hours of volunteer work per year. In addition to building confidence, volunteer work teaches helping and giving.

Along with building confidence, students would be taught to make good choices during the middle school years. As part of the "good choice" curriculum, education about alcohol-related problems would be discussed. Outside authority figures such as police officers or someone from a health organization could speak. Age appropriate material would be important.

Step #2: Education Saturation

At the high school level, schools could devote a two- or three-day total saturation experience for the entire student body.

Grades 9 and 10 would be saturated with age-appropriate lectures. Featured speakers might include: state highway patrol officers, first responders, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, an alcohol-related accident victim, or an emergency room physician.

Health educators would teach about health-related consequences as well as social and family consequences. Parents would be asked to review reading material that relates to alcohol consumption and responsibility with their children.

Grades 11 and 12 would be saturated with lectures and possibly field trips. The key word here is saturation. The message would be clear that drinking alcohol irresponsibly is a negative. Lectures might include: a member of Alcoholics Anonymous to talk about their struggles, a parent or sibling who has lost a loved one to a drunk driver, a teenager who harmed or killed someone while driving drunk, legal counsel, or a mortician. Field trips might include a visit to a jail, an emergency room, a morgue, or a courtroom.

Other activities would include the use of fatal vision goggles with attempts to walk and drive a golf cart or an appropriate vehicle. The viewing of shock films, particularly apology videos of teens that have harmed or killed someone while driving drunk, could be a good addition to learning.

Kids love technology. Hold a competition among area schools to create effective television commercials or billboards that would reinforce the alcohol issues. This competition could go national. As extra motivation, the winning entries could reward students/the schools in some way.

As a graduation requirement, seniors would need to complete a senior project about alcohol-related consequences. Ideas for these projects might include: interviews with those who have been affected by alcohol in some way, research on social implications of alcohol use, or alcohol and the long-term effects on the human body. These projects would be presented to educators and then some chosen for an entire assembly presented to the student body by the seniors.

Step #3 Community Awareness Saturation

Awareness Week – get communities involved. The idea would be to sensitize as many people as possible to this serious issue. Saturate communities with articles on alcohol consumption and related consequences. Work with local newspapers and request that a

series of articles be printed. Ask local television stations if short commercials could be played, perhaps several that students created. Plaster the schools with photographs of automobiles that were involved in alcohol-related accidents.

Ideally, an awareness program should be implemented nationwide and become a mandatory part of the curriculum for every school in the United States.