

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Today's pre-teens and teenagers are surrounded by negative influences. These bad influences come at them from many directions and in different forms and at different times from within their own households. Today's world, good or bad, is up front and in the faces of children of all ages. Violence, destruction and loss of human life are vividly portrayed in music, movies, television and on the internet. Are children and teens being tainted and hardened by what they see and are exposed to on a daily basis? How many children today have a parent or family member who is an alcoholic or a substance abuser? With all of this in mind, a program to prohibit drinking and driving that truly reaches pre-teens and teenagers has to be as shocking and vivid as today's world can be to them.

My program would consist of a series of at school assemblies. Starting early in elementary school general alcohol education is fine for this age group. However, into middle and high school the presentations need to be intense, poignant, and distressing to make an impression that will be held and burned in these students' memories when they are faced with making an alcohol-related decision for themselves.

Speakers for these presentations should include the following representatives:

- A person who has been arrested for a driving under the influence violation but has not been imprisoned. This person can share how this type of an arrest can affect your life. This speaker would talk about embarrassment and inconvenience this type of violation has caused them with having to find an alternative way of transportation because of their driver's license suspension, the expense of the fines, the humiliation of explaining to friends and family about the arrest, attending DUI School, and finding time to do community service.

- A person who has spent time in jail for a DUI violation. This person can take this offense to a whole new level for the audience. Now your employer and employment are involved and at risk. How are you regarded by family, friends, community and employers once you are an ex-convict? What is it like being imprisoned? Visual tools would be introduced at this point on a huge screen showing the living quarters and fellow inmates that you would be in contact with along with as many other unpleasant pictures that can be produced about prison life (i.e. food, shower facilities, beat up and injured inmates, weapons, etc.).
- A person who has taken a life due to a drunk driving accident and has immense remorse. This person could currently be an inmate and can come to the students via video or could have served their time and been released from prison. This presentation should include photographs of the accident along with any other materials that can be produced including newspaper articles, television footage, courtroom transcripts, etc. Anything that can show graphically how this person's life and the lives of their loved ones have been dramatically changed due to this one bad decision to drive while under the influence of alcohol.
- Emergency Response Personnel including paramedics, firemen, and police officers who are great speakers and can take a child back to an accident scene through their words and descriptions of what they see and experience at an accident site. Visual aids would be included in these presentations, including blood splattered photographs, people in distress, and the Jaws of Life cutting a person from a mangled automobile. As distressing as this would be to an audience of students, it would leave a big impression about the reality of such a tragedy.
- Survivors who were victims of a drunk driver would be great speakers to describe how their lives were changed by someone getting behind the wheel after drinking. Again, accident photographs and before and after pictures of the person if they sustained scaring or disfigurement would be shown. Even if you could not get a survivor to come and speak, displaying before and after photographs of people seriously injured in a drunk driving accident would leave an unforgettable visual impression on the audience.
- Family members of drunk driving accident victims whose loved ones' lives were taken from them prematurely. How would you feel if you were the one responsible for causing such a tragedy and living each and every day of your life knowing you are responsible for this family's heartbreak?
- Another way to impact an audience would be to have the auditorium dark and play only the audio portion available from an accident scene. At the end of the tape, explain the details of what they just heard and experienced.

- Possibly one of the last program sessions could be held without any words spoken. How moved would an audience be when they were expecting a lecture and instead there was only inspirational music playing as photographs displayed on a large screen of pictures of people whose lives were taken by a drunk driver showing their year of birth and year of death or age at the time of death?

As you can see from the speaker sequence, this program would start out with a small burn then intensify with each new session. To keep the momentum of the program, there should not be a large time period between each session. Also, because of the graphic content of the program, parental permission may need to be secured for the student to attend. If the responses to this program are students being sickened to their stomachs, brought to tears or if they lose of sleep due to the distressing nature of the content, then the program is a success!

Much time, preparation and research will be needed to put together a program such as this with effective speakers, visual graphics, and parental approval. Once complete, the program can be toured through multiple school districts and will be more instrumental than any mediocre program that students sleep through or use to catch up on their homework.