

# “Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Without a doubt, a significant change is needed in how young drivers are educated about the dangers of driving under the influence. While most methods of educating teenagers about DUI present factual information, these traditional approaches to teaching young drivers usually involve lengthy lectures from teachers or parents, or videos on DUI that are many years old and do little to show the real consequences of DUI. A dry lecture from somebody several years older than a teenager is not likely to deliver the DUI message. I believe that repeating these methods year after year has actually created apathy in the target audience of young drivers to such a degree that there has been an increase in the DUI death toll. I believe higher DUI rates among teenagers may stem from ineffective teaching methods. I believe my proposal for a new DUI education program will be more effective in educating young drivers and preventing DUI-related accidents.

Last year, PennDOT began a new program called "Pullayouee" with the purpose of persuading young drivers to go the complete opposite direction, (i.e. make a u-turn) from choosing to drink and drive. I was asked by a PennDOT safety press officer who is a family friend to serve as a teenage spokesman for the program in the Altoona area. As spokesman, I spoke at a news conference and gave an interview for WRTA radio to promote the program. With several of my friends, I saw firsthand the quality of the program's approach to teen drivers and the topic of driving under the influence. This new program gave me DUI information, such as statistics and local accident rate information that I had never seen before in any health or driver's education classes, where educating teenagers about issues like DUI is a chief priority. I was also

impressed as I learned about the new methods being used by the program, including a DUI simulation, something else I have never seen before. In addition, the "Pullayouee" campaign makes a significant effort to reach teen drivers outside the classroom. The program sends advisors to school events like football games or assemblies to stage parties where students are given free food and /or t-shirts and wristbands, all of which are conducive to attracting the interest of teen drivers. While at these events, students are also able to see pictures and hear accounts of actual teenage DUI accidents. This approach is likely to attract teenagers, while giving them the chance to see what can actually happen to teenagers like them who made the choice to drink and drive. By engaging in this type of approach to peer education, the PennDOT "Pullayouee" campaign reaches out to students in ways that they are not likely to have experienced before. These teen drivers will see something that is relevant and interesting to them. The "Pullayouee" campaign seeks to better educate teen drivers by focusing on what matters to them.

I believe that the Law Offices of Edgar Snyder should support and expand the "Pullayouee" campaign with funding that would enable PennDOT to present symposia for high school students throughout the state. Presented in a format similar to a career fair, these symposia could include information booths from hospitals, fire departments, law firms, police departments, and other organization which deal first-hand with the effects of DUI. In addition, these symposia could feature keynote speakers such as police officers, accident survivors, a drug and alcohol counselor, or perhaps an accident lawyer, all of whom have knowledge of DUI and its impact on teenagers. By participating in this new and unconventional method of DUI education, I am confident more teenagers would acquire new information (as I did) to help steer them away from the choice of drinking and driving. I am confident that my proposal will be both interesting for teenagers and effective in keeping them from drinking and driving.

While the main topic of concern for the symposia I propose would be DUI, other subtopics could also be presented, including the dangers of driving too fast, using a cell phone, or eating, or being distracted by loud music or friends while driving. All of these

activities are contributing factors in many accidents involving teenage drivers. This approach would provide teenagers with a variety of safety lessons for driving, presented in a manner more likely to grab and hold their attention. With my proposal, I am confident that there will be a decrease in teenage accidents as teenagers would have newfound knowledge to protect themselves and others from the dangers of DUI.

On a personal note, my family has been especially adamant about educating me about DUI after my cousin was killed last year by a drunk driver. While my cousin Becky Cohn was driving home from work, a drunk driver crossed the divided highway, and into her path. Trying to avoid the crash with the drunk driver, my cousin ran off the road, breaking through the guard rail and hitting a tree. She was killed on impact. While Becky was not killed by her own drinking and driving, she became a DUI statistic nonetheless.

Since then, my parents have been adamant about educating me on the topic of drinking and driving and being cautious while driving at night when drunk drivers are more likely to be on the road. I am very thankful for their concern, even though sometimes their repetition of topic is irritating. I am also thankful for your firm's concerns for teen drivers advertised in its commercials. These advertisements provide statistics, realistic images of accidents, and personal messages.

When it comes to the DUI message, many of today's teens have the attitude that they have seen it all and heard it all before. DUI education methods need to be updated to reach teenagers in new effective ways. I suggest the law firm of Edgar Snyder & Associates partner with PennDOT's Pullayouee campaign, enabling them to expand this program that gets the DUI message across to teenagers in new, effective ways.