

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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In order to demonstrate a worthwhile presentation to educate teenagers and pre-teens about the truths of drunk driving and underage drinking, I feel that a three phase program would be most effective. The program would last the duration of a school day and the entire student body would be brought together for the presentation. The first phase would be the education portion.

Following would be the practical application and reward. And the final piece of the program would be the wrap-up and include reminders throughout the remainder of the year. Through enjoyable yet educational demonstrations, informative speakers, and regular reminders, students will be able to efficiently and completely comprehend the dangers of harmful alcohol related decisions.

The first phase of the program would be called "Wake-Up." Speakers would come in from various organizations in the community and share how underage drinking as well as drunk driving affects their specific role in the community. The students would respond positively to true real life stories. The main reason that students participate in illegal drinking activities is to experiment with what will happen. If they are educated by the use of real stories and passionate people, their desire to explore the consequences will be diminished. When thinking "advocates for alcohol education" groups that come to mind are the local police department, the Emergency Medical Department, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Each of these organizations could share a different perspective on the consequences of underage consumption of alcohol, drunk driving, and the truly devastating effects that both can have on a community. The Police Department would share the legal consequences and how the prosecution of underage

people is dealt with. The Emergency Department could speak about the tremendous strain that underage drinking and drunk driving has on their system, especially in college towns. The EMTs are very aware of how devastating and brutal the scenes of drunk driving accidents are. They could add additional statistical information that is prevalent to the relation between underage drinking and the burden it places on the local emergency response departments. Furthermore, MADD would be effective in targeting the emotions of the students. Each of the MADD mothers has a first-hand story of how alcohol related deaths have affected their families and loved ones. The ability to share true stories that plainly illustrate what can happen if one chooses to participate in destructive drinking can be the most powerful information for a young person to hear. Regardless of personal mindset, one is going to have an emotional response to hearing the tragic stories that the mothers, emergency medical professionals, and police officers have shared. The students need to be shown that the scenarios printed in textbooks about drunk driving actually do happen. And more importantly, that they can happen in their own hometowns or even to someone they love. The speakers will allow students to begin sensing their emotions about the topic, which will later allow them to reflect freely on their thoughts.

After the speakers finish their presentations, the students would have the opportunity to watch a mock accident. The accident would involve their peers, real police officers, real cars, real body bags, and the real truth about drunk driving. The mock accident would be a realistic display of what could happen should they chose to participate in underage drinking and driving. The students involved in the drunk accident would create a story line, for example, the evening following the school's senior prom. This would be a relatable topic for the observers because it is a time when students are prone to drink. The use of fellow classmates and the mock death forces students to think about the consequences of their actions. Afterwards, the students would have time to reflect on what they have just seen and heard. The students would participate in an individual or small group activity that included a questionnaire (see attached) on their thoughts and feelings on the issue. The opportunity for reflection upon prior presentations will create

a learning environment. While it is important that students learn about the topic, it is more vital that they comprehend the information. The use of a short list of questions pertaining to the topic forces the students to think twice about the inclusive message of the event.

The final phase of the program would focus on the months following the presentation. While speakers and activities can leave lasting effects on the students, they will eventually fade. The student body could easily be reminded of the truths about drunk driving and underage drinking with a weekly poster or announcement that outlined a specific part of the larger presentation they had already seen. For example, packages of Smarties could be passed out by the administration with the attached message, "Party like a Smarty," with the intended message that the students think about their actions and how they could affect others. The campaign designed to specifically target underage drinking and drunk driving could also target other destructive decisions by using the general statement reminding students to think about their actions. This would create more awareness and encouragement to the students to reflect on what they have learned and its concern to their lives. Once every grading period, four times a year, students from SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) or any other student group could perform a small skit or plan an event. These mini-events would act as a supplement for the larger presentation that was demonstrated at the beginning of the year. See attached for an example of a mini-presentation. Continuing education that promotes healthy choices would provide a legacy for the program. Frequent reminders can be efficient in stating the positive ideas introduced by this program.

I know first-hand how difficult it is to convince teenagers that the consequences of drunk driving and underage drinking are true and devastating. However, I believe that a three step process that focuses on education, application and follow up, students will be better informed about the truths of underage drinking. With a full understanding of the issues related to the topic as well as an investigation deep into the root of the problem, students will be more prepared to combat the pressure to drink. The use of valid examples and accurate portrayals will leave a lasting impression. A relatable education

is the basis of the decision making process. With personal cases, genuine information and reinforcement the program will prove to be successful in deterring youth from making destructive decisions involving alcohol.