

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Drunk Driving: For REAL

The world can be a dangerous place. Stories of murders, drug overdoses, and lethal cancers have become commonplace, and one cannot venture out at night without the threat of being mugged. With so many looming dangers, it may surprise you that the leading cause of death among individuals ages 15-20 last year was motor vehicle crashes. Perhaps even more startling is that almost a third of these crashes could have easily been prevented. They were caused by underage drinkers who were behind the wheel when they were impaired. With such shocking statistics, drunk driving can certainly be considered an epidemic among today's youth. If such habits are not broken when an individual is young and most impressionable, they will remain a threat to themselves and those around them for a lifetime. It's a risk we can't afford to take.

In recent years, lawmakers and educators have recognized teen drinking to be an ever-increasing problem and have established programs to educate students about its effects. Statistics show, however, that these programs have been largely ineffective thus far. Despite instructing children from an early age that "drinking is bad" and that "you shouldn't drink and drive," the message has failed to resonate with a large portion of students. Why has this happened? The answer is simple: these programs, though good and well-intended, are not taken seriously by the student or the teacher. The students are not actively engaged in the material and there is very little thought involved. Students sleep through monotonous videos and skim health books for worksheet

answers. This mechanical approach to teaching is merely a waste of time and hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

Since the dawn of time, humans have had a certain degree of rebelliousness. For example, God told Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit. So, what did she do? She ate the forbidden fruit in defiance. During adolescence, this rebelliousness is at an all time high. This is not to say that all teens wish to disobey their superiors, but a good many do. This is especially true for young adults who have already begun the practice of underage drinking. They're already breaking the law and most likely aren't afraid to break another. Due to this distinct trait, young adults need to have a different kind of drunk driving program. They cannot be treated as if they are children. If you simply tell them, "do not drink and drive," it will make it all the more appealing. It is not enough to tell them not to drink and drive, you must show them.

The program that I have proposed to tackle the underage drunken driving epidemic is entitled "Drunk Driving: For REAL." The word "real" is an acronym for real-world, experiences, and lesions. Drunk Driving: For REAL is a new-age anti-drunken driving initiative that rejects the outdated teaching techniques of its predecessors. Gone are the days of dated videos and childish fill in the blank study guides. For REAL fully engages the student through a variety of writing and visual exercises in combination with the latest in simulation technology. Rather than trying to influence the brain through logic, For REAL focuses on the heart and emotional impact. The goal is to illustrate to the student not just how drunk driving can affect them, but how it can potentially impact others around them as well. This revolutionary program is sure to leave a lasting impression, one that will remain vivid long after the final test is graded.

The first way in which For REAL engages the student is through writing. Writing is a vital skill for all students to acquire in the learning process. By replacing guided worksheets with open response prompts, students will not only learn more, but they will remember it. The first writing assignment is the knowledge assessment. On the first day of class, before any instruction is given, the teacher will give each student a piece of paper and

instruct them to state their knowledge of the effects of drunk driving. The teacher will then collect the assignments and read the responses aloud, beginning a class discussion. Students will be posed the exact same question again on the final day of class. They will then be able to compare both responses and assess what they've learned. The second assignment will be given late in the course. For the "imagine if" assignment, teachers will fill a hat with slips of paper describing a variety of fictitious situations involving drunk driving such as: "imagine if you were killed in a drunk driving accident" or "imagine if you killed a five year old girl as she was crossing the street because you were driving impaired." The student would then write a letter to the surviving person(s) and express their sympathy. This exercise would force the student to view their actions through the eyes of another.

In addition to the above exercises, For REAL places a great deal of emphasis on verbal interaction. All lessons are given orally by the instructor rather than through the textbook or videos. There are minimum participation requirements that all students must fulfill. Law enforcement officials, injury lawyers, and individuals who have personally been affected by a drunk driver would also be brought in to contribute to the discussions. Such guests would allow the students to see the consequences they could face and the havoc it would create for those closest to them.

The final component of For REAL is arguably the most impactful. The total sensory exercise incorporates the use of visual simulators to experience what it's like to actually drive under the influence of alcohol. Each student is given an opportunity to use the machine and must share their experience with their classmates. This is sure to give students a wakeup call as to just how difficult and daunting the task can be.

The goal of For REAL is not to bore the student with statistical information and stern heading. It is to make them aware of the "total picture" – how their actions affect them as well as those around them.

The student created a For REAL brochure to go along with her essay.