

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Not Another Teenage Statistic

We hear the stories. We read the charts. We know the people. We understand the overwhelming statistics. What has become common knowledge to teenagers is that teenage alcohol abuse is on the rise – but what will make them care? My program, Not Another Teenage Statistic, is an opportunity to allow teenagers to live above the influence, to live above the statistics.

As a form of unity, teenagers will receive black shirts with one white statistic on the front. It is important that the statistics pertain to the high school level teenager. The 5 statistics will be as follows:

- Three out of every four students (75%) have consumed alcohol (more than just a few sips) by the end of high school.
- During the last 30 days, 28.5% of high school students nationwide have ridden one or more times in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol.
- 43% had at least one drink of alcohol on or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- Every day, on average, 11,318 American youth (12 to 20 years of age) try alcohol for the first time.
- More than 1,700 college students in the U.S. are killed each year – about 4.65 a day – as a result of alcohol-related injuries.

With the staggering statistics on the front, the back will simply read "Not Another Teenage Statistic." It will be encouraged that every Friday will be "Figure Friday" and

every Saturday will be "Statistic Saturday" where students, and teenagers alike, wear their shirts to represent living above the influence of the weekend parties, a time where a majority of underage drinking occurs.

While t-shirts are a good way to unify groups of people, what I hope this program can truly offer is an alternative to the partying weekends. These "Sober Weekend Retreats" would offer teenagers a place to go and be with other teenagers who want to live above the pressures to drink. Everything from Bon Fire Socials, where teenagers can gather around camp fires roasting marshmallows, to Guitar Hero Meltdown, where teenagers can let loose, playing video games like the popular Guitar Hero, and of course Mystery Movie Mania, where teenagers can interact with movies to work through mysteries. By offering places to go, and people to be around, it will not only bring together people who feel the same way towards drinking, but also allow a pressure-free zone where teenagers can come whenever they feel they need to get away from the chaos of the party scene.

Every health class I have been in has taken a hands-off approach to teaching about the dangers of drinking. I think it is important that Not Another Teenage Statistic take a personal approach when dealing with the drinking issue of our generation. The movies and films that have been shared in my classroom over the years may be real-life stories, but real-life stories I have not and may never meet. There are stories that exist close to families and teenagers in every school district. I think it would be important to have personal interviews and stories from the people who have dealt with this problem. Whether young or old, students will listen if they know that there is someone to answer their questions, comfort their concerns, or even just because they know the person who is telling the story.

I hope that Not Another Teenage Statistic can reach out to all sides of the drinking issue, including addiction, dependency, rehabilitation, legal consequences, illness/death, as well as the social aspect of it all. By bringing in people who have and can admit to addiction, who have suffered from alcohol dependency, who have entered

rehabilitation centers, who have gone to prison for alcohol-related reasons, who have lost their licenses, who have suffered cirrhosis, who have lost someone from alcohol, who have been excluded from job opportunities, family reunions, and their children's lives – this is what teenagers need to hear, and they need to hear it from the people who have gone through it.

School surveys will help to put the drinking problem of teenagers into perspective. Honest surveys, distributed by students to students, will allow true data to be collected. Questions on the survey would include:

1. How often do you drink?
2. How many times have you been intoxicated?
3. How many times have you driven under the influence of one or more drinks?
4. Are you allowed to drink alcohol in your home?

These questions will make it possible for teenagers to truly understand how much drinking is actually taking place, and where it is taking place. The school-wide statistics will be entered into a presentation, including student input, videos, and even pictures that will allow teenagers to reflect not only on their peers, but on themselves. A school cannot admit they have a problem until they realize it is a problem. At the end of the presentation, the idea of "Don't Drink" will be in the back of their heads.

More than ever before, teenagers need a way out of the pressures of high school. As a senior, I know more people who spend their weekends blacking out at parties than who don't. I know more students who come to school hung-over than I know students who have studied for an exam. In the backwards world that is high school, teenagers need a helping hand to just say no to drinking. If your friends do it, you want to do it. If your peers do it, you want to do it. If your crushes do it, you want to do it. If your parents allow you, you want to do it. Every aspect of the teenager's life has to be taken into consideration. Stop the pressure, stop the drinking. It only takes one person one night to make one less statistic.

