

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Peers Educating Against Drinking (PEAD)

As a student who has moved numerous times, I have seen more than my fair share of anti-drinking and anti-drunk driving campaigns. I remember that most of these programs bombarded students with statistics or told grisly stories that were meant to shock students into not engaging in risky or destructive behaviors.

In the end, though, the message faded. The many stories I had heard blurred together and I could no longer recall the faces of the school administrators who stood in the front of the room, passionately trying to prevent the pre-teens and teenagers from going down the wrong path.

Furthermore, despite these enthusiastic efforts, the cold numbers remain largely unchanged: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports, "motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of young deaths, aged 15-20 years." Moreover, 12.8% of all fatal traffic crashes are alcohol-related, and 40% of that number involves teens driving while drinking alcohol. 2005 Monitoring the Future reports, "three out of every four students have consumed alcohol by the end of high school." Despite the many programs available to schools, many teenagers are still engaging in underage drinking and drunk driving.

Blending my personal experiences and facts I found while combing though research, I developed a program called Peers Educating Against Drinking (PEAD). Its objectives are as follows:

- to effectively educate students about the reality of the problems of underage drinking and drunk driving
- to foster a peer-to-peer connection so that the message will leave a lasting impression on students' hearts and minds

PEAD is organized around a simple idea: peer speakers. Instead of a warning coming out of the mouth of a school administrator, faculty member, or parent, students will listen to someone around their age who has suffered through the consequences resulting from alcohol abuse and/or drunk driving. What makes PEAD unique is that each PEAD event will involve only one peer speaker. Thus the experience will be personal and free of distractions for the student audience. It will also take place in the environment that the peer speaker is in, such as a rehabilitation center, a jail, or a juvenile detention center in order to make the situation as real as possible for the students who are attending the program.

Any school across the country could easily implement this program, as long as it acquires cooperation from the state and/or federal government. Here are the step-by-step instructions for PEAD:

1. Locate a local juvenile detention center, jail, or rehabilitation center near the school. Find as many teenage offenders as possible who were sentenced or committed due to consequences related to underage drinking and drunk driving.
2. Ask the state/federal government or administration running the rehabilitation center to cooperate with PEAD by creating an incentive for teenage offenders to volunteer as a peer speaker for PEAD. These incentives could include longer visitor hours, reduction in sentence, or certain privileges.
3. PEAD organizers meet with the volunteer peer speakers and tell them what the program is about. PEAD Organizers should also help peer speakers organize their personal stories.
4. At the school, PEAD organizers split up the student participants into groups of thirty. The poster enclosed could be used to advertise the event. If there are

enough peer speakers (one speaker to each group of thirty students), all students could participate on the same day. If not, peer speakers could host multiple events at different times so that each group has an opportunity to participate. The important thing is that each peer speaker speaks to a smaller audience of about thirty students at one time so that the peer speaker's story is personal.

5. On the date(s) of the event, one PEAD organizer (a parent, student, school administrator, or teacher) leads each group of thirty students on a field trip to the juvenile detention center, jail, or rehabilitation center where their peer speaker resides. At this point, if possible, the PEAD organizer should give the group a tour of the building so that the students can absorb the environment.
6. Each group of thirty is taken into separate rooms and asked to sit down. If possible, the chairs should be arranged so that each person can see the peer speaker as he/she is talking. The PEAD organizer will go to the front of the room and say the following: "Hello guys. My name is _____. I am here today to introduce our peer speaker. You have all probably been to anti-drinking events before. But PEAD wants this experience to be different for you. Instead of throwing empty statistics at you, we are going to let someone simply tell their story. Hopefully being in this environment will make the situation of our peer speaker more of a reality for you. Teenagers have a tendency to be risky and think they do not have to face the consequences associated with risks. But this belief is wrong: our speaker is someone just like you who is paying dearly for disregarding the consequences of his/her actions. Please give him/her your full attention and respect."
7. When the speaker comes in, he/she should sit so that they are the same level as the audience and can connect to them in a more personal manner. Let the peer speaker tell his/her story without interruption. Seeing a real person behind the story and being in the same environment as him/her will help the audience understand the reality of the consequences associated with underage drinking

and drunk driving. After the peer speaker is done speaking, the PEAD organizer should let the audience ask questions. After all questions are answered, all students should return to school.

I believe PEAD would be more effective than many conventional programs because a personal message without any distractions will stick to students' hearts and minds. Being in the environment and hearing one person's story firsthand makes the consequences of underage drinking and drunk driving a poignant reality for the pre-teen and teenager participants of PEAD.

The student created a poster/flyer to accompany her essay.