



Youth Networking Newsletter

MADD Youth In Action Training: Working to Reduce the Availability of Alcohol to Minors

New Canaan (March 7, 2009)- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Connecticut and the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council and the New Canaan Coalition, joined forces on Saturday March 7th to reduce underage drinking in Fairfield County. The group of 35 took part in a *Youth In Action* Training that is based on programs aimed at reducing the social and retail availability of alcohol to minors. The event was held at the New Canaan Outback Teen Center from 10 AM to 2 PM. A second session was held at the Chester Addison Center in Stamford on March 26th to reach more teens.

Youth In Action is a national program of youth-led, community-based teams that

work toward changing the social climate that suggests underage drinking is acceptable for those under the minimum drinking age of 21. During the training the participants planned projects that work in collaboration with local liquor retailers and law enforcement to keep alcohol out of the hands of youth.

"The students, police officers and coalition members are all very motivated and there is no doubt that they will be doing great things in their communities to prevent underage drinking" says Iannucci. "Their efforts will make their communities a safer place to live."

On behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, we would like to thank the

Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council and the New Canaan Coalition, along with all those who participated for their work and support towards MADD's mission to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime and prevent underage drinking,

For more information about MADD's *Youth In Action* program, please contact Lauren Iannucci at the MADD Connecticut Office (203) 234-6521.

For more information on the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council or the New Canaan Coalition, please contact Amy Badini Youth Liaison at (203)253-2160.

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Special points of interest:

- ◆ It's all about doing what you love - without alcohol. **Life at its best** doesn't shame, blame or lecture. It supports youth who choose not to drink and assures them that they are making the right choice. Visit www.addnothing.org to learn more.
- ◆ Each year, an estimated 5,000 people under the age of 21 dies from alcohol related injuries. Alcohol is a factor in about 4 out of every 10 deaths from car crashes, drownings, burns, falls and other unintentional injuries.

Faces Working in the Region



Darien

We at The Depot, first heard about SADD from Janice Marzano, Program Director at the teen center. This group stands for "Students Against Destructive Decisions." When I heard about SADD I was very eager to join this group along with many other people who heard about it. We have a

strong group that is very willing to help our community. During our first SADD meetings, led by President Kenny Weiss, we knew that we really wanted to get our message out to the student body as quickly as possible. We soon came to the conclusion that we should try to have "SADD Week" at our high school. The administration was very pleased to see that some students in the school were trying to make a difference in the student body.

SADD's mission:
To provide students with the best prevention tools possible to deal with the issues of underage drinking, other drug use, impaired driving and other destructive decisions.
For more information about SADD, please visit their website at www.sadd.org

During this week we put posters up all around the school using statistics we found off the SADD website along with many other facts we wanted the students to know about how bad the consequences were to making bad decisions like under-

age drinking, driving under the influence or not wearing your seatbelt. At the end of the week we also had a huge surprise for the school and put a totaled car in the court yard of our school and put phrases like "Drunk Driving Kills" and "Your Future Car?"

Even though some students in our school weren't able to accept some of the facts that they read the majority of

the students in the school really got the message and thought the week had an excellent impact on our school. The administration thought our chapter did an excellent job in what we did during the week and thought we had made a real impact. I, along with the other members in the group, thought this was a great week for the school and thought every one was able to learn something.

*~Tyler Corcoran, Sophomore
Darien High School*



Greenwich

Adults always seem to be concerned about ensuring that the children in their communities are hearing "positive messages." From teaching children how to share in elementary school, to cautioning young adults about the potential dangers of campus life, students are continuously bombarded with instructional "lessons." But positive messages don't always need to come from an adult's lesson. On March 25th, 2009,

the Student Government representatives of Greenwich High School were certainly given a positive message, but it was presented in a fashion that truly hit home for them and had a real impact on their thinking.

Outreach Club of Greenwich High School hosted a "Youth Leadership Breakfast, for which Nick Leibowitz from Mother's Against Drunk Driving came and spoke to the mass of nearly 300 students. He told his story, and expressed his compassion and emotion about his life and his past. The fact that his story was so



real and so recent, it really gripped the students and kept their attention.

We assume that these positive messages have an impact on young people's ideas and future motives in life, but Outreach was actually able to measure the success of their Youth Leadership Breakfast in terms of this impact. Students completed a survey, and after hearing Nick's story, students stated that they were less likely to consume alcohol, and especially less likely to operate a vehicle after consuming alcohol. The impact and success of this presentation

was tangible, and students reinforced their new thoughts through writing down their intentions on the survey.

But the positive message did not only reach the nearly 300 students in attendance, but rather, it reached the whole school. The Student Government representatives took the message back to their homerooms, and spread Nick's story to the entire school. Now every student in the high school has heard this story, and has been impacted by its message. Positive messages can come in many forms, but for the students of Greenwich High School, this peer-to-peer sharing of Nick's story has had a truly valuable impact

*~JJ Mijck, Senior
Greenwich High School*

Other Successful Youth Events & Projects in Greenwich Include :

- Wiffle Ball Tournament with the Police
- Greenwich Teen Connections Directory at www.unitedway-greenwich.com
- Teen Participants in the Legislative Breakfast

For more information, please contact Jenny Byxbee, Greenwich Youth Services Coordinator. Email: jbyxbee@unitedway-greenwich.com

New Canaan

Teens Stick it to Underage Drinking

(as appeared in the New Canaan Advertiser, Rip Empson)

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, those who start drinking alcohol before age 13, have a 40% chance of developing an alcohol abuse or dependency problem.

In order to raise awareness of such risks and to help combat the rise in underage drinking, two New Canaan residents



Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence and are two and a half times more likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.

(Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.)

took their message straight to the source.

As part of the "sticker shock" program, Whitney Gulden and Maggie Tucker placed stickers on packages of alcohol in local liquor stores, indicating that it is illegal for adults to purchase alcoholic beverages for minors.

Both teens are members of the groups Youth in

Action and New Canaan Coalition, which strives to reduce the social and retail availability of alcohol to minors and to support enforcement of underage drinking laws, according to Sgt. Carol Ogrinc of the New Canaan Police Department.

Four of the local liquor stores showed their support, allowing the girls to place 50 stickers on beer and wine packages throughout their stores.

"April is Alcohol Awareness Month so it was perfect timing for this event," Ogrinc said. "And I am very proud of the girls. It shows that they are committed to what they believe in, which is obeying the laws that related to underage drinking and being involved in their community in a positive way."

Stamford

Heads UP! How to Survive High School

What happened was...

So there were these two freshmen. And a couple of parties. And some bad stuff started happening. Stuff these two girls had heard about but now had a chance to try for themselves. So they did. And what started as a fun experiment ended up with these two girls in the hospital.

That could have been *end of story*. But it wasn't.

Take two

These two students thought about what happened to them and it made them wonder...who can I trust?...am I follow-

ing my friends or myself?...what do people say about me now?...where does it all stop?

Let's just say they learned a lot...

And now they want to share with you what they've been through. To give you a **Heads Up** on what to expect. The kinds of decisions you'll face. The choices you'll make. Who your real friends are. What's right for YOU.

So how does it work?

First you'll get a chance to hear these students' stories. And ask questions. And then maybe come up with some stories of your own that you could use help with...from students your age, who know what it's like to be new in high school.

What'll we talk about?

Whatever's on your mind. Trusting friends. Dealing with trouble. Figuring out how to make the decisions that are right for you—for school, for home, for being yourself and liking that person.

Then what??

Then maybe you'll join the Heads Up! Team and learn how to talk with other students. You'll come to monthly rap sessions, find support and advice. You never know.

Heads Up! Is a Stamford High School production. For more information, please contact: Health Center Room 118a 977-5489.

MADD Power Camp 2009

Lights, Camera, Take Action...

July 14-17, 2009 at Southern Connecticut State University MADD Connecticut will be holding it's annual Youth Leadership Power Camp. Power Camp is a 4 day 3 night summer camp for teens and their advisors focused on underage drinking prevention. Power Camp gives you the opportunity to meet peers from around the state that are ready for a change and who want to create an environment that is focused on the prevention of under-

age drinking. While at camp, you will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to initiate change in your home community by developing a project plan for the following school year.

We hope you can all join us and take part in this great experience. Please contact Lauren Iannucci, Youth Coordinator at MADD and Camp Director at 203-234-6521 or by email at lauren.iannucci@madd.org any questions. I look forward to seeing you all at Power Camp 2009!

Regional Youth Network
Greenwich, Darien, Stamford, New Canaan

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**Collaborating to Support
Healthy Communities**

For submissions or questions,
please contact Amy Badini at
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Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council (LFCRAC) is a collaborative of dedicated representatives from a variety of sectors in lower Fairfield County. Our mission is to reduce substance misuse from youth through seniors and including persons living with mental illness in Greenwich, Stamford, Darien and New Canaan.

This publication is designed to connect youth in our region who are interested in preventing substance misuse in their communities.

Healthy Perspectives Article as appeared in the Greenwich Time By Barry Halpin

Ava was lost in thought: "Am I digging my grave? Or am I digging to a new world that does not judge but accepts, a world full of love instead of hate, a world that does no drugs. I've heard that if you don't like the way your life is going, you can always change it. You can change the dream and the world you live in."

Back in November 2007, Ava's world was a living hell, filled with drugs. Change seemed light years away. She was smoking weed and drinking every day; she was depressed, feeling totally useless. Ava didn't think about tomorrow; the future didn't exist for her. She didn't care about anything, anyone, not even herself. "I was doing terrible in school, making bad choices in life, choosing the wrong friends and pushing away my good friends."

Her real friends were begging her to stop drinking and drugging and take a look at what had become of her life; she didn't want to hear anything. "I always told her, if you need me, I'll be there for you," says Victoria. "I remember one time she called me; she was wandering by the side of the road, totally wasted. And then her phone went dead. I was scared out of my mind for her safety. It was horrible seeing what she was doing to herself. We couldn't get through to her."

Finally, one of her friends went to see Steve Karjanis, school social worker, at Central High School in Bridgeport, and recommended Ava for the Leadership Group, a peer-to-peer school based support group. Most referrals come from the untapped dynamic of friends looking out for friends.

The Leadership Group was started in 2005 by Karjanis and Dave Gordon, school drug counselor, with two students; there are now more than 350 students, who attend one of the 20 groups that are offered each week.

"I was so angry when I heard what my friend had done. There was no way I needed this group; I didn't have a problem, I didn't need help," says Ava.

Karjanis recalls Ava coming to her first group, accompanied by her friend. "She didn't think her using was any big deal. But she kept on coming back anyway, so I knew she was getting something out of the group, even if she didn't want to admit it."

Six months ago, Ava, a senior, had enough of the insanity and stopped using. Her grades went up significantly and her relationships improved. "My relationships became clearer and more real; they weren't based on a drug bond. I was hanging around positive people who were actually going somewhere with their lives."

The Leadership Group's mantra is: "Harnessing the power of peer influence to effect positive change." I have co-facilitated a Leadership Group since the beginning of the school year and have witnessed countless success stories, testament to the power of peers helping peers.

The students look forward to the group; it's a chance to express themselves in a place where no one is going to judge them. They're with people who care and understand what they're going through. Getting encouragement from kids their own age is vital.

"The Leadership Group helps the students move forward. It's important to strike a balance between the social and the academic; you need both in place to succeed," says Principal, Alex Ortiz. "Steve and Dave structure the program to make it conducive for positive results."

John Ramos, Bridgeport Superintendent of Schools, says, "What we strive for is opening doorways to learning for all students. If you neglect emotional and social health, you aren't positioning students to be successful in the years ahead. The endgame is to be college ready and prepared to succeed; it's critical to pay attention to those areas."

Michelle, 16 and a junior, had a friend talk up the program when she was a freshman. "I tried it and thought it was cool. You could be open; people listen to you and don't talk trash to your face. They care about each other; I feel comfortable getting things out in the group. Karjanis listens and understands."

Ava credits the Leadership Group for helping turn her life around. Her message for those going through what she went through is: "Think twice, choose wisely and reach out for help if needed.. The Leadership Group is an excellent resource for those who want to make the right choices."