



For Details, Contact:

Paula Goodwin

Phone (815) 941-3130

E-mail: pgoodwin@grundy.k12.il.us

Education Service Network

1320 Union Street

Morris IL 60450

Phone (815) 941-3231

Fax (815) 942-5384

www.educationservicenetwork.org

News Release

Road to Reality Shows the Perils of Underage Drinking

Coal City IL, October 30, 2008: When teens drink alcohol, their judgment and reflexes become impaired. And when they make the additional bad decision to drive, events can easily turn to tragedy.

That's the lesson of "The Road to Reality," an experiential learning event conducted Wednesday, October 29, 2008, at Coal City High School. More than 400 adults and youth walked the road to learn how an underage drinking party can spiral out of control, sending a 17-year-old girl to jail and putting two parents in legal trouble for providing the alcohol at the party.

The event was sponsored by the Coal City Community Cares Initiative (CCI) in conjunction with Coal City School District #1, Coal City Police Department, Grundy County Sheriff's Police, Grundy County No Tolerance Task Force (NTTF), and D Construction.

Participants traveled through the high school and witnessed a sequence of seven scenes acted out by youth and community members. The first scene was at an underage drinking party where a boy who was too drunk to drive gets talked into being driven home by his girlfriend, who had also been drinking. Next, guests heard the voices of first responders radioing in their reports on a two-vehicle crash near Coal City High School involving a family of four and the teens from the party. Participants were then escorted to the mock crash scene, where emergency workers extricated people from vehicles and prepared them for transport to the emergency room. A 7-year-old child was "dead" at the scene.

From that point, participants moved to the hospital scene, where E.R. personnel try to resuscitate the male teen. Eventually, the youth was pronounced dead. Nearby, the teenage drunk driver was interrogated by a police officer.

The next scene brought people into a courtroom where both the teen driver and the adults who permitted the drinking party were found guilty and informed of their potential jail sentences. From there, spectators moved to a dramatic scene of the 17-year-old girl dressed in prison attire and delivering a poignant speech about the consequences of her actions and the pain she will feel for years to come.

The final scene was in the school courtyard, where students and adults acted out a candlelight vigil for the victims of the underage drinking tragedy.

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Vicky Ryan of rural Morris said she did not know what to expect when she and her 16-year-old son walked in the doors at CCHS, but was struck by the “hard-hitting realism” of the event. “I could see the change in him as we walked through. Kids around us were acting silly at first, but as they progressed through the scenes, they got more and more serious.”

Freshman student Ashlynn Zickefoose said the event had an impact on her because it was so realistic. She even saw other students crying at the dramatic ending scenes.

Corey Trammel, a CCHS junior, said the realism of Road to Reality likely changed some youths’ minds about underage drinking. “I wasn’t really planning on going, but once I went through it, I thought it was definitely worth it. I think the people who did it did a really good job.”

Sophomore Kailee Martin said “it made me think twice about the decisions that I make.” Having so many different people from the community acting out the scenes “made it more real to me,” she added.

Organizer Kim Scerine, who chairs the CCI, had high praise for the more than 100 youth and adult volunteers who spent the past few weeks preparing for the Road to Reality. “It was truly a team effort. Everything came together,” she said.

Scerine described the support from the Coal City School District as “really amazing.” She was especially pleased with the messages the event sent to parents. Before they started on the Road, CCMS Counselor Michelle Painter urged parents to “pay attention” to what is going on with their children and do their best to keep them out of harm’s way.

“I liked that the judge pointed out that the parents (who were charged) should have been smarter than this, but they were not. Their role was not to be popular, but to be the parent,” Scerine said.

Scerine said CCI got the idea for the event from Lockport Community High School, which has been doing these events annually for several years, and from the Grundy County NTTF, which pioneered this kind of effort in 2000.

Coal City’s version of Road to Reality had some unique aspects as well, Scerine pointed out. For example, only a few insiders knew in advance who the victims from the other car were going to be. It turned out that basketball coach Chris Spencer played the role of the driver whose car was hit by the drunk driver as he was leaving the high school with his whole family. Spencer’s young son was “killed” as part of the story.

Scerine thinks that the personal nature of the Spencers’ involvement increased the impact of the Road to Reality.

“We’re in a small town, and there is a common denominator that everybody knows each other,” Scerine said. “She (the teen drunk driver) made a bad decision that night and she hurts a family that everyone loves.”

For more information about The Road to Reality and other CCI efforts, visit the following web site:
www.communitycaresinitiative.com