

The content on this page is provided by the Vernonia Prevention Coalition

Be a Piece of the Puzzle: Above the Influence--Vernonia's OSSOM Teens

By DeAnna Pearl

Since 2009, Vernonia School District 47J students have been attending OSSOM (Operation Safe Students on the Move). This year was the largest group ever. Over 25 dedicated Vernonia High and Middle school teens met monthly to plan and develop positive outreach programming to their peers. They punched out in October with Red Ribbon Week activities highlighting the dangers of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug (ATOD) abuse. They sustained messaging throughout the year of not only choosing not to use drugs or alcohol but to live above its influence.

OSSOM closed its events planning in April which was Alcohol Abuse Awareness month. Unfortunately, while there is a dramatic reduction in accidents involving youth and UAD (underage drinking), high school students are still reporting it is very easy to obtain alcohol. What we know now, is the harm of even occasional use of alcohol can be damaging to developing brains, sports performance and academic achievement. Occasional use can lead to increase abuse while opening avenues to other physical dependencies.

OSSOM doubled its meeting and planning stages to prepare for the week before prom: April 16-20th. The group planned and implemented a week of events to highlight the dangers of underage drinking prior to prom and beyond. During the week a media blitz was conducted to highlight not only the negative dangers of driving under the influence but included positive messaging reminding student they can be above the influence and make healthy choices.

In addition to an awareness campaign, OSSOM planned a mid week Healthy Teen Fair. Booths included dangers of UAD, tobacco abuse awareness, hidden sugar dangers, suicide outreach, character building, teen stress and more. This year, two students developed a booth to highlight the dangers of Nicotine. "Some of my friends are starting to use the electronic cigarettes and I don't think they understand that nicotine is the drug that causes addiction," states an OSSOM junior. "I know some kids have started using them even if they NEVER smoked before!"

This amazing group of youth wrote and performed a series of vignettes, "UAD: It's Only the Beginning". Since November, OSSOM had been developing the vignettes to be reenacted for this assembly on Friday before prom. The group utilized the footage from the 2010 SKID reenactment

to set the tone. Six vignettes highlighted what happens after the accident, what it really impacts and how far reaching the consequences to the community. But to clarify a point, the final vignette, focused on the power of bystanders whom step in and change fate.

Unfortunately, every 15 minutes a teen is injured or killed due to impaired driving. As a grim reminder, 12 VHS students and one teacher volunteered to be victims. From 9am to 11:30, every 15 minutes a youth was chosen. He or she was taken out of class and returned altered and given a story of their death. They participated further as witnesses, along with The Reaper, to the UAD presentation later on Friday. Selected victims read their stories and blew out their candles to represent the loss of life.

While most kids don't drink, even occasionally, those of who do

This could be contributed to efforts to provide safe prom nights and an all-night party on graduation night.

OSSOM have been utilizing positive messaging media to help their fellow students identify with personal empowerment and self advocacy. The Above the Influence (ATI) is a national campaign created and implemented by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a program of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. ATI informs and inspires teens to reject illicit drugs via TV, print, Internet, and local radio advertising – and, most importantly, in partnership with community organizations.

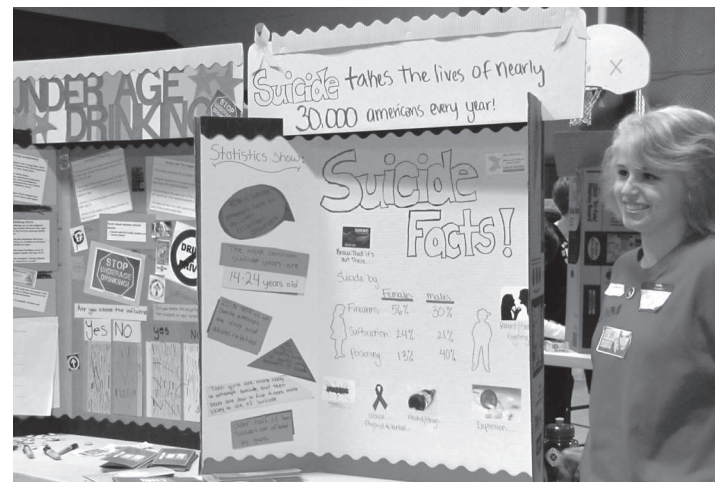
Teens can be the most influential group to carry a message they are passionate about and the OSSOM group utilized the Above the Influence to help carry their message and truth about what MOST kids don't do.

- above the influence is a community of teens, for teens.
- it's about being an individual, not a follower.
- it's standing up to negative influences.
- it's knowing the facts about drugs and alcohol, and making smart decisions about drugs and alcohol.

Every teen's life is filled with pressure, some of it good, some of it bad. Our goal is to help teens stand up to negative pressures and influences. We want teens to live Above the Influence. The more aware they are of the influences around them, the better prepared they will be to stand up to them, including the pressure to use drugs and alcohol. It's not about telling teens how to live their lives, but rather giving them another perspective and the latest facts so they can make smart decisions.

While OSSOM is sponsored by the Vernonia Prevention Coalition, it would not possible without the leadership of Pete Weisel, HS counselor. OSSOM students volunteer time, sign a conduct

contract, and participate in making their school a better place. They stand before their peers and speak out about the



danger of ATOD abuse and the benefits of living above the influence. Every year they are stronger and dedicated to their Vision: VSD 47J is a district where healthy decision making in fundamental and healthy lifestyles are the norm.

OSSOM would like to thank to the volunteers whom helped make the Healthy Teen Week and UAD Awareness Day happen: Mark Brown, Dana Hyde, Dean Smith and Vernonia Fire Volunteers, Metro West, and Gretchen Lindauer. Further, they would like to thank the VSD Administration and teachers for being supportive while the OSSOM students took time to prepare for the week. With the support of teaching staff, these students were able to take time outside of the classroom and make up class time missed.

The Vernonia Prevention Coalition partners with many groups, parents and adults in the community that make a difference. If you would like to Be a Part of the Puzzle in making a healthier and safer community contact DeAnna Pearl at DeAnna@vernonia-or.gov or (503) 369-7370.

ATOD Free Grad Night

Seeking donations for Graduating Class of 2012

Contact Betsy Miller
503-429-6049

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you.

Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1

Summer Meal Program

"Follow the Pin Wheels to Free Summer Meals!"

NEW Location: Vernonia Community Church

Breakfast	Scheduled Activity	Lunch
8:30	9-11	11:30
Adults \$1.50		Adults \$2.00

Questions? Please contact:

Nic Welch (503) 369-6734
Or
Cathy Meyer (503) 429-8033

Volunteers Welcome
All REGISTERED volunteers & staff are provided a meal on the day they participate!

USDA and the State of Oregon are equal opportunity Providers and employers