

UpFront Programs: Reality-Based Solutions for Rosemount High School

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Executive Summary

The city of Rosemount has a high school of about 2000 students. One decision that many of these students face each day is the choice of whether or not to use drugs and alcohol. Currently there is a drug and alcohol education component incorporated into the school health curriculum. However, as indicated by surveys and student responses, there is still quite a problem around the issue of drugs and alcohol. Specifically, students are in need of more education in areas such as how to know one's limits when using certain substances, and how to identify if there is addiction potential in one's self and what to do about that. Also, there are more and different drugs being created every year that young people have to make choices about. That is why Rosemount High School needs a program that is grounded not only in facts but is also up to date and makes a conscious and compassionate effort to connect with and help each student see how drugs and alcohol might affect their lives.

UpFront Programs is the answer to this problem. This programming offers drug and alcohol education based upon a model called "reality-based" education. There are three main components to it. The first is fact-based education that presents all information about drugs and alcohol in a real yet understandable way. The curriculum works to engage students and make sure they understand each step of the learning process. The second component concentrates on assessing all available resources in the school and community for students who have determined they might have a substance abuse issue, and recommends students to ones that are caring and supportive. The third component utilizes restorative justice practices instead of traditional punishment as a remedy to create long lasting healing when a substance-related offense occurs. Together these components provide a comprehensive solution for this issue.

Introduction

Across the nation drug and alcohol abuse among young people is still an issue affecting the lives of many. For years there have been various efforts to intervene and prevent what the negative effects of drugs and alcohol use. Unfortunately none of these efforts have yet been able to be effective and beneficial for all, or even a majority of young people for that matter. That is why there needs to be a complete change in how this issue is approached. One community that would benefit from a change such as this is the city of Rosemount. Although efforts have been made over the past decades by the city and local school district to curtail substance abuse, it still persists as an issue affecting the community's younger population, particularly those who attend the local high school. The purpose of this proposal is to demonstrate that there still is a problem of drug and alcohol misuse by students of Rosemount High School, and to recommend a new program that will address this issue in an innovative and effective way. This proposal will give hope and a way forward with an issue that has been affecting our society for too long.

Statement of Need

It is no secret that illicit substance use by young people is something that has been occurring for decades now. However despite much awareness about this issue, it is still prevalent throughout our society. The Monitoring the Future survey from the University of Michigan, which keeps track of adolescent drug and alcohol use trends, showed that nationwide in 2014 the use of any illicit drug in the past year stood at 14.6% for 8th graders, 29.9% for 10th graders, and 38.7% for 12th graders. Despite some declines over recent years, these figures still represent a significant amount of our nation's young population. Almost no community in this country is unaffected by this reality.

This reality can be seen in the small city of Rosemount, Minnesota. Even though the town itself is home to just over 20,000 residents, Rosemount High School is one of the largest high schools in the state with almost 2000 students (“Rosemount H.S.”, 2015). Each day these students have to make many choices that can have large impacts upon their lives, and unfortunately for various reasons many still choose to use drugs and alcohol. Recent studies only confirm this fact. In Dakota County where the City of Rosemount is located, the 2013 Minnesota Student Survey shows that only 50.5% of 11th graders could say that they had not used any drugs or alcohol in the past year, which is a sharp drop in that same year from 71.5% of 9th graders that could say they had not used any, and 82% of 8th graders that could say that as well. These percentages translate into hundreds of students out of a body of 2000. These statistics also demonstrates that not only are the young people of Rosemount High School starting to use substances at younger ages, but also the use among their peers increases as they get older.

These statistics are a call for concern since it has been shown through studies that the misuse of drugs and alcohol during the adolescent years can have detrimental effects on the body in various ways, especially on the brain. A release of a study under a grant from the National Institute of Health gives evidence to this by saying, “Youth who chronically consume heavy quantities of alcohol and/or experience drug withdrawal symptoms may be particularly at risk for cognitive deterioration by young adulthood” (Hanson, Medina, Padula, Tapert, & Brown, 2011). In addition to psychological effects such as the one described above, a report released by the United Nations describes how drug abuse can become the go to solution for different problems in young people’s lives when really there are other solutions that should be pursued (“The social impact of

drug abuse”, 1995). These effects are just a couple of the many that could happen for so many students at Rosemount High School if drug and alcohol misuse is not decreased.

It is important to note that by no means is Rosemount High School unaware of what can result from substance abuse. Already in place in the school district’s regular curriculum are two components that educate about drugs and alcohol. One is a module about drugs and alcohol in the mandated health class all 10th graders must take. The other is a developmental psychology class select 12th graders get to take where they then teach what they learn about drugs and alcohol to 6th graders in the school district. However as evidenced by the previously described usage rates, more can be done. The numbers do not only demonstrate this. Interviews were conducted with several Rosemount High School students about their specific concerns related to drugs and alcohol in their school. These interviews indicated that they also felt more needed to be done. One student testimonial described how when he entered as a freshman, he and his classmates felt they did not have an awareness of how prevalent drug and alcohol use really was in their high school. Another student talked about how they see their friends constantly justifying excessive use of drugs and alcohol, but end up not truly knowing their limits. Both of these concerns raised by these students deserve just as much attention as any in a drug and alcohol curriculum.

If all of these issues are to be addressed, however, new and innovative ways that do not replicate mistakes of the past need to be utilized. It cannot be assumed that young people will see the negative consequences in the misuse of drugs and alcohol. That idea, however, has been the goal of failed programs of the past few decades such as D.A.R.E., which was described in a 2003

General Accountability Office report as creating “no significant difference” in drug use between those who went through it and those who did not (Hickok, 2003, p. 2). In 2001, the Department of Education convened a panel of experts that assessed various drug education programs across the nation. They only gave “promising” or “exemplary” ratings, and D.A.R.E. did not fall under either of those categories (“Exemplary and promising...”, 2002”). In 2000 a follow up over a period of 5 years from another study demonstrated that D.A.R.E. had “limited effects” in regards to drug use by the program participants and that effects “decay over time” (Clayton, Cattarello, & Johnstone, 1996, p. 1). In fact, that same study concluded with recommendations for new programming that looks at “risk factors” of the individual participants and how their individual circumstances influence their chances of substance abuse. These individual circumstances are the types of factors that will be addressed in this new programming.

The reality is, adults who care about the well-being of young people cannot be at all places and all times with every young person making sure that individuals do not make these life altering decisions. Programs that take this approach of control often assume the causes of drug and alcohol use and abuse, but in truth the causes cannot be fully known unless all factors of a young person’s life are taken into consideration. With that in mind, the paradigm of how issues are being addressed can shift. There needs to be an entirely new drug and alcohol education program that works with young people to develop ways that get at the core underlying issues that lead to misuse and addiction, and focuses on empirical evidence of effects. Rosemount can be the place where this new approach starts.

Program Description

The overall goals of the program are to significantly reduce the amount of drug and alcohol use and abuse among students at Rosemount High School, and to create greater awareness about identifying personal risk factors for drug and alcohol addiction and abuse. The first objective to achieve this will be implementing the new curriculum as a supplemental component to the current drug and alcohol curriculum. This supplemental component is based on the framework presented by UCLA Professor Emeritus Rodney Skager in his publication “Beyond Zero Tolerance: A Reality-Based Approach to Drug Education and School Discipline”. The next objective is to have a decrease in drug and alcohol use in all grades by 15% as measured by the Minnesota Student Survey in 2016 for Dakota County. If successful, the long run intention for this program is to become a regular part of the curriculum at Rosemount High School, and possibly expand to other schools in the district and region, depending on its success.

The program planned to be implemented is based upon a framework of teaching about substance abuse that was developed after programs like D.A.R.E. were not successful. Rodney Skager, the author of the article “Beyond Zero Tolerance: A Reality-Based Approach to Drug Education and School Discipline” knows the failings of D.A.R.E. from first-hand experience since he has been monitoring the substance use rates of Californian students since 1985 (Skager, 2013). His research on this subject helped him realize the programs in place were not working, so he devised a new approach to drug and alcohol education. This is where “reality-based” education comes in. There are three main components of it. The first and most crucial part of reality-based education is that it requires facts about drugs and alcohol to be taught honestly and straight-forward, as well fully engaging students in that learning process. Second, it recommends that

schools seek and provide the proper resources for students who are struggling and need possible intervention. Lastly, the model calls for an end to excessive use of suspensions and expulsions for problems that can be resolved through “restorative practices” (Skager, 2013).

Skager is not the only one to recommend practices like these. Marsha Rosenbaum, who has been studying drug issues for decades including work done for the National Institute on Drug Abuse, also recommends reality-based practices. She echoes the need for facts that are honest and “science-based” as she describes them. This recommendation is said by her for two reasons. One, “young people are capable of rational thinking”; and two, young people are often asking for true facts about drugs and alcohol since they want to make decisions for themselves (Rosenbaum, 2014, p. 22). The new program at Rosemount High School would make sure that all students are heard. In addition to giving facts, there would also be discussion with students about what they feel are the facts they need to make informed decisions for themselves. How this would pan out will vary from classroom to classroom since it is important for reality-based education to be an organic and ever-changing process that reflects the specific needs of a particular group of students. By approaching the curriculum in this way students will receive straight-forward facts about drugs and alcohol as well as have their individual concerns and needs addressed. This will give them an opportunity to have a say in their lives thus creating more engagement in the learning process.

The support resources and intervention component of the program would work to address all issues in students’ lives that affect and influence their individual substance abuse issues. The reason for this component is because it has been recognized that such issues as substance abuse

do not occur on their own, and there are many factors to look at when trying to figure out a resolution to such a problem (Skager, 2013). The way this part of the program would be happening in Rosemount High School is by working with students through the program to help each one identify if they may have a substance abuse problem that requires more help or not, and from there determine what resources are available to address that specific issue. Like with the first component of the program, it is important for this part to be left as an organic process that changes with individual needs so it would not be beneficial to define how this process would exactly happen before talking with each student that is in need. By making this part focused on the individual student, it will allow for that individual to get the resources they specifically need and have a better outcome to their issues as a result of that focus.

The third component of the program will work to resolve wrongs and hurt done by students in regards to their substance use choices. Often called restorative justice or restorative practices, this model of conflict resolution “addresses the emotional need of victims and promotes insight and often positive personal development in offenders” (Skager, 2007). These practices would take the place of school suspensions and/or expulsions for substance use related offenses on school property. The process would involve everyone who is affected by the offense to come together and discuss with the person who did harm how their actions affected and harmed others, and what that individual can do to amend the situation (Skager, 2007). As with all other components of this program, it is vitally important for the specifics of this process to be left up to the school since the entire school community needs to be involved in determining what is best for their school as they know it best. These restorative practices will allow for the students to take responsibilities for their actions, as well as lead to a better chance of them feeling connected

to the school rather than pushed away (Skager, 2013). Long term results of such practices being in place would include reduced expulsion rates and reduced reoffending rates. Overall restorative practices will lead to a school environment that feels more honest, fair, and connected.

These three components of fact-based education, utilizing community resources, and restorative justice practices combined, make up reality-based drug and alcohol education. This curriculum will allow for a comprehensive and fresh approach to drug and alcohol education that will support students and teachers alike to see and experience learning about this subject in a whole new way that can provide each person important insights never had before. When it comes to an issue as important as this, it makes sense there is always caution about what the best course of action is. Yet as it has been demonstrated many times through research evidence, the ways in the past of addressing this issue cannot continue if any significant change is expected to happen. An academic who looked at the history of drug education made an important point related to this by stating that, “teachers need to be prepared to engage in open, honest dialogue about drugs and drug use that does not rely on scare tactics” (Tupper, 2008). This program can also provide an extra benefit to the teachers of the new curriculum as well by allowing them an opportunity to engage in their own learning process along with the students. Another benefit of a program like this is that it involves the entire school, so not just students but everyone who is a part of the Rosemount High School community can learn something important.

A very important point about this model of programming is that it is not just a theory, but something that has been successfully utilized before. For more than 10 years, UpFront Programs at Oakland High School in Oakland, California was a program based on this model that had

much success throughout its existence. It was only after the recession of 2008 that the program got much of its funding cut, just as much other education in California did at the time. The founder of UpFront Programs, Chuck Ries, felt that he knew the scare tactics of D.A.R.E. did not work, and wanted to try an alternative approach. He is not in any way an advocate of drug and alcohol use, and thinks that no use is the obvious safest option, but he saw that young people needed to be given real and true facts to make informed decisions (Ries, 2015). The way Ries conducted UpFront was so closely aligned with the reality-based education model that Rodney Skager made it a point to use UpFront as the main example of how reality-based practices can be implemented (Skager, 2013).

Marsha Rosenbaum, one of the other architects of reality-based drug and alcohol education, was quoted saying about UpFront that, “Student assistance programs like Chuck’s are an invaluable resource. If you could have that in every school, we’d be taken care of” (Grob Plante, 2014). Rosenbaum also stated that the follow-up results of the program showed students using drugs at lower rates, and were also attending school more and being more engaged (Rosenbaum, 2013). Beyond this critical praise from academia, the UpFront program was recognized by the California Department of Education as “an exemplary program” (Montoya, 2004). Just as important as well, the student reviews of the program show its effectiveness. During the 2007-2008 academic year approximately 400 students received instruction from three different UpFront staff. Of the 216 students that were surveyed, 88% said they felt they were provided with useful information about drugs and alcohol, and 92% said they were more aware of the risks of using alcohol and other drugs. Out of the 216 students surveyed, 58 had used in the last 30 days, and an amazing 72% of them said they are less likely to use alcohol and drugs after seeing

an UpFront presentation (Ries, 2008). All this evidence together shows that not only is reality-based education a logical theory, but it is something that has been put into practical use and had success.

The unfortunate reality is, as stated before, that UpFront no longer exists in the form it once did. Ries stated that due to the funding cuts, the program had to be ultimately changed over to another agency for oversight thus fundamentally changing the programs model of being based in the schools (Ries, 2015). Yet because of all the benefits Ries saw in this program he still does what he can to this day to teach others about it, and hopefully make it a program again one day. This renewal is the opportunity being that exists at Rosemount High School. This school is the perfect place for such a transformative and beneficial program to begin once again. It is obvious from conversations had with people in the community and students at the school that they all want to see change for the better when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Everyone wants to see real change happen, and that is exactly what this model of reality-based education can provide.

Chuck Ries believes so much in the potential of this model that he is willing to come out to Rosemount to do all the necessary training to get this program started. The plan is to have the reality-based education start as a supplemental component to the drug and alcohol module that is already a part of the mandatory health class all students are required to take during their high school career at Rosemount. Ries would train the health teachers in the basics of this model, as well as demonstrate in a class session how it is implemented. When the regular sessions start for the students, after each one an evaluation would be given to the students to fill out to determine how effective they felt the program was in teaching about drugs and alcohol, as well as how it

has changed their individual choices and outlooks. For the restorative justice component of the program, there would be a review of all the policies currently in place of what the procedures and consequences are for substance related offenses at the school. From there determinations would be made of what policies could change or be applied differently with a restorative justice framework. This review would be conducted by an expert with training and experience in school-based restorative justice practices.

This program would be phased in over the 2015-2016 academic year. With the anticipated success of this program, it would then be proposed to be implemented at all other high schools in the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District. The potential for this program is high, quite possibly a new norm if it gets the attention it deserves. That is why the funding to get this off the ground and running is so critical. As shown here, all the evidence and background is there that demonstrates the importance and necessity of reality-based drug and alcohol education. It is time a program that takes a real, honest approach to drugs and alcohol is given an opportunity to transform the lives of the young people of our community who are too often not given the resources they need to make the most informed decisions for themselves.

Evaluation Plan

This effectiveness of this program will be evaluated in several ways. First, after each class session the students will fill out surveys to answer questions that will take a look at factors such as how their awareness of substances and their potential effects have changed, as well as what they feel their likeliness is to use substances after taking a class. The teachers will also fill out a survey to rate how effective they felt the teaching model was by assessing items such as connectedness to students and classroom climate. At the end of the 2015-2016 academic year there will be an evaluation done which will include feedback from students, faculty, and school staff in the form of surveys and free-form responses. This larger evaluation will be about the overall effectiveness of all components of the program. Some examples of what will be assessed are overall attitude and awareness changes among students in regards to drugs and alcohol, and staff and student perceptions of the how the whole school's climate has changed. The 2016 Minnesota Student Survey will also be utilized once results are released and compared to the 2013 survey to see how reported rates of substance use have changed. It is also planned to have an independent evaluation organization assess the overall effectiveness of the program. All of these of these points of data will be freely shared with the public once compiled and organized.

Budget

There are several costs associated with implementing this program. However, since it will become a part of the curriculum, in the long term it will be very cost effective since the training to do it will just be passed down from previously trained teachers to new teachers. As it currently stands, these are the costs that have been estimated:

Item	Cost Calculation	Narrative
Salaries (In-kind; provided by school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two teachers: \$28 / hr for 70 hours = \$3920 	\$28 per hour is the average salary for teachers in ISD 196. There are two teachers who will be running this program. 70 hours is the amount of classroom hours spent teaching UpFront from the most recent report.
Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training workshop: \$2200 per day for two days = \$4400 Travel pay: \$500 per day for two days = \$1000 Travel Expenses: \$850 	Chuck Ries charges \$2200 for each day of training and there are two workshop days needed. He requests \$500 for each of the two days he has to travel. It has been estimated that a roundtrip flight from San Diego to Minneapolis will be \$350 and three nights hotel will be around \$100 per night. \$100 for food has also been calculated into the expenses.
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum materials: \$300 	This was calculated by asking Chuck Ries how much the necessary materials are.
Total Budget: \$10,470		
Amount of Request: \$6550		

All expenditures will be documented, and those documents will be available whenever requested by the school board. With this program's success, these costs will be small in comparison to the great amount of short and long term benefit gained.

Conclusion

As with many complex issues in this country, there is no one perfect solution. The reality is, however, what has been tried and tested for the past several decades to solve this issue has shown almost no beneficial results. That is why it is important to take the opportunity now to put into motion actions that will actually have both short and long term benefits for the young people of our communities. Reality-based education offers that opportunity when it comes to the issue of drug and alcohol abuse. With the program's focus on real facts, real results, and creating real and meaningful connections to students lives, it will succeed in areas that are critical to solving this issue. The students of Rosemount High School have many tough decisions to make throughout their lives, and it is only fair that they are given all the facts and resources to make those decisions.

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