

## The value of partners

Partners – friends who share common interests and work toward a common goal. As we work to prevent and reduce underage substance abuse, Communities that Care of Lorain County depends on our partners.

We have a staff of one- it's clear that partners are our lifeblood. They keep us grounded and connected to what really matters. It's important to have lots of voices at the table to represent the diverse needs of our county. Our partners are people just like you – people who want to make a difference in their community.

This spring we've embarked on a campaign called "Reach Out Now," which exemplifies the words partner and partnership. Our Task Force, which is focused on underage drinking specifically, has rolled out this free curriculum geared to start the conversation about alcohol with 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

Our partners who will teach "Reach Out Now" are many and varied. In the Lorain City School District, we are partnering with the Lorain County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services (LCADA) and some community leaders to bring the message to some 5th graders in Palm Elementary School. Over in Avon Lake, the local Key Club – a host of students under the direction of Mr. Gjergj Haxhiu (Mr. H, to most of us) - are bringing the message to Troy Elementary 6<sup>th</sup> graders. They have even created a play to illustrate some of the points in the curriculum. And, in the Firelands Local School District, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Lorain County, many of whom are involved in that agency's Lunch Buddies program with that district, will facilitate this prevention campaign with some 6<sup>th</sup> graders South Amherst Middle School. Additionally, we have coalition members who are involved and committed.

The curriculum is easy and simple. In three, 20-minute lessons filled with discussion, quizzes and games, youth have chance to ask questions and get answers. Sometimes we're scared to talk about the things we most need to talk about and this is a great way to open the door to this much-needed conversation.

The comic shown here is a way to get kids started talking about the choices they make and risky behavior.

In "Reach Out Now," youth tell us what they know about alcohol and then learn about how alcohol affects the brain and body and making smart choices. Youth are asked to think critically about alcohol, a topic which many of us would just as soon avoid. For instance, how does alcohol affect the signals in your brain? What long-term effects does alcohol have on the body? Why might it be difficult to say "no" if a peer offers alcohol to you? We'll ask them again at the last session what they've learned.

We'll need facilitators to work with youth in grades 5 and 6 for next academic year to help bring the prevention message to more of Lorain County's 14 public school districts. If you like working with youth, teaching, helping others, this is a natural fit for you. If you're in between jobs, this can be a great resume builder.

So, step up and partner with us. Like the campaign says, "Reach Out Now". Looking forward to hearing from you. Communities That Care of Lorain County, [www.ctcloraincounty.org](http://www.ctcloraincounty.org); 440.282.9920.