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 Lexington's
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SADD Chapter at LHS continues to grow



Above: SADD faculty advisor Julie Fenn; Left: SADD members gather in the quad at LHS

By Laurie Atwater

Julie Fenn is the substance abuse specialist for the Lexington schools and she is also the advisor for SADD (Students against Destructive Decisions) along with Christine Sodergren, Spanish teacher at LHS, who came onboard this year as co-advisor. According to Julie Fenn, Christine "has brought a lot of energy and great ideas" to the club. "I feel very fortunate to have her onboard!" SADD received two grants this year and sponsored several successful student awareness campaigns around campus this year.

The alcohol awareness initiative: "Think About It: 2 Out of 5...is it worth the risk?" was timed to occur before the Senior and Junior prom and graduation events to help demonstrate that 2 out of every 5 teens in the US are in an alcohol-related accident at some point in their life.

Faculty advisor Julie Fenn states, "Although the number of LHS students drinking has been resistant to change more students are choosing not to drink. We are hoping to challenge attitudes and beliefs about teenage drinking and create a "no use" culture among our younger students.

Lexington's SADD was one of thirty youth groups across the state awarded a grant from the Commonwealth as part of the statewide youth movement to engage Massachusetts youth ages 13-18 (or grades 7-12) in a tobacco-free lifestyle.

"Although the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that smoking among LHS students had decreased," Fenn says, "we continue to be concerned about students' acceptance of "social smoking".

In addition to those education and prevention efforts the students also sponsored a LHS games night at the high school and Laser tag event. According to Fenn, the goal is to provide a fun, affordable event, and a space students could come and just hang out. For Games Night the students transformed Commons I cafeteria into a recreation room/teen center for the evening.

SADD also sponsored an evening of Laser tag at LazerZone in Marlborough. The SADD club raised money and paid for the cost of the bus and for the bungee cord station at LazerZone.

SADD would like to sponsor this event next year and are working hard to

find sponsors and spaces for their activities. If you would like to partner with SADD, provide space food or funds for their activities, contact Julie Fenn at Lexington High School for more information!

TUNING IN TO THE STUDENTS

According to Zack Abdu-Glass being a member of SADD is a lot of fun and definitely not dorky (my word, not his!). "It's actually really cool to be in the group," he says. And lots of fun, too according to a small group of members gathered around one of the tables in the quad at LHS. Eliza Abdu-Glass, Erin Darabant, brother R.J. Darabant, Elissa Bowling, Zoe Pedulla and Kelsey Fenn joined me for a few minutes to chat after we shot the picture of the group.

While the main goal of the group is to get kids to promote alcohol and drug-free activities, they also act as emissaries for the standard on the LHS campus and in the wider community. The original mission of SADD chapter was to help young people say "No" to drinking and driving. Today, the mission has expanded and SADD has become a peer-to-peer education and

activism organization.

SADD members promote total abstinence but they realize that safety is paramount. If a student makes the choice to drink, there are ways to mitigate the risk. "Stay away from cars and don't get behind the wheel," is the biggest take away from this small group.

The goal of the group is to reach teens when they are young. "Once kids get older they go one way or the other," according to Zack. "If we reach them when they are younger we can push them in the right direction."

I ask the kids if they feel a responsibility to reach out to someone who is drinking at a party. "I don't feel it's my responsibility to try to stop people from drinking at parties," Zoe says, "But if people are about to get in a car that's different."

At LHS, drinking is still associated with popularity according to the group. Kids drink because "they want to appear older and more mature they want to be like college kids," the group agrees.

Zack is a three year varsity soccer



Above SADD members wear caution tape to spread the word about drunk driving before prom and graduation.

player who says that he has “never had a beer” and maintains that “you can have fun without drinking.”

I ask the students about the stress on campus. “This is a pressure cooker of an environment,” Zack says. “Kids are staying up ’til 2 or 3AM every night doing homework.” All of the kids agree that for many drinking is “a way to let go.”

Erin is an incoming freshman and she feels that making connections with her teachers has been key. “It’s really important. I go to see a teacher every day after school.”

According to Eliza Abdu-Glass, “If you have a good relationship with a teacher and you are having a real crunch, you can go to them and they will help.”

Lots of kids can’t handle the pressure and they just say “I’m done,” according to the group. Zack believes that academic stress is in part a matter of personal choice. “If you choose to take all AP classes then you’re going to have stress.”

All of the students agree that parental stress affects them, but Zoe says that pressure from peers can be just as intense. “You not only want to show the teacher that you know what you’re doing, but you want to show the other students in your classes,” she says.

Erin states, “LHS is just so competitive.” Most of the students agree that if there was less competition “more kids would reach out.” The fierce academic

competition is hard for some students to take and there is a perception among some the students that the kids that excel “have expensive tutors.”

Zack says that athletics is just as competitive as academics. “You’re expected to play well and to win,” he states.

Most of the kids like the LHS campus and the quad atmosphere, but they say that the campus “gets broken up a lot” into groups and there is not much of a sense of one community at the high school. “Because it’s so big it’s hard to find unity,” Erin says. There is definitely cliquiness on campus with different parts of the quad designated for certain groups. If you venture into the wrong space you are likely to get a look that says, “this is our area,” one of the kids says.

Zoe is a peer mentor which is a position designed to help students who are having social difficulties to assimilate she explains. Elissa says that these kids are easy to spot because they sit by themselves, they run to the bathroom during breaks rather than socialize and they just have a hard time fitting in. The peer mentoring program is designed to help them find “more socially acceptable” ways to fit in according to Zoe.

However the group agreed that sometimes it is hard to tell who is having a hard time. “It’s more how you feel than how you look,” Erin says.