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profile

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juvenile justice and delinquency prevention

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ACQUISITIONS

PROJECT STAR: Teaching Youth To Resist

"I have something I'd like to say," one 16-year-old institutional resident said quietly to a group of juvenile justice practitioners. "I don't know if this is stupid, but I just learned something that if I'd known a long time ago, could have kept me out of this place."

The visiting guests looked at him with intense interest. What could it be that would have the potential to keep youth out of correctional institutions?

"My counselor taught me how to say no and not lose face with the guys," the boy explained. Through a few simple techniques, the boy's counselor had taught him how to opt out of delinquent activity while not endangering his reputation or his friendships.

To teach youth that simple art of saying no before getting into trouble is what Project STAR in Kansas City, Missouri is all about.

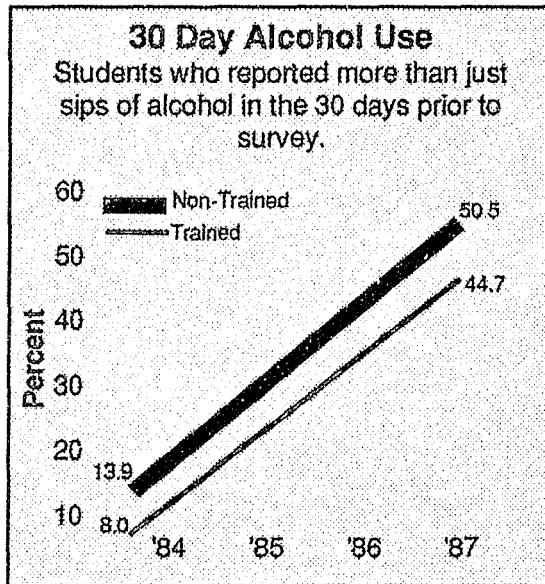
This alcohol and other drug prevention program, funded entirely by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, has its roots in the 1983 Royals baseball scandal.

Ewing Kauffman, then the sole owner of the team, was embarrassed and angered when four Royals players were convicted for cocaine use. In an effort to "give something positive back to the community," Kauffman hired Dr. Calvin Cormack, now Executive Director, to search the country for an effective, drug prevention program to implement in Kansas City schools.

In 1984, with the assistance of the University of California's Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research, Project STAR was developed. "Mr. Kauffman wanted to find a program that began early enough to really reach students before they made those crucial decisions," said Lynn Bruning, Senior Community Specialist with Project STAR.

Using research findings stating that youth make the decision to try alcohol and other drugs two years before actual use, and that drug use was most prevalent in tenth and eleventh graders, Project STAR was developed to teach sixth and seventh graders the basic skills of saying no and resisting peer pressure.

The program, Students Taught Awareness and Resistance, uses teachers in private and public schools to teach the 13-lesson curriculum in their classrooms.



All teacher training by Project STAR staff is provided free of charge. In the program's first year in Kansas City, staff estimate that around 8,000 junior high students received STAR training from 75 teachers in 26 schools in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Since 1988-89, over 15,000 students have been receiving training each year with over 68,000 trained since the program's inception.

Training comes in two main parts. In the initial curriculum, or Project STAR I, students learn the key concepts of prevention and have the opportunity to practice identifying peer pressure situations. While teachers guide their classroom experience, students also select peer leaders, five from each class, to help reinforce the messages.

"Peer leaders may demonstrate the role plays or lead small group discussions," explained Bruning. "They receive extra training from their teachers and are able to give the lessons credibility for their fellow students."

During the 13 weeks of curriculum, student lessons deal with subjects such as the consequences of drug use, practical techniques for refusing drug offers, the ways media promotes tobacco and alcohol, and new approaches to avoiding negative peer pressure. Through games, skits, videos, and music, students learn that drug users are a minority to which they do not have to belong.

"Our program centers around resistance training--teaching kids how to say no and keep a friend," said Bruning. "We also use homework assignments to encourage the child to fully participate and to involve a student's parents in the learning process."

Parents are notified prior to their child's involvement in the program. Interestingly, Project STAR, unlike other drug prevention programs, has yet to receive parental resistance.

The second component of Project STAR consists of a five week eighth grade follow-up curriculum entitled Project STAR II. During these sessions, earlier lessons are reinforced and students practice resisting peer pressure and learn how their reputations can be affected by drug use.

Largely due to its attachment to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which sponsors other prevention programs, Project STAR has been thoroughly evaluated from its inception.

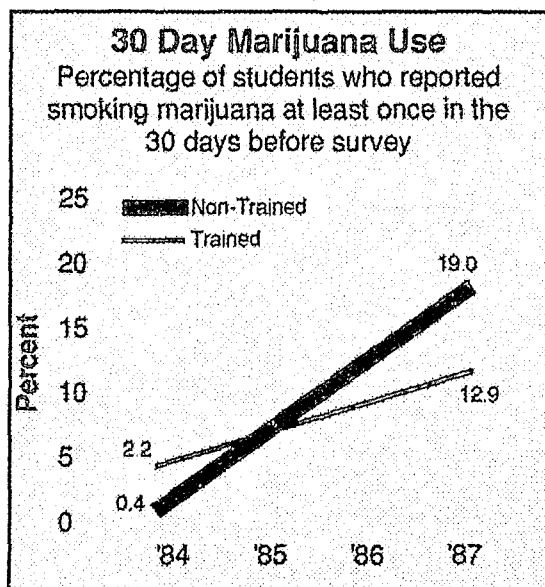
One major research effort compared 649 students who received the initial Project STAR resistance skills training during 1984-85 and 513 students who did not. Data collected during the 1984-85 and 1987-88 school years was then compared.

Results showed that overall the Project STAR program "effectively reduced smoking among training students... and effectively reduced or prevented marijuana use among teenagers."

However, as the chart on this page demonstrates, alcohol use was found to be only temporarily delayed as trained students displayed a "catch-up phenomenon." Project STAR students were essentially catching up, at an older age, with non-trained students in their drinking frequency. To Project STAR, these results indicated the need for high school programming.

STAR Connections: High School Training

As the first component of a planned, comprehensive prevention effort at the high school level, STAR Connections, is being implemented to "reopen communication between students and adults on the issues of alcohol and other drug use."



Instead of targeting all students, however, STAR Connections puts special emphasis on those involved in school activities and athletics.

"These kids are often significant influencers in their school student bodies," explained Steve Koon, School Specialist working with the STAR Connections program. "Our goal is to change the norm in

primary groups and by doing so begin to change it in the school as a whole."

At the beginning of the year, activity sponsors host a mandatory pre-season meeting with parents and students to discuss expectations and make commitments for action promoting non-use of alcohol and other drugs and to build group cohesiveness. Sponsors also host a post-season or mid-season meeting to discuss changes in both student and parental attitudes.

Throughout the year, at least four forums are held with the team or club, and specific alcohol and drug-related topics are discussed. Sponsors may choose forum topics from lesson plans provided in the program manual and quarterly newsletter.

"We think the forums are critical to the program," said Koon. "They are really the place where sponsors can provide follow-up with students."

As stated, STAR Connections is the first component of a planned, comprehensive prevention effort at the high school level. All STAR Connections sponsors are given three days of training free of charge and the Kauffman Foundation pays for substitutes during this time.

STAR Baseline Training: Community Involvement

STAR Baseline training is made available by the Kauffman Foundation to all community groups in an effort to increase community awareness. In this uniquely designed two-day experience, trainees examine their own knowledge and attitudes about drug and alcohol use and how these activities affect those close to them.

"The goal is two fold," explained Bruning. "First, we want to help members of a community establish a personal 'baseline' of understanding and information.

"Secondly, we want to encourage and motivate them to use that understanding to become directly involved in some type of prevention," said Bruning.

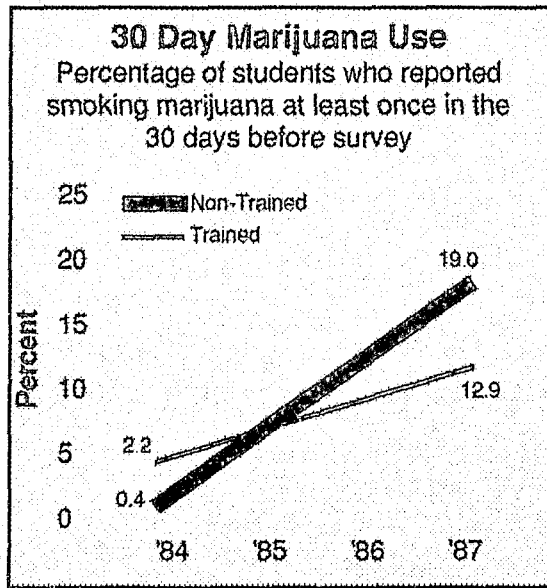
Future efforts of Project STAR and the Kauffman Foundation include the development of a media-based elementary school prevention program and out-of-state dissemination of Project STAR and STAR Connections curriculum.

"Anyone concerned about the vitality of the school and community must recognize the pressures and dangers that youth face today," explained Ewing M. Kauffman, founder of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

"Project STAR is lighting the way to change by supporting youth in their efforts to be drug-free."

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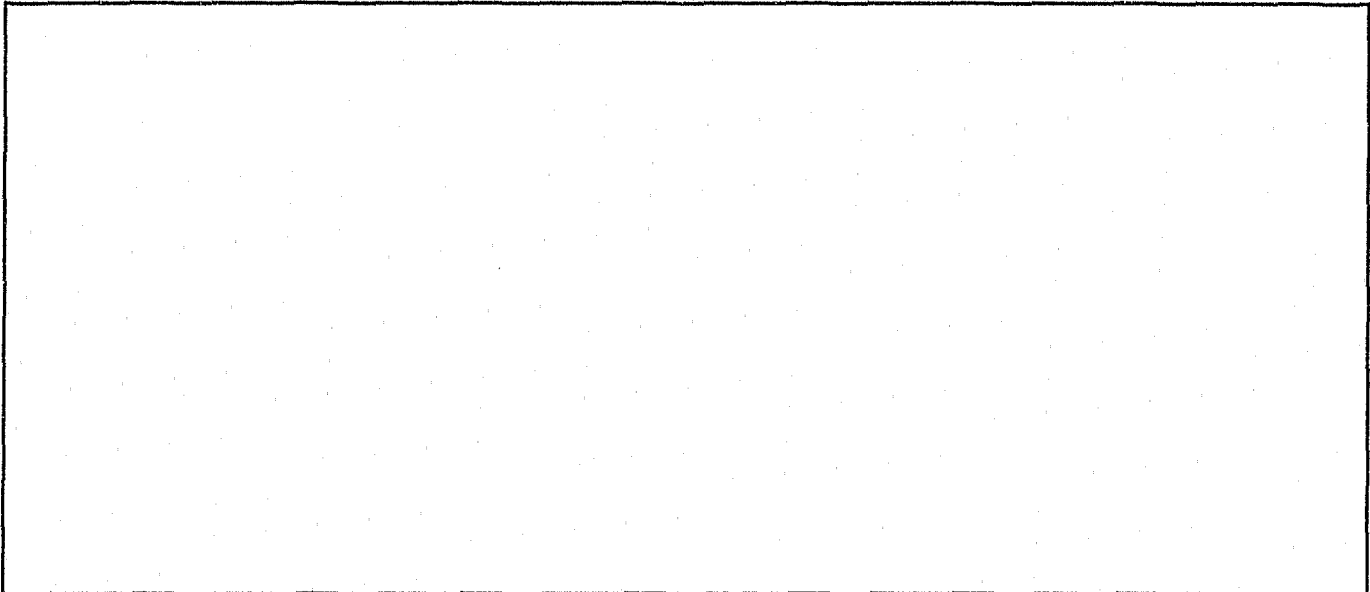
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Profile is printed in an effort to encourage dialogue on various approaches to juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. Programs featured in *Profile* have not been the subject of an independent evaluation by Community Research Associates.

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Profile is written and designed by Rebecca Maniglia. Additional design and artwork by Michael McMillen. For information about other issues in the *Profile* series or related programs on juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, contact: Community Research Associates, 115 N. Neil St, Suite 302, Champaign, IL, 61820 or call 217-398-3120.
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