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## Abstract

What if you were offered a product that promised to make you more attractive to others? A product that will help you be more outgoing and free spirited in social settings? What if these products promise carefree entertainment without consequences? Would you be interested? Would teens?

Tobacco and alcohol companies have been making such promises through advertising and marketing for decades, and as the recreational marijuana industry grows, it is following suit. A growing body of research shows that the more young people are exposed to alcohol and tobacco advertising, the more likely they are to use these substances themselves. Alcohol and tobacco companies take advantage of this fact and specifically target young people in their marketing. Media literacy is an effort to inform youth of how media is developed to influence their choices and to correct misleading information.

The Capital Region Educational Service District 113 in partnership with the Miss Washington Scholarship Organization implemented the Media Awareness project. The project is an interactive classroom presentation developed to increase teens' knowledge of how the alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco industries target them with their advertising and other marketing strategies. The presentation is delivered to middle school youth either by Miss Washington or high school students who have been trained by Miss Washington. Over the past three years, the project has reached thousands of students across Washington State.

As a result of participating in the presentation, students report increased awareness of marketing strategies used by alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana industries to target youth. They report that they have been given the tools to critically examine industry claims and are able to resist marketing strategies. They report that the presentation helps them identify consequences of using these products while they are still developing. Overall, the program has been effective in addressing an often overlooked source of pressure for adolescent substance use media and industry marketing.

## A. Philosophy

The mission of the Media Awareness project is to educate youth about how the tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana industries target youth with their advertising and other marketing strategies. The goals are for youth to increase awareness of the specific techniques used by these industries to attract young people, to build resistance to marketing, and to identify reasons to abstain from these products while they are still developing.

Many factors contribute to underage substance abuse, including exposure to widespread marketing and advertising. According to the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY), youth who see, hear, and read more alcohol ads are more likely to drink, and drink more heavily than their peers (CAMY, 2005). Our hope is that we encourage young people to critically analyze the messages they receive through television, signage, and online media, rather than be passive recipients of what J. Edward Hill, MD describes as "...aggressive advertising and marketing campaigns designed to make consumption glamorous, sexy, and fun" (CAMY, 2005). We aim to increase the perception of harm associated with underage substance use as well as to dispel the myth that most teenagers use substances.

## B. Needs Assessment

Young people face pressure to use alcohol and other drugs from many sources. The Media Awareness project is an effort designed to increase awareness of the pressure promoted through intentional marketing and often deliberate deception in order to entice consumers. Research is clear that marketing tactics can influence individual risk factors for adolescent substance abuse, namely lowering the perception of harm associated with drinking and other substance use, and normalizing the behavior leading young people to believe that using alcohol is a normal, widely accepted part of growing up. Prior to the project, the content of the presentation was available and the need to disseminate the information was clear, but how to get the information to youth remained a challenge.

In an era of shrinking funds, limited time, and lack of other resources, the need was evident to provide schools with support to educate their students on issues of underage drinking and other drug use. As recently as 2005 in Washington State, it was common for school districts to have an appointed student assistance counselor who could help promote substance abuse prevention messages through awareness events (ie- Red Ribbon Week) and classroom presentations. However, as budgets continued to shrink, more attention was given to intervention rather than prevention. The earliest version of the Media Awareness presentation already existed as a part of the State's 'Let's Draw the Line' campaign, but its exposure to youth was limited to groups participating in the campaign. In 2012, the Educational Service District (ESD) 113 was awarded a grant from the Washington State Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) to partner with the Miss Washington Scholarship Organization and have the current Miss Washington deliver the presentation to a modest 500 students within the five county region served by the ESD in classroom sessions. The project also included an opportunity for Miss Washington to mentor student prevention clubs in order to learn the presentation and deliver it to other students in their schools. A brief survey was developed and administered to students after watching the presentation, which indicated that the initial learning targets of the presentation were being met. Students also had an opportunity to write their reactions to the presentation in the survey.

It is important that the presentation be up to date and appealing to youth, so the presentation is updated annually. During the 2013-14 school year, the presentation was updated with new images,

information, and content based on the survey results, as well as the input of high school prevention club students. A new manual was created to help newcomers deliver the presentation, and the survey was updated to collect more information. With additional support from the Washington State Department of Health, the most recent version was updated to include information about retail marijuana, e-devices, and advertising and social media. With support of the ESD's Center for Research and Data Analysis, the student survey was updated to measure students' self-evaluation of the learning objectives. This data, along with input from students, continues to inform the updates to the presentation.

### C. Population Served

The target population served by the Media Awareness program is middle school aged youth (grades 6-9). The research supports that this is a good time in an adolescent's life to provide education about media awareness. First and foremost, while the vast majority of middle school students do not use alcohol, marijuana, or cigarettes in Washington State, this is a particularly vulnerable time for young people to start experimenting. According to 2012 Healthy Youth Survey data, the average age of first use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana was about 12 to 13 years old. It seems prudent to arm these young people with the information before they make a decision to use.

Another reason to target middle school aged youth with this presentation (as opposed to younger children) is that they are developmentally ready to understand and respond to the material. Early adolescence is a time when young people begin to develop the ability to observe their environment, assess, and take appropriate measures. They are developing the cognitive ability to critically observe their environment, and analyze the messages they receive, especially from media. This is also a time where they are asserting their independence and feel a genuine sense of outrage when they learn how these companies are trying to manipulate them.

The young women who become Miss Washington are skilled public speakers and know how to command a stage. However, few of them have experience speaking to a classroom full of middle school students. Preparation for this audience is essential, and often learned through experience. Each year, the former Miss spends time with the current Miss to discuss the project and the lessons learned. Additionally, the Miss attends a training session to learn the presentation and to discuss typical issues that may arise in the classroom. As the current Miss Washington learns the presentation and more importantly, class management, she is able to impart her experience to the high school prevention club students, who will do the same work. During the teen trainings, students are given tools to use to help manage behaviors and questions that may come up during the presentation.

Cultural competency is an important aspect of the project and is constantly addressed as the project continues to evolve. One way we seek to ensure cultural competency is seeking feedback from students, teachers, and other people who attend the presentation. We ask if the presentation is relevant to the community and respond to suggestions for improvement. We ask students to help select the images and the information that is shared. We also strive to use images and content which reflect the cultural make-up of Washington State. While it is not possible to have one presentation completely fit with every community in the state, we continually ask if we are doing everything we can to come close. We also allow for flexibility and encourage prevention clubs to tailor the presentation to their community as needed.

#### D. Building Capacity

Each year, the program continues to build and the information reaches more students. This could not be accomplished without the coordination between many organizations and individuals. The primary organizations involved in the project are Capital Region ESD 113, the Miss Washington Scholarship Organization, Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery, and the Department of Health.

The ESD is the liaison to schools around the state and also provides technical assistance, such as providing current research, and the Center for Research and Data Analysis which helped develop an accurate and appropriate survey to measure results. The ESD also manages the overall project and coordinates the scheduling and other logistics. Whenever possible, Student Assistance Professionals from the ESD are also present during the classroom presentations to provide support and help answer questions that arise.

The Miss Washington Organization has incorporated the project into their program and is considered when selecting a new Miss. As the project continues to grow, the organization is considering training the young women from local competitions as a way of reaching a broader audience across the state. Many of the women involved in the project have also delivered the presentation to students from their former schools.

In addition to providing funding for the project, DBHR and DOH are able to use their considerable networks to raise awareness of the project and how to get it to schools. Because of this networking, there have been far more requests for the presentation than we are able to fulfill. In response, we look for opportunities to train other individuals and provide them with the materials needed to bring the presentation to their community. For instance, in 2014 the presentation and related materials were added to the Washington Healthy Youth Coalition website, [starttalkingnow.org](http://starttalkingnow.org), and continues to be a component of the 'Let's Draw the Line' campaign. Additionally, in 2015, we hosted a breakout workshop at the Student Support Conference, a convention sponsored by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Participants were given training and materials so they could either present themselves, or train their high school students to deliver it.

Another important piece of capacity building is that each of our surveys is hand-entered into a database. In order to accomplish this task, we recruit students who earn community services hours and other incentives, as well as other staff and volunteers. In 2015 alone, about 2000 surveys were entered.

What started in 2012 as a modest plan to get the information to 500 students has grown tremendously. As the project continues to grow, new strategies for delivery are discussed to meet demand.

#### E. Strategic Planning

The primary goal of the Media Awareness project is to strengthen students' knowledge and attitudes in order to empower them to make healthy decisions about alcohol and other drug use. There are four primary objectives to meet this goal. First, we want to educate youth about the specific techniques companies use to target youth- colors, images, and techniques used in advertisements, flavoring, product packaging and placement, and use of social media. Secondly, we want to build resistance to marketing by encouraging students to critically analyze print and video advertisements.

We also want to correct the common misperceptions promoted through marketing that youth substance use is widely prevalent and without consequences. The final objective is for students to identify reasons to delay initiation and abstain from using substances while they are still developing. The presentation is designed to meet each of these objectives, and addresses the gap in education around the topic created by limited time, capacity, and other resources.

The project seeks to serve a minimum of 1,000 students through Miss Washington appearances, and to train at least three prevention clubs annually. Our time frame is generally from October, when we begin updates and start training the new Miss Washington, through June, when school is adjourned for summer.

Our hope for long term sustainability is to continue to use Miss Washington to promote and deliver the project so students across the state continue to get the information, as well as to continue training youth groups. We also seek to train community prevention leaders, teachers, and other interested individuals so communities that don't have access to Miss Washington still have access to the information. The potential partnerships through other ESD programs that serve youth make this vision a reality. Examples of partnerships include Student Assistance Prevention and Intervention Programs, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Programs, and other student leadership groups.

#### F. Implementation

The prevention field has been aware of the influence and impact of advertising and other marketing strategies on adolescent substance use for some time, and education for teens on the topic is built in to many curricula. What makes our program unique is how the information is presented and delivered.

The Media Awareness presentation is an interactive PowerPoint and generally lasts about 40 minutes. Throughout the presentation, students are invited to speak out and several 'games' are built in to get students engaged and talking. One game is identifying the "American Alphabet" during which students try to identify the company or product based on one letter of its name (think of the cursive 'D' from Disney). In a similar fashion, students identify companies based on slogans (Skittles "...taste the rainbow") or logos (Nike's swoosh). Students are shown 90 second commercials to illustrate common selling techniques. They are also shown online marketing examples through Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The presentation shows students how companies strive to get their attention and market to them, including alcohol and tobacco companies, and more recently, the emerging marijuana and vaping industries. The presentation corrects the misperceptions portrayed by these companies that their products are harmless, helpful, and very common. They are given the facts about the relatively little prevalence of substance use by teenagers in Washington State (using current Healthy Youth Survey data), as well as the consequences experienced by many teens who do use. Finally, students are given an opportunity to share their reasons for not using or waiting until they are 21. At the end of the session, students are asked to complete a brief survey.

Due to its interactive nature, the presentation is ideally delivered in a classroom, such as a health class, and limited to 50 students or fewer. Although this may mean we reach fewer students than we might from a full-school assembly, our experience has been that students are far more likely to engage in the presentation, and are more likely to retain the information.

The presentation is delivered either by Miss Washington, or a group of high school teens who have gone through the teen training with Miss Washington. The teen training can be anywhere from one to three hours and is facilitated by Miss Washington and an adult supervisor or advisor. The training consists of ice-breaking activities, education, a viewing of the presentation, and an opportunity to practice the presentation in front of Miss Washington for feedback on presentation skills. The students (often members of a prevention club such as SADD) are encouraged to practice again before going to their middle schools to present. During the presentation, students introduce themselves, and state the reason they are drug free. This is an important piece of the teen presentation because the fact that there are teens at their high school who are alcohol and other drug free is reinforced to the younger students.

Whether delivered by Miss Washington, or delivered by local teens, the Media Awareness presentation has been well received. Miss Washington is a local celebrity across the state, and students (and staff!) are always really excited to meet her. Not only does she bring her status and prestige, but each Miss is also a great role model who younger students can often relate to. They are young enough that they can recall their middle school years and talk about the pressures they faced and how they coped, and young enough for the middle school students to care. After the presentations, the students are invited to follow Miss Washington on Facebook or Twitter, which many do. More than once, a student has reached out to Miss Washington following the presentation to comment on the topic.

The teens who present offer a different status, and an important one. Eventually, the middle school students who watch the presentation will make the difficult transition to high school, and for many the link to students who are outspoken about their drug-free lifestyle is invaluable and increases their resiliency against unhealthy choices.

Implementation of this program is easily replicable, but requires a lot of behind-the-scenes coordination. Advertising for the presentation comes from the ESD, which can alert all school district superintendents and principals, state agencies who can notify key community leaders and coalition organizers, and other networking opportunities. The scheduling of presentations is handled through the ESD and the Miss Washington Organization director.

Over the years, the program has served a growing number of students. The first year, 2012-13, the presentation was delivered to 1,200 students. 2013-14 had 3,500 students viewing it, and this year, from January to June of 2015, Miss Washington presented to nearly 4,400 students across the state. She also trained 43 high school teens from four different prevention clubs. At this time, it is unknown how many students they then presented to.

## G. Evaluation

Our survey results indicate that the Media Awareness project has been successful in teaching the identified learning objectives. Each year, the evaluation has been updated to more accurately capture the effectiveness of the project. Because of this fact, it is impossible to compare effectiveness over the years of implementation, but the following is what we do know.

In 2013-14 school year, 90 percent of students stated that they “understand more clearly that alcohol advertisers intentionally target youth”, and 90 percent are “convinced that alcohol advertisers use humor, sexuality, and celebrities to promote alcohol for youth”. Finally, 89 percent of students reported that they are “convinced alcohol advertisements would look a lot different if they needed to

show the health and other consequences of using. That same year, a health teacher who invited Miss Washington to her class stated, “This was a brilliant presentation that aligned with my middle school health curriculum perfectly...” and “My students walked away building their knowledge and understanding ... with this knowledge I feel they are better prepared to stand up to peer pressure and the temptations of drug and alcohol advertising in the future.”

This year, the survey was much more specific and relevant to the updates made to the current presentation. The following chart outlines the questions, and the percentage of students who agree or strongly agree (score of 4 or 5 out of 5).

I know how these industries target YOUTH with their branding.	81%
I can give an example of how these industries target YOUTH.	73%
I will resist branding.	68%
I can name one reason why these industries target YOUTH.	77%
I know how colors can be used by these industries to target YOUTH.	78%
I am confident I will not be sold these products because of branding.	72%
I know one technique used by these industries to target YOUTH.	78%
I know how flavors can be used by industries to target YOUTH (Ex., E-Cigs).	84%
I am going to share what I learned today with others.	56%
I know at least one reason to not use these industry products.	81%

In addition to these questions, students were asked to identify topics their friend would benefit from learning more about. More than half the students reported ‘marijuana’, a result that is not surprising given the conflicting messages they receive about marijuana in our state. When asked, “What did you like, was new, or meaningful for you about this presentation?” students made comments such as, “I didn’t know they could make you pay a \$500 fine and lose your scholarship money (if charged with Minor In Possession)” and “Interactive. I learned how brands use colors and flavors to disguise alcohol.” Finally, students were asked “what is one thing you will do differently as a result of this presentation?”. Responses included, “look more carefully at products”, “I’ll keep deciding for myself not to use alcohol and drugs and not listen to the lies brands tell” and, “Look at labels more closely, look to see how different companies advertise new products to draw people in”.

So far, our results show promise, as well as room for improvement. At this time it is difficult to measure how this presentation has affected overall adolescent substance use, but our survey suggests that it is effective in meeting the learning objectives and the projects overall mission to educate youth about how the tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana industries target youth with their advertising and other marketing strategies.

#### H. Program Management

The program is managed by a Student Assistance Professional from the Capital Region ESD 113. The ESD is the hub for coordinating the activities, so once a Miss Washington appearance has been booked, we are in constant communication with the school and the Miss Washington Organization. After the appearance, the school is contacted again for any feedback, concerns, or suggestions for the future. The student Assistance Professional oversees the scheduling, management of the surveys, and all required reporting.



The project is presented at least twice to funders. The first presentation occurs after the presentation has been updated for the year. Then, a progress presentation is delivered at a Washington State Healthy Youth Coalition meeting, which provides state level leadership to reduce under-age drinking and other drug use.

Many resources are available for implementation. Funding for the project is provided by the Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery and the Washington State Department of Health. Another important resource is the relationships and networking that occurs in order to get class time for the presentation. We are in an era where class time is incredibly valuable and often heavily focused on academics. Schools have allowed time for the disruption that occurs anytime something out of the ordinary happens, and this is largely due to the trust cultivated in our relationships. Schools believe that this topic is a valuable use of time.

Expenses for the project have included contracting with the Miss Washington Organization, supplies such as thumb drives to disseminate the presentation and related materials, incentives for student prevention teams involved in the project, including a visit to the Washington State Spring Youth Forum where they presented to other youth about the project.