

**The Stand Up Leadership Team:
A Collaborative Youth Prevention Effort Engaging Community for Social Change
By Julianna Nemeth**

It was Saturday April 26th and nearly 1500 middle and high school students from around Delaware County started streaming into the coliseum at the Delaware Area Fair grounds for the 5th Annual Battle of the Bands, a youth planned and led event supported through the Delaware Area Career Center. Although the fifteen teen bands that were performing had been rehearsing furiously, another group of youth, the Delaware Stand Up Leadership Team, had been meeting three times a week, for several hours each time, preparing as well.

For the second year in a row the Stand Up Leadership Team decided that they wanted to bring their prevention message to the Battle of the Bands, one of the largest community events attracting a significant amount of teens. This year the students wrote "Public Service Announcements," skits of sorts, on the topics of the prevention of alcohol facilitated sexual assault and coerced sexual activity in teen relationships as well as on the prevention of underage alcohol use and teen tobacco prevention. They also prepared game activities for the teens present at the Battle to learn more about a variety of issues, including teen dating violence and sexual assault prevention.

The Stand Up Leadership Team arrived early bringing close to \$1000 in items they secured for the raffle. In years past, proceeds from the Battles' admission and raffles were used to fund and build a skate park in Delaware City. This year the youth organizers decided to start "Central Ohio Youth Projects" a foundation run and managed by teens that will accept



applications from other teens to implement youth projects in the community. After setting up the raffle items, the Leadership Team set up their booth area and began practicing the skits they'd perform as public service announcements.

By the end of the day the youth attending the event experienced public service messages from the Stand Up Leadership Team during the band breaks, including a powerful message about sexual assault prevention. And many of the youth in attendance took time to come out to speak with the Stand Up Leadership Team members and play their educational learning games on teen dating violence, sexual assault, tobacco and alcohol.

The energy of the day was intense. It was amazing as one of the few adults at the event to know that all of this was planned and implemented by and for teens. The Stand Up Leadership Team took pride in their violence and drug free messages. And as they packed up several of the members of the teen bands that performed came over to speak with our youth and hang out with them. It's at times like these that as an

adult I've come to realize that teens have the power to change the world. And when students talk openly and honestly about their realities, about how 12% of the teens in the county have been forcibly sexual assaulted, about how 13% of teens in the county reported physical violence in their dating relationships within the past 12 months, that even the "idols," the "rock stars," want to know what they can do to make things better.

The Stand Up Leadership Team, funded in part through Violence Against Women Act Rape Prevention Education and Family Violence Prevention Services grant dollars, is an all-county teen-led prevention group. Instead of competing, the major prevention providers in the community decided to join their extra-curricular youth-led prevention efforts, and in 2007 the Stand Up Leadership Team was born. The goal of the collaborating agency and school partners was to create a dynamic youth-led prevention initiative that would foster the Search Institute's developmental assets, including assets relating to the external empowerment and constructive use of time assets and to the internal assets pertaining to positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. In addition, Stand Up Teen Leaders are encouraged to think of ways to



impact prevention along the Spectrum of Prevention, a systematic tool developed by Larry Cohen that allows for effective prevention through activities related to Influencing Policy and Legislation, Changing Organizational Practices, Fostering Coalitions and Networks, Educating Providers, Promoting Community Education and Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills.

The collaborating agencies believe youth have the ability to impact positive change for other youth and the larger community. The Delaware General Health District and HelpLine provide the primary staffing for the group's meetings and activities and the other prevention providers throughout the community support the group's efforts by sponsoring events and connecting the team to critical community service needs. Shortly after forming, the Stand Up Leadership teens wrote a statement of belief—We believe that by being drug, alcohol, and violence free and by making positive choices we will help make ourselves stronger and our futures brighter. They decided that they would Stand Up to promote positive self images, a positive future, and positive relationship choices; they would work to end teen tobacco, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual violence; and they would work to ensure the wellbeing of the environment.

In the few short years they've been together the Stand Up Leadership Team has of service projects related to their vision and core areas of action. They have hosted two teen leadership weekends, provided testimony at the Ohio Department of Education Regional Safe Schools Summits, presented at the Ohio Prevention and Education Conference, written legislatures about teen dating violence protection and prevention education bills, organized school drives to secure items to create gift baskets that were then donated to the local domestic violence shelter for Mother's Day, presented to local funders and participated in local focus groups attesting to the needs of youth in the community, as well as sponsored

events within the community to promote positive images of youth and to influence peers in making positive decisions.

This group has taught me that youth have the ability to engage the community—both with peers and adults. Sometimes, in fact, when you empower youth to speak passionately about their vision, adults, decision makers, really do stop and listen. Thinking about cultivating youth-led prevention efforts in your community? Give it a try. Then you too can be witness to the creativity and passion, that when funneled into a positive direction, has the ability to change your community, our world. It's worth the investment.

Julianna Nemeth is the Prevention Director at HelpLine of Delaware and Morrow Counties, Inc. As such, she oversees the coordination of the prevention education initiatives which HelpLine provides around the topics of Suicide Prevention, Sexual and Family Violence Prevention, and Child Sexual Assault Prevention. In addition, she supports the implementation of the Sexual Assault Response Network, a program of HelpLine. HelpLine is a host agency for the Ohio Sexual Violence Prevention Network, a statewide effort which brings together specialists interested in ending sexual violence. Julianna holds a B.A. in Religion from Wittenberg University and an M.A. in Women's Studies from Ohio State University. Involved as a volunteer and professional with sexual violence, intimate partner violence and family violence justice advocacy work since the mid-1990s, Julianna is concerned with the ways in which cultural identity, privilege, and oppression inform our ability to provide effective prevention and intervention services to those in the community. Julianna is the current convener of the Delaware County Suicide Prevention Coalition and the PEACE (Prevention Education in All Classroom Environments) Collaborative and is the co-chair of the Ohio Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Consortium. In addition, she is active on the Delaware and Morrow Sexual Assault Response Teams and is working to found the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence.