

# **FCD Drug Resistance Initiative: Was it worth it?**

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In early October, two educational consultants, Roger Waitt and Gabriel Taylor, from Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD), spent four full days on campus offering vital information to Heathwood students, parents and faculty. Students described these presenters as “fun,” “nice,” “cool,” “easy to listen to,” and “easy to relate to.” Inviting experts to work closely with members of our community was a deliberate strategy that our school utilized with the intention of helping members maintain healthy and drug-free life-styles.

FCD is a non-profit organization out of the Boston area that utilizes a unique approach to drug resistance education. All of their consultants have achieved long-term recovery from alcohol or drug addiction. These educators joined our community and shared specific information that helped us understand how drugs and alcohol can harm us physically, legally, emotionally and socially. More importantly, they shared their stories of how drugs destroyed their lives. According to our students, this is what made their visit most powerful. A student reported, “I liked that they did not just tell you a bunch of facts and then leave. They discussed it with us by using real life examples.”

Some key points that Roger shared with parents at an evening presentation include the following:

- ✓ There is an average interval of two years between when children first use drugs and when parents learn of their child’s use.
- ✓ Parents should ask questions and communicate with other parents.
- ✓ The number one reason why students do not do drugs is that they do not want to disappoint their parents.
- ✓ It is crucial that parents talk, but more importantly, listen to children.

In addition to assemblies with our student body, students in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades received intensive classroom sessions during the week. Students in the eighth grade were targeted because they tend to have misperceptions about drug and alcohol use. If these “normative beliefs” go unchecked they can be very influential. Students in the tenth grade were targeted because they have been exposed to various alcohol and drug-use practices and perceptions of their peers and yet are still impressionable.

To help us understand the benefits of this program, we administered student surveys at one and two month intervals. We wanted to hear from the students to find out whether they thought their time was well spent. We also wanted to give the students an opportunity to continue the dialogue on this important topic. Students gave overwhelmingly positive responses. A student in the tenth grade described this type of drug education as “utterly necessary.” Some important themes presented themselves in both grades as being especially poignant. Students felt that hearing the “personal” and “real-life” stories shared by the presenters was most likely to help them make drug-free

choices well into the future during occasions when access and opportunity to drugs and alcohol were present. Students also emphasized their positive reception of the message that the decision to *use* or *not use* was theirs. During our follow-up discussions, it was evident that students perceived this message as novel, accurate and qualitatively different from the imperative “don’t do drugs.” Students noticed that the presenters never said, “don’t do drugs.” Instead Roger and Gabriel shared relevant information and emphasized the students’ choice. One student reported that this message made him “feel more like an individual.”

Was it worth it? I purposefully posed the following question to each student group: “If you were a parent with a child attending Heathwood, would you want your child to have this type of educational experience?” Without hesitation, their answer was a resounding yes!

Students find themselves on the front lines when it comes to the war on drugs. Efforts to bolster their resistance have great value when they serve to intercept and prevent the serious effects that illicit and inappropriate drug and alcohol use cause. Our collective effort to live a healthy and fruitful life is vital to this end. The daily encouragement to remain drug-free that every student, parent and employee offers is important, powerful and permeates the lives of all persons that are connected with this fine learning institution.