

Op-Ed: When Teenagers Speak Up, We Start a Chain Reaction

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Guest Columnist

May 19, 2021

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Adults may say they know what their kids go through when we're out with our friends and have to work through all kinds of situations.

But the truth is, there's a lot they honestly aren't aware of. Which is why it's so meaningful when we as teenagers step up and take action.

I experienced a situation several years ago in middle school. I had no idea I would have to deal with this issue so young, or that it would change my life in the ways that it did.

When I was 12, I became friends with a girl whose friends started bringing alcohol to school and getting drunk. I wanted to help, but confronting her was incredibly hard. I would tell her she needed to stop, about all the consequences, but she refused to listen. Every day I would try to figure out what to do to help.

Eventually she got caught, and it was also difficult watching everything she went through after that point.

This whole experience motivated me. At a young age, I experienced needing to speak up against underage drinking and having to confront a close friend. It's terrible, it's scary and I don't want anyone to go through the same. I want kids to be informed and hear from me, a teenager, who has experience.

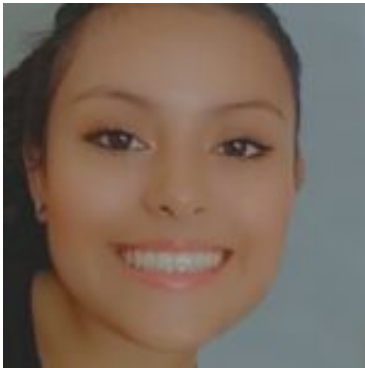
If I can change one person and that person changes another person... it turns into a chain reaction and makes the community as a whole better and stronger.

Today, I work to prevent future situations like mine. I share my story and help other teenagers understand they can speak up and create change.

This is especially important when we talk about dealing with friends driving after drinking. So many of us encounter these situations and have to be aware of how to handle them and hopefully prevent crashes, injuries or worse.

I recently presented to a group of students, which had incredible results. Next, I'm hoping to speak to more classes and motivate even more youth to be stronger, empowered and confident in the challenging – and scary – moments we all experience.

Because eventually, we all have to face unexpected challenges on our own and it's up to us to take the right action, no matter how difficult that is.



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Pelayo is a sophomore currently enrolled at Young Women's Leadership Academy and is a member of Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth's Youth Leadership Council, which identifies young leaders across the state and helps them develop skills to become active, engaged citizens.