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#### What I Have Learned as a Member of DFCA

I grew up attending programs such as D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) which taught us that avoiding drugs was as easy as “Just Say No.” If only it were that easy now. As a senior in high school, I have grown accustomed to the news that “she smokes” or “he chews.” My friends smoke and drink, people I am not friends with smoke and drink, and even lower classmen smoke and drink. It seems as though it is not as easy as it used to be in elementary school. Some find it very hard to resist the urge to turn down what they know is bad for them just because they are pressured by their friends. But one thing I have learned ever since joining the Drug Free Club at my school is that sometimes it takes breaking the norms around you in order to realize that it is okay to be different. It was sort of a joke when the idea was first introduced because, to put it bluntly, we are high school teens in the twenty-first century. Choosing to be drug-free is not the cool thing to do anymore. Telling your friends that you have to stay after school for a Drug Free Club meeting does not sound cool. I figured very few kids would even join the group so I did not plan to join either. But I was mistaken. My high school decided to select ambassadors from sports teams and clubs and I was chosen by my cross country coach. I attended the first meeting and realized that I was not alone. There were football players, golfers, runners, baseball players, band members and more. It was almost like a movie because the classic high school groups: jocks, nerds, and popular kids, had all come together to show that they were committed to their health and their future. So week after week my school's DFCA coordinators held more meetings where we came up with prizes and incentives to spread the word about our club. We would have pizza parties as we listened to speakers, donuts in the morning at 6:45 and even shaved ice at lunch just for presenting our Drug-Free Club card. I saw excitement flow through the school when drug-free members received shaved ice or free admission to sports games. It was sort of an eye-opener for me as I saw that the more people we got involved, the more normal it seemed for someone to talk about the club. I felt more comfortable pulling out the drug-free card at restaurants to get the discount because now, my friends were all doing it too. We were excited to walk into those 6:45 in the morning meetings together or go into the meetings during the school day. This was a fresh and new feeling that I had not experienced until my senior year of high school. My school was able to create a club that spread so easily across the school by selecting ambassadors and I am so grateful they did. I had a voice in meetings and we were given tasks like reaching out to local restaurants to ask for discounts and special deals for members. Not only did this build my leadership skills, but also maturity and communication skills through reaching out to businesses. The opportunity that this club gave me took me back to the simple days of just saying no is one and it is an opportunity that I will not take for granted or ever forget. The Drug Free Club of America at my school showed me that being different is good because you can really take leadership and show others the right direction in life. By becoming part of this

club I became more confident in being different and more confident in my choice of saying no to drugs.