

**How has Drug Free Clubs of America affected or changed your: Friends and yourself**

Before my junior year of high school I felt so lost. I was confused as to why I wasn't making any strong connections with any friends. Everyone else seemed to have a friend group that they felt comfortable in. *So why me?* It wasn't until the beginning of my junior year that this lost feeling began to vanish. I quickly positioned myself in a friend group as soon as I saw a welcoming gesture. We hung out all the time after school; going to the park, the movies, having sleepovers, etc. My happiness and confidence grew as we bonded closer and closer together, each day.

I was at my highest level of happiness the first half of my junior year. It couldn't have been better. But what I didn't know was how it could get worse. The last half of my junior year was where everything began to go downhill. I noticed that my friends were going out and sharing secrets with one another more. When I finally got the courage to ask them what all the secrets were, they invited me to come out to one of their outings to see for myself. That following weekend was the first high school party I had ever attended. As soon as I stepped into the hosting house, I felt out of place. The smell of marijuana and alcohol reeked the whole house. Not even an hour had passed and I was ready to go home. I told my friends this, and all of a sudden I was surrounded by drunk teens (some of which were strangers to me) shoving their cups of alcohol in my face and their pens filled with weed in it. They were all telling me that the reason I wasn't having fun was because I wasn't fully immersing myself into what the party had to offer. The next part of this memory is something that I leave out a lot when telling it to people, as it embarrasses me. But why should it? I felt so crowded as if there was no escape other than joining in on their activities, so I began to cry. And I told them I wanted to go home right away. From that night on the friends who I thought were my friends, became unfamiliar. They kept trekking on that road of alcohol and drugs. Even posted about their "fun" adventures too, on social media. And I, I split off from them.

Being an active member in the Drug Free Club my whole highschool career, I knew my place that night. The knowledge that I have gained from being in the Drug Free Club has greatly impacted my life. I am healthy without drugs. I am happy without drugs. And so much more. Why would I, a student-athlete, who has worked so hard in school and in sports want to ruin my own reputation? I am in control of my own body, meaning that I get to decide if I want to join in on the illegal activities of doing drugs or if I want to do everything I can to keep my mental and physical self healthy by staying drug free. Still today, I am glad that I stayed away from the alcohol and drugs that night at the party. The couple weeks following that party was a bit difficult, as I sat there thinking that if I would have just done what my friends were doing, i'd still be friends with them. But as I began to reach out to other members of the Drug Free Club, I felt a sense of community and inclusion. I knew I wasn't alone. I joined a new group of friends during the summer into my senior year. From the start I knew this friendship would be different from my previous group. In common, we were all part of our school's Drug Free Club, because we knew that we could have fun in different ways. We knew that we didn't need drugs or alcohol to control our lives. I feel more cared about with these new friends in a way that my old friend group did not express. People that share the same values and attributes as I do, are the people I want to surround myself with.