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Grade 12

Empowered and Drug-Free: The Influence of DFCA

When I joined my school's Drug Free Clubs of America group as a freshman, my expectations were admittedly rather low. If I'm being completely honest, I only joined because I didn't want all of my brand-new teachers to think I was a kid from the "wrong side of the tracks". I assumed that everyone involved in this club was just like me, and we were all just following the crowd by signing up. Truthfully, it wasn't until I started receiving the various DFCA member perks that I felt there was any value in the program for me. The weekly meetings, rally, and rewards were nice, but even once I did start receiving these prizes and treats, I still didn't fully understand the point of the organization. I mean, it might've been useful for the kids who use drugs, but what could it do for me?

As a sophomore, I reluctantly decided to join my school's DFCA program again. I mostly joined because the majority of my friends did, and I was scared of being left behind. While I now recognize that mindset as a red flag, I got lucky. None of my friends got caught up in bad habits during our second year of high school, and I didn't see a drug or alcohol bandwagon for me to jump on. While that was a definite "pro" about my sophomore year, there were other memorable moments. I was trying to add more leadership roles to my resume, and I decided to apply for a DFCA officer position. I figured that I'd be a shoo-in for an office. Instead, I received a rude awakening when I didn't land a spot. Discouraged and admittedly a little hurt, I started looking down on DFCA as if the organization was beneath me.

After not receiving an office, I almost didn't join the club again simply out of spite. But, after some coaxing from my parents and friends, I paid the fee and signed up. Even I had to admit that the post-drug-test perks were pretty spectacular. However, my perspective on the benefits of DFCA changed after attending one party during my junior year. The change in my classmates' attitudes toward substance use was shocking to me, and my eyes were opened to many new things. Suddenly, the phrase "I can't, I get tested" wasn't just words strung together, but a handy tool to keep in my back pocket. It got me out of some sticky situations, and I was grateful for it. As the year went on, there were kids I had grown up with who learned how to say it - and others who didn't.

As a senior looking back on my DFCA experience, I'm grateful that I joined. Being involved in this program is about more than receiving rewards or obtaining new leadership positions to add to a resume. This organization lets you build relationships with others who are committed to a healthy lifestyle, and it teaches kids about the dangers of drug use. It gives students an out who hope to stay away from substance abuse and teaches them valuable life skills. I'm grateful that this organization is at my school, and I'm hopeful that students will be positively impacted by it for years to come.