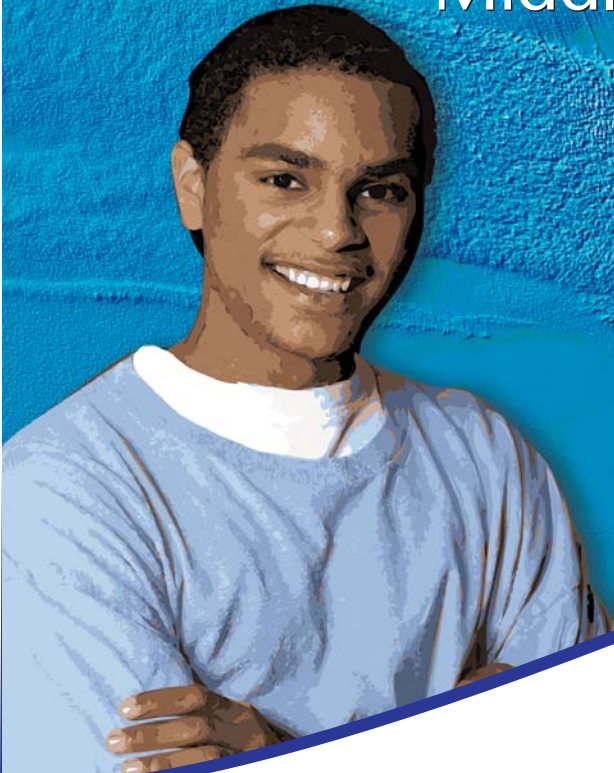


DARE

Middle School Program Revamped



By Elizabeth S. McConnell

As students develop during the middle school years, they often formulate new attitudes and opinions toward authority. These attitudes are enriched when students have the opportunity to interact with school resource officers in an engaging classroom experience. The New DARE middle school program, *Take Charge of Your Life*, has reinvented DARE as part of a major national research study that promises to help teachers and administrators address the issues of drugs and school violence.

Gone is the old-style approach to prevention in which an officer stands behind a podium and lectures students in straight rows. With the New DARE, the functions of the DARE instructor and the school resource officer are combined. New DARE officers are trained as

“coaches” to support students using research-based refusal strategies in high-stakes peer-pressure environments. School resource officers (SROs) are trained as certified DARE middle school/junior high curriculum instructors.

The program is based on constructivism and interactive learning and uses a variety of instructional strategies. For example, students are now able to see for themselves—via brain imagery—tangible proof of how substances diminish mental activity, emotions, coordination, and movement. Mock courtroom exercises bring home the social and legal consequences of drug use and violence.

“Prevention inside the 21st century schoolhouse will need to be effective, diverse, accountable, and mean more things to more people, particularly with the safety issues that have emerged since Columbine and terrorist alerts,” according to Charlie Parsons, executive director of DARE America. “That’s one reason why every New DARE officer is also being trained as a certified school resource officer.”

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DOUBLE THE IMPACT

The New DARE curriculum is in its fourth year of a massive five-year \$15 million national research effort funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Under the direction of principal investigator Zili Sloboda, the University of Akron's Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Study is a rigorous scientific evaluation of the New DARE curricula designed to blend the latest in effective prevention science with the nation's largest prevention delivery network.




The implementation of the New DARE curricula and associated training affords greater options for utilizing SROs. The positions of DARE instructor and school resource officer are congruent and enormously supportive of a safe school climate. Merging these roles meets the need to provide students with life skills imparted from a science-based prevention program while meeting the demand for increased police presence in schools.


"The presence of an SRO on our campus provided our staff and students with many positive benefits," according to Mike Mason, principal at Hold Middle School in Fayetteville,

Arkansas. "In addition to an increased sense of security and well-being, students learned to relate to a law enforcement officer in a personal and meaningful way. The New DARE lessons also helped our students set goals and focus on making positive life decisions." ■

Elizabeth S. McConnell is deputy director for education for DARE America. To find out more about the New DARE, visit www.dare.com



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