

## P.A.R.T.Y. ON; PROGRAM EDUCATES TEENS ON THE DANGERS OF RISKY BEHAVIOUR

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Illustration: photospread; 3 photos: 1. photo by Ernest Doroszuk; ELTON HORNER, a quadriplegic, and former patient at Toronto Rehab's Lyndhurst Centre, speaks to students at the centre as part of the P.A.R.T.Y. program.; 2. 2 photos; LAURA KRISTENSEN's red Sundance was hit by a drunk driver eight years ago. She underwent nine operations and almost lost her leg to an infection -- but today she is walking.

LAURA KRISTENSEN'S left leg was so badly shattered, doctors could not count the fractures.

"They said my leg looked like cornflakes," she tells a group of astonished Newmarket students.

Eight years ago, a drunk driver slammed his pickup into Kristensen's red Sundance. "I saw headlights and that was about it," says Kristensen, 18 at the time. She underwent nine operations and almost lost her leg to an infection. But today, Kristensen does what doctors said she might never do again. She walks.

Kristensen is one of the injury survivors who share their stories with high school students through the P.A.R.T.Y. program -- Prevent Alcohol and Risk-related Trauma in Youth. The program has been educating teens about the dangers of risky behaviour since 1994, especially important as prom season approaches.

### TRAUMA ROOM

P.A.R.T.Y., based at Sunnybrook & Women's College Health Sciences Centre, guides students through the experience of a serious injury, including visits to the trauma room and intensive care unit. The day ends dramatically at Toronto Rehab's Lyndhurst Centre for spinal cord rehabilitation.

No shock tactics are ever used. Just the sobering truth.

"We don't go in for the gore," says Joanne Banfield, the program co-ordinator. "That's the sensational side. That's not what stays with you.

"The goal is to show how a teenager's priorities, self-identity, independence, sexuality, appearance and friendships change with a traumatic injury."

P.A.R.T.Y. skips the preaching. The day focuses on making smart choices.

"We're not here to be your parents," adds Banfield.

During a recent visit, 30 students from Dr. John M. Denison Secondary School attended the session. The day started with good-natured giggling, but as the day progressed, the laughter stopped.

Banfield begins the sessions with what she calls "setting the groundwork." Students learn about brain and spinal chord injuries and what they might experience in the trauma room. The briefing follows them into an actual trauma room.

"You're going to experience sights, sounds and smells that you're not used to," Banfield cautions. On average, one student faints during the day-long program.

Tensions rise as Dr. Talat Chughtai explains how he can crack open a patient's rib cage and massage the heart to get it pumping. Two students retreat outside.

In the classroom, Banfield presents equipment patients require as they enter the ICU. The adult diaper elicits a few nervous giggles. The catheter causes groans and squirming.

"If showing somebody a catheter is what it's going to take for somebody to wear a seatbelt then, hey, I've done my job," Banfield says later.

She shows students a tracheal tube, which, when inserted in the throat, provides an airway for breathing. "If you've suffered a 'facial smash' in some cases we can't find your eyes, your nose or your mouth."

Students also look at a feeding bag, for patients on a permanent liquid diet, and a chest tube, used to drain fluids from the lungs. In the ICU, students see these instruments in use on live patients.

For Angie Coates, this is too much. She saw her older sister struck down by a car and seriously injured three years ago. Walking through the ICU brings back memories: "Everywhere I looked I thought, 'Oh, there's my sister,'" says Coates, 17. "I thought: 'I can't be in here. I'm going to freak out.' "

"Everyone has a story like that," says Banfield, who lost her own brother in a car crash. "That's why I am passionate about prevention."

Occasionally, students don't get the lesson of prevention, says Jocelyn Robinson, a nursing student and P.A.R.T.Y. volunteer. "It's sad, because those are the one's we're going to see."

## QUADRIPLEGIC

At the Lyndhurst Centre, students meet Kristensen, Elton Horner and Rich Vanderwall.

Horner, a quadriplegic, guides the students through physiotherapy and occupational therapy. After leaving a bar in 1983, Horner lost control of his car and, without a seatbelt, was thrown from the vehicle. He broke his neck. Since 1988, he has shared his story with P.A.R.T.Y., advising students on how to avoid dangerous situations.

"If, at any time," says Horner, "you're getting ready to do something and you get a queasy feeling in your stomach or a voice in the back of your head says 'beware,' listen to that voice. Be aware of that queasy feeling because that could be your saviour."

In 1992, Vanderwall, now 33, crashed his motorcycle.

"All it took was two, three seconds of me turning my head and I ended up driving into the back of a dump truck at 100 km an hour," he says. The crash left him paralyzed from the chest down.

Questions from students come fast: What happens to your friends? Your social life?

"I love to party," says Vanderwall. "I like all the things that most young guys like to do. But the biggest difference for me is that I haven't been drunk in over 10 years. I figure I've lost control of 80% of my body, I want to stay in control of the 20% I have left."

As for friends, Vanderwall says they often can't adjust.

## TRUE FRIENDS

"It's very common to have friends drop off after something like this happens."

Kristensen says that the support of true friends, many new to her after her injury, helped her recover.

At the end of the day, 18-year-old Laura Morrelly is amazed.

"Anybody who has a licence should take part in this program," she says.

Kristensen hopes the program will encourage students to stay safe while still living to the fullest.

"I thought I was invincible. But you don't know what's going to happen to you so you have to do with your life what you can, not just wait for it to come around to you. You have to go out and get it."

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## THE WRITTEN WORD

When a young person is injured, the whole family suffers. That is one of the lessons of the P.A.R.T.Y. program. At each session, Joanne Banfield reads a letter from a mother whose son remains in hospital 12 years after suffering permanent brain damage.

"If a loved one dies, the grief is heavy," the unnamed mother writes. "But it eventually lifts a little with each passing day. When a loved one is incapacitated, the way my son is, grief just doesn't go away."

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## IMPACT

The P.A.R.T.Y. program works, according to preliminary data from a 10-year study.

"We ran five years worth of data and it actually showed a decrease in driving offences and injuries in kids who had come to P.A.R.T.Y.," says program co-ordinator Joanne Banfield.

The final results of the study will be presented at an upcoming conference in Vienna. For more information on P.A.R.T.Y., visit [Partyprogram.com](http://Partyprogram.com).

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## GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION

P.A.R.T.Y. is no party. After students learn the workings of the trauma room, Dr. Talat Chughtai takes them into it. Some faint during his presentation.

"When I try to tell a story, I make it very graphic and real. Sometimes I lose a couple of people because of that. But it helps them to picture it."

Dr. Chughtai hopes to show young people how their lives can change in an instant. "These things happen to anybody," he said. "Value your life and take care of it."