

This issue of *Peer News and Views* highlights our most longstanding peer education program, **Challenges, Beliefs and Changes (CBC)**. CBC is a program that trains high school students to promote choices and decision making about alcohol and other drugs with students in grades 8 and 9. 2008 will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of support for this Program by the **Masonic Foundation of Ontario**. During this time, we have trained thousands of high school students in our two day workshops, and each time our instructors are thrilled to discover young people who are eager to learn, committed to teaching others and discovering a passion for helping that will stay with them in their professional careers and personal lives.

## Dawn T Maracle: Making a Difference – 20 years later

Dawn Maracle is a peer leader who has kept in touch with PAD over the years. In 1988, Dawn was a delegate at the Masonic Foundation of Ontario's ceremonies kicking off their campaign to support drug education programs. As a grade 10 student at Quinte Secondary School in Belleville, she found the trip to Toronto was one of her first experiences finding a "home" away from home. The experience "opened me up to a whole world outside of Hastings County", she recently said from her home in Ottawa. "I was able to meet people who were like-minded and could show others that you didn't need to smoke, drink or do drugs in high school to have a good time." Dawn became a peer educator with PAD's program at her school for three years, getting teachers on board and organizing her fellow students to participate in the PAD training and deliver the program to their younger peers. One of her innovations was taking the program to students on her nearby reserve, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, where she is a *Status Indian*.

Dawn's connection with PAD and peer education did not stop upon her graduation from high school. She has continued her commitment to combating substance abuse and applying the lessons learned from the PAD peer education program in her professional life. Dawn completed Native Studies at Trent University, and Education at Queen's University and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She is now aiming to complete her Doctorate in adult education, with a specialization in Aboriginal and Adult Education. She has worked as the Senior Research Policy Advisor for Cancer Care Ontario in the Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit and at the Assembly of First Nations, lectured in Germany, and taught part time at different Ontario universities. "To me, the lesson from the peer education experience, has been to take responsibility for my own



behaviour. The philosophy of the PAD program is parallel to my *Haudenosaunee* (Iroquois) ideals – to be an active community member with caring, sharing, honesty and respect. For me, this means one of my lifetime goals is to help make the future better for the coming generations. We affect others by our decisions. It's about helping to ground kids so they can learn who they are and realize they have the power to make things better, too."

Now on the "mommy track" for the next year – she has a new baby daughter, Oronnia, and is the step-mom to twin girls and a boy – Dawn also sees how to apply what she has learned with her children. "It's important to seize those *teachable moments* with your kids", she says, referring to how children perceive those who are using tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, either in the media or within their own lives. She is also committed to giving her children a strong sense of their Mohawk heritage and the skills and knowledge to live their lives in balance.



## PAD Peer Leaders Make a Difference in their Community

On May 25, Diane Buhler, PAD's Executive Director, had an opportunity to hold a discussion with three grade 11 student peer leaders from CHAT Richmond Hill. **Daphne, Leora and Yael** talked about their experiences with the **CBC: Challenges, Beliefs and Changes Peer Education Program**.

**DB:** You all applied to be part of this program last year when you were in Grade 10. What made you want to be part of this program?

**Daphne:** We didn't have this program at our elementary school. I applied because I realized it would have been a good idea to hear from peers, someone our own age.

**Leora:** I like dealing with children. I think it's important that they realize that drugs and alcohol affect them and their friends. Kids in Grade 8 have misconceptions about high school – I know I did. I never had this program myself, but I think it would have helped me a great deal.

**DB:** What did you find helpful about your two day training workshop (provided by Gail Diamond, a PAD peer education instructor)?

**Yael:** I learned a lot more about drugs and alcohol in the course of our training. It taught me about values, about the values associated with friendship. That's something I hadn't thought about before.

**Leora:** In the training we learned facts, new information which I realized applies to real life experience. Just a few weeks before, a friend had gotten drunk and sick at a party, she passed out and her friends just left her alone there! So when we learned [about alcohol poisoning] it really hit home – people don't know these facts! The facts surprised me.



**Yael:** It changed a lot for me, put things into perspective, how I feel about drinking and being with friends who are drinking.

**Leora:** Yeah, like on a trip to Cuba, when there were free drinks, and they didn't care how old you were, everyone was just chugging...I told them all how dangerous it is, I made them aware of the risks and consequences.

**DB:** How did you feel about working with the Grade 8 students?

**Daphne:** We were nervous when we had to go in front of the grade 8's, but working as a team gave us confidence.

**Leora:** Yeah, the training was a bonding experience.

**Yael:** You have to go in there, knowing how to deal with grade 8 kids – they think they know everything, but they don't!

**Daphne:** The schools we went to were different, but even in the same school, different peer leaders had different experiences, depending on the class you got. You just have to be prepared.

**Leora:** The kids can be resistant, initially, but when we tell them the facts, or personal stories, they start to listen. In the end, we let them ask questions and they were really interested by that point. And when we gave them scenarios, about making choices, they got very involved.

**DB:** On April 30<sup>th</sup>, you three girls volunteered to do an adapted version of your peer education program at the "Making Choices Conference" for students in Grades 7 and 8 at Yorkhill Public School. You were the only youth doing presentations among a group of adult workshop leaders. How was that experience?

**Leora:** I really enjoyed it. I was actually sad that our peer leadership experience was over [in our own schools] for the year and I wanted to do it again! At Yorkhill, we kind of created our own program, because we had only a half hour with each group, and that worked really well.

**Daphne:** The theme was making choices; we wanted to give them the tools to help them to that.

**Leora:** And give them some facts, about alcohol and marijuana.

**Daphne:** We gave them scenarios, and then discussed the risks and what precautions they should take. They really listened. We made up a resource booklet about making decisions, and gave it out.

DB: So, overall, do you have any general comments on the PAD peer education program?

**Daphne:** I think it works really well. The video, *Skeletons in the Closet*, gives the students the opportunity to discuss the characters and their decisions – they like that.

**Leora:** They really got into the general discussion part – I think that works best.

**Yael:** I think you need to be flexible – just make sure you get certain key messages across, and then be flexible with the process. You have to watch how it's going with your group and react quickly. It makes you think on your feet!

As the conversation came to an end, the students were asked for their final remarks about the peer education program. All three agreed: **“Everyone should get this program!”**

## Garth McCurdy: A PAD Trainer Reflects on Peer Education

In 2004, PAD had the opportunity to bring on board **Garth McCurdy** as a Peer Education Trainer. Garth has a B.A. in Psychology and was an Addictions Counsellor for Youth at the Hospital for Sick Children for five years and has worked with youth with behaviour challenges within the Niagara Catholic District School Board. After working alongside senior trainer Pat Sanagan in an initial training capacity, Garth has become a veteran PAD Peer Education Trainer.

We asked Garth to reflect on this past year of working with peer leaders in the **Challenges, Beliefs and Changes (CBC)** Peer Education Program. “What I found most useful in the CBC program was its flexibility,” Garth recently stated. “It promotes input from the peer leaders themselves, and this allows them to alter their delivery to fit the specific needs of their community.” Of particular importance, Garth noted, was that the peer leader training allows for a wide spectrum of students who can participate, regardless of the challenges they may face at their own school. “CBC opens up doors to those students who excel at leadership but also includes those who may have issues that complicate their lives, like substance abuse or difficult behaviours. They are not the obvious choice of student to be involved, but it is this mix of students that really maximizes the program’s potential.”

In April of this year, Garth had the opportunity to discuss the CBC Peer Education program with several students from Centennial Secondary School in Welland. Eight of those students had received the CBC program themselves in Grade Eight. “The feedback from the students was enlightening. As peer educators, they felt the experience was more difficult than they had imagined! But they recognized the value of working with the younger students, and also the opportunity to re-examine their own opinions and note how these had changed since grade eight.”

Perhaps the most interesting feedback comes from the students who received the program in grade eight. “The information the peer leaders gave us stayed with me,” says one young man, now a peer leader in Grade 11. “But they also helped my anxieties around entering high school the next year. I knew I would find a friendly face to say hello to in those first few tough weeks.”

For Garth, the experience in watching the senior students present the CBC program to a grade eight class was invaluable. “It allowed me to see the program in action, to see how they adopt the program to meet their own individual facilitation skills as well as the specific need of the schools. This is very relevant, considering these are students who have made the transition from these same feeder schools to their secondary school.”

When asked about the future of the program, Garth stressed that the combination of information, values and skills, along with a flexible delivery approach, makes this program significant for both the peer leaders and junior students. “But we need to keep checking which elements of the CBC program need changing. Our students keep telling us that the information must be current, and important to their lives – change is important in accordance with the perpetual changes of youth!”

As we continue to strive to make CBC the most current and informative peer delivered program on substance use and choice for youth who are making the transition to high school, we depend on the feedback of the youth involved in the program and look to Garth and our other professionals for their insight, reflection and experience to keep CBC as Ontario’s pre-eminent Peer Education Program.

## NEW Peer Programs from Parent Action on Drugs

Parent Action on Drugs offers many programs and resources for youth. Our youth programs reflect our philosophy that programs for youth should be youth-driven and that young people can be excellent educators. With training and support they can increase awareness, change attitudes and build skills with their peers to increase health and safety.

### What's with Weed

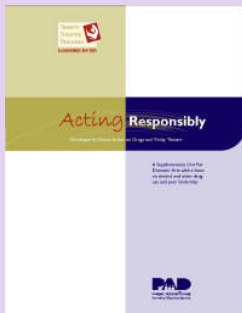
This is a peer education program to engage youth between 15 and 18 in identifying problems they – or their friends – may be having with the use of marijuana and ways they might change to reduce these problems.

This youth-driven program provides secondary schools with effective tools to address problematic marijuana use with its students. It helps students identify not only potential problems but also positive behaviour change strategies connected with marijuana use. It also provides supports to reduce, avoid or prevent the problems.

The program model includes a strategy for recruiting senior students as peer educators, a training day for the senior educators to provide instructions on delivering a 75 minutes workshop to their younger peers about the real risks of marijuana use, and ways to reduce these risks.

*“Every high school student will need to make a decision about marijuana. Students understand what works and what doesn’t. We’ve seen many presentations, but they usually turn into lectures. Students would much rather hear about marijuana on their own turf, in their own language and by people their age.”*

Natasha Lantz, Youth Advisor, What’s With Weed Program



### Acting Responsibly: A Supplementary Unit for Dramatic Arts with a focus on alcohol and other drug use and peer leadership

Includes opportunities for students to further their competency in dramatic arts as they explore the topic of alcohol and other drugs

Options for presenting a student run workshop for their peers or performing a docudrama on the problems related to alcohol and other drug use

*“[This experience] was a huge eye opener for many of us... we all realized how serious our actions are when we make a choice to drink or do drugs”*

Nicole A.; drama student, Turner Fenton S.S.

*“I liked the guide. I think the Acting Responsibly document supports a number of different ways of approaching this topic... I’m very excited to work with this program again. At this drama level the students are mature enough and the distance to Grade 9 is sufficient to make an impact.”*

Roberta Belfry, Dramatic Arts teacher, George S. Henry Academy

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*We would like to thank  
for continuing to support our Peer Education program.*