



Deborah Lucas Angel

Panelists speak to students about real-life scenarios and the potential results of poor decision making and risky behaviors on Oct. 24 at the Truth & Consequences event at Grant County Extension Offices.

Eighth graders learn through real world examples

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NEWSA

At 13 and 14, eighth graders are on the cusp of high school and entering that nebulous world of “not quite an adult” yet “not still a child.” However, in their minds, they are fully in charge of themselves. It is a confusing and, occasionally, dangerous time.

To help the teens through some of the confusion, Champions for a Drug Free Grant County (Champions), held the Truth and Consequences program on Oct. 24 at the Grant County Extension Office. The program was based off of an earlier one developed by Extension Services and 4H.

According to Launi Gum, program director for Champions, after eight months of planning, the event was comprised of four interactive stations:

- Students discussed good decision making with Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and practice using exit strategies and refusal skills to say ‘no’ to situations that make them uncomfortable.

- Students learned about real-life consequences of poor decision making and risky behaviors from a panel of experts including St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Kentucky State Police, NorthKey Community Care/Regional Prevention Center and others.

Students were presented with scenarios such as what to do when babysitting and your charge is non-responsive after eating gummies from the child’s older sibling’s room or you test positive for drugs but you take Adderoll for ADHD.

- Students practiced safe driving in a stationary vehicle through the use of a VR (virtual reality) Simulation provided by Arrive Alive. Exposing students this age to good driving habits is especially important now that the legal driving age has been lowered to 15 in Kentucky.

- Students heard from Quinton Higgins, survivor of the horrific Carroll County bus crash in 1988, the deadliest drunk-driving accident in U.S. history. Higgins demonstrated how other people’s decisions may impact us, but ultimately we have control over how we react and respond to things outside of our control.

To pay for the event, Gum said Champions obtained a “Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Grant” and “an event sponsorship provided by Interact for Health which allowed us to partner with Grant County Extension Homemakers to cater a homemade lunch for volunteers as food.”

She explained “Truth & Consequences is technically an Extension Office program. Truth & Consequences: The Choice is Yours was created by a Family and Consumer Science agent in Clinton County in the early 2000’s.

“The core component of the interactive program is the scenarios in which students talk through the consequences of real-life situations with various community experts; however, other parts of the program vary from community to community. In Grant County, the program was



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Quinton Higgins, a survivor of the May 14, 1988, Carrolton bus crash, uses a bus similar to the one in the crash as part of Voice for Change. Here, Higgins shares his story with eighth graders at Truth & Consequences on Oct. 24.

implemented up until COVID-19.”

Gum said the program “is being brought back this year because this is the last year of Champions for a Drug-Free Grant County’s Drug-Free Communities grant ... When we asked coalition members if there was one event that we could bring back before the grant ends so that it can keep going in the future, the answer was unanimously Truth & Consequences.”

Gum said “the primary planning partners were Champions for a Drug-Free Grant County, Grant County Extension 4H & Youth Development, Grant County Middle School Youth Service Center, and Williamstown Independent Schools Youth Service Center.”

Nearly 40 volunteers from approximately 20 community organizations helped make this year’s event run smoothly.

Gum listed the community partners as:

- IN5 – suicide prevention whose goal is “erasing the stigma of mental illness and promoting optimal mental wellness.”

- Arrive Alive, which brings the high levels of road carnage and overall lack of road safety to the national forefront. Funded through private donations, the organization is “dedicated to saving lives and preserving lifestyles” using a virtual reality headset and vehicle to simulate driving scenarios.

- Cabinet for Health and Family Service, the state government agency that administers programs to promote the mental and physical health of Kentuckians and support Kentucky’s families.

- Chief Circuit Judge - 15th Judicial Circuit Court, Honorable Leslie R. Knight

- Department of Family and Juvenile Services - dedicated to improving the lives of children and families involved in Kentucky’s juvenile justice and child welfare systems.
- Epiphany Community Services – work with organizations to identify their major chal-



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Arrive Alive uses a virtual reality (VR) headset, vehicle and screens to simulate driving scenarios. Eighth graders attending Truth & Consequences on Oct. 24 had a chance to give the technology a spin.

lenges, and find solutions to address these challenges as effectively as possible.

- Grant County Extension Homemakers provided lunch for volunteers.

- Grant County Schools Food Service

- Interact for Health, which works with communities to improve mental health and well-being to support community power building and to change policies and systems

- Kentucky State Police
- NKY Health Department
- NorthKey Community Care, whose mission is “transforming lives and communities through excellence in mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services.”

- Students Against Destructive Decisions (originally Students Against Drunk Driving) now has a mission of “creating, equipping, and sustaining a network of student-run chapters in schools and communities focused on peer-to-peer education.”

- St. Elizabeth Healthcare

- Street Art Kustoms
- WellCare
- Quinton Higgins (Voice for Change) - Voice for Change was established in 2014 by Higgins. He purchased a bus similar to the one from the crash and uses it to share his story and experience at schools, DUI classes, churches and community events.

Higgins is a bus driver for the Hardin County School District.

While the truth and consequences of risky behaviors related to substance use, mental health, and violence are each big issues, Gum said they “are intertwined because in real-life they are interconnected—there is rarely ever an instance in which one of these things will not intersect with at least one of the other two.”

She said it would be a disservice to separate them as issues and that “part of being able to effectively address complicated issues is being realistic that life is messy.”



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