

Simulated car crash prompts sober thoughts in students about drunk driving

Students and teachers watched as fire trucks, police cars and an ambulance rushed to a heavily damaged car in the parking lot of École J. H. Picard Catholic School in Edmonton.

Firefighters used power saws and tools to pry the car apart and tear the roof off so that paramedics could free the bloodied victim and put her in the ambulance.

It's a scene that students were unlikely to forget soon, and that was the point. It was a simulated car crash designed give Grade 9 students a first-hand look at the consequences of drunk and distracted driving.

"Driving drunk is a lot more risky than I thought it could be, and (the mock crash) just enforces not to do it," said Erin Rempel.

She was one of more than 100 students and teachers who witnessed the May 30th mock crash as part of the Preventing Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) program at the Misericordia Community Hospital.

"Whenever we do this, we see a lot of wide eyes, so I've always found it interesting to see how interested the kids are," said Alex Campbell, one of the PARTY program presenters and a paramedic for 16 years.

Campbell said the PARTY program is about giving kids the knowledge and tools they need.



Students at Ecole J.H. Picard School view a mangled car as part of a mock PARTY program crash. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

“As they navigate life, everyone of course is going to make poor decisions, but what we want them to understand is that some of those decisions have a lot more gravity than other ones.”

In 2016 there were 12,191 impaired driving incidents across Alberta, according to [Statistics Canada](#). Twenty of them resulted in death and 54 in injuries.

While the mock crash is normally kept secret, students were informed beforehand so that they would be prepared – and would show up, said Cindy Dallaire, vice-principal of École J. H. Picard.

“Students needed a carrot, instead of saying ‘Oh it’s a free day, maybe we’ll stay home today’, and so the attendance is fantastic.”

The crash wasn’t real. Still, the sight of the mangled car and the rescue effort rattled some students.

“The kind of people that go around driving drunk are stupid, especially when they can put other people’s lives in danger,” said Diego Alfaro, adding he was “a little disturbed” as the injured driver was removed from the car.

The PARTY program, run by Covenant Health, is the only one of its kind in Edmonton and organizers say it’s effective. In March, the PARTY program marked its [25th anniversary](#), having reached more than 40,000 students since it began in 1992.

Impaired driving injuries dropped five per cent among the students who attended the program, according to [a 10-year study](#) by the Sunnybrook Trauma Centre in Toronto – the parent organization of the PARTY program.

“When you’re talking (about) head injuries and spinal cord injuries, five out of 100 is a significant number,” said Marcia Lee, an Edmonton emergency room nurse who runs the PARTY program locally.

Lee said most patients with impaired-driving related injuries are between 15 and 19 years old.