

Adams County youth participate in 'We Are The Majority' Rally

HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS RALLY FOR PREVENTION AT OHIO STATEHOUSE

May 24, 2019 Mark Carpenter News, Top Stories



From left, Five Adams County teens- Connor Parks, Caytie Rains, Haley Parrett, Makayla Wilson, and Ireland D'Ambra- were among approximately 2,000 Ohio middle and high school students that marched in downtown Columbus on April 30 for the eighth annual We Are The Majority Rally. (Provided photo)

By Patricia Beech-

Five Adams County teens- Connor Parks, Caytie Rains, Haley Parrett, Makayla Wilson, and Ireland D'Ambra- were among approximately 2,000 Ohio middle and high school students that marched in downtown Columbus on April 30 for the eighth annual We Are The Majority Rally (WATM Rally).

The rally is held yearly to celebrate healthy lifestyles and advocate for youth-led prevention. It also raises awareness about the fact that the vast majority of young people do not use drugs or alcohol.

Produced by Prevention Action Alliance (PAA) with funding from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and

Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), the WATM Rally is led by the Youth Council of the Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network (OYLPN).

The OYLPN Youth Council is comprised of teen leaders in high schools from across Ohio. They promote mental health wellness and the prevention of substance misuse in their schools and communities.

Danielle Poe, Director of the Rural Health Opioid Project (RHOP) at the Adams County Health Department accompanied local students to Columbus.

Poe introduced the evidence-based Botvin *LifeSkills Training* Program in all three county school districts. The program has won high praise from school districts across the country for its effectiveness in promoting drug abuse prevention.

Poe says she believes every county should have a youth-led coalition attend the rally.

“Data shows peer-to-peer interaction and prevention is more effective than anything we can do as adults,” Poe told the Defender. “This rally empowers students. They come back with new goals and strategies they can put in place to promote drug abuse education and prevention.”

The Adams County Youth-led Coalition also met with Representative Brian Baldrige (R-Adams Co.) who gave the group a tour of the statehouse and an invitation to shadow a representative for a day.

Students from seventh grade through college-age are eligible to join the Youth-led Coalition. For more information, contact the Adams County Health Department.

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine spoke at the event, encouraging teens to make their voices heard. He said, “It’s important for legislators, governors, and people who are concerned about the drug problem to listen to you.”

According to government officials and event organizers, the rally creates a community for young people who choose not to use drugs, and it celebrates those healthy choices.

“Adolescence is a critical time to prevent drug addiction,” said OhioMHAS Director Lori Criss. “Research tells us that early use of alcohol, nicotine and other drugs greatly increases a young person’s chances of becoming addicted. The good news is we know prevention works. Spreading this message among strong youth leaders and their peers is imperative to create positive change at the community level.”

More than 120 organizations brought almost 2,000 youth from 75 towns and cities to the WATM Rally to hear that message and create that positive change, according to Harim C. Ellis, director of the Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network (OYLPN) at PAA.

This event proves young people can get excited and organize around positive behaviors and identities,” said Harim C. Ellis, director of youth-led services and the Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network (OYLPN) at PAA. “The We Are The Majority Rally celebrates the fact that the majority of young people aren’t using drugs and alcohol and are making positive decisions. It lets young people know that they’re not alone when they choose not to use drugs.”

The WATM Rally was planned and led by the OYLPN Youth Council, which is comprised of 10 teen leaders from across Ohio. One of those teens, Jade Eilers, said substance misuse is an issue close to her and has made it part of her platform as Miss Teen Ohio International.

“Almost 20 million Americans have a drug addiction, and several of my family members add to that number. Twenty million is a big number, but we also have a big number here today who don’t use and are making the right choice by doing so,” said Eilers. “By being the majority today and everyday, we are focusing on good choices and positive habits to create a better future. We are the majority, and we are here to encourage others to be a part of the positive majority.”

Prevention Action Alliance is dedicated to leading healthy communities in the promotion of mental health wellness and the prevention of substance misuse. PAA is nationally recognized for building networks that empower communities to create safe and healthy environments. For more information about the organization, visit preventionactionalliance.org.

The Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network unites more than 120 youth-led groups across the state of Ohio to promote mental health wellness and prevent substance misuse. OYLPN members advocate for the majority of teens who make healthy choices and don’t misuse drugs and alcohol through peer-to-peer education, environmental strategies, and legislative advocacy.

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