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## **Drug Free Youth In Touch(D\*FY\*IT) in Joliet, Illinois<sup>1</sup>**

*Presenter:*

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This program has brought together youth, educators, law enforcement, the medical community and business people in a positive way, underlining the importance of remaining drug free. We recognize its success by naming Joliet [D\*FY\*IT] as winner of the 1992 Governor's Cup signifying the effort most symbolic of the spirit of Illinois volunteerism. (The Honorable Jim Edgar, Governor of Illinois)

### **Background**

D\*FY\*IT is an approach to drug and alcohol prevention which rewards students who are staying clean and enjoying life drug free. It makes it cool to be clean!

When a group of students from Whitehouse High School, Tyler, Texas, appeared on ABC TV's popular *Good Morning, America* to talk about D\*FY\*IT, phones started ringing and questions started pouring in to D\*FY\*IT national leaders. The questioners ranged from a school principal in California to President Bush's former drug czar William Bennett. "What," they asked, "is D\*FY\*IT and how can we get it into our schools?"

The Tyler, Texas, D\*FY\*IT (Drug Free Youth in Texas) Program in its first year, through positive peer pressure influenced more than 3,000 Smith County, Texas, high school students to be voluntarily tested by urinalysis for drugs.

### **Bringing the Program to Joliet**

In the fall of 1991, a community activist brought the D\*FY\*IT idea to the Joliet, Illinois, Chief of Police. With police leadership, an implementation committee was formed that included parents, public and private

school staff, chamber of commerce representatives, healthcare professionals, the media, and the police. Joliet's Drug Free Youth In Touch (D\*FY\*IT) program started in 1992 and is modeled after the successful Tyler program.

### **Program Description**

Joliet area D\*FY\*IT is guided by a Board of Directors made up of community leaders, students, school officials, and parents. However, implementation is through individual school-based chapters that are run *by* students *for* students.

At the heart of the program is a simple urinalysis test for drugs and alcohol. When students pass the drug test, they receive membership in their local school chapter and are entitled to all its benefits and privileges, free of charge. Subsequent random testing is required to maintain membership. The membership card is recognized by area merchants for direct discounts on merchandise, or on services such as a round of golf, admission to the indoor ice skating arena, and general recreation programs. Other businesses that wish to participate can provide direct donations or sponsorships to the D\*FY\*IT program.

Testing kits are acquired from companies that have a national reputation for providing quality

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<sup>1</sup> Material is taken edited by Witt, P.A., & Crompton, J.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Recreation programs that work for at-risk youth: The challenge of shaping the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.  
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diagnostic drug abuse products to government, business, and industry. Testing of students is conducted by volunteers who have been trained by professional laboratory staff from St. Joseph's Medical Center and Silver Cross Hospital. These professional staff are also available to provide quality assurance in the testing process.

To date over 2,000 students at three high schools and one junior high have become members of D\*FY\*IT. Membership in D\*FY\*IT is free to all students, and none of the costs of the program come out of the school budget. Money is obtained through fund-raising events, the sale of banners and bumper stickers, and charitable contributions.

The urine testing is legal, because the program is voluntary. If students are under 18 years of age, written permission must be obtained from their parents or guardians. Confidentiality is assured by using social security numbers, not names, when urine samples are submitted. If a test result is positive, the designated student chapter representative and the counselor meet with the student. Students who fail the first test get a second chance. Counseling is generally mandatory if a student fails twice. Students suspended from D\*FY\*IT are encouraged to join again. Requirements for reentry are determined by each chapter. Test results are not available to the public or the police. The goal of D\*FY\*IT is to eliminate drug use, not to prosecute abusers. In most chapters, results are not communicated to parents, but each chapter determines its own policy.

Membership in D\*FY\*IT can be revoked if alcohol abuse occurs or if a student commits an alcohol-related crime such as driving under the influence of alcohol. Policies on alcohol are usually determined by members of the student leadership panel.

### **Getting Started**

The D\*FY\*IT program should be announced at a special rally or school assembly. The media, including local newspapers, radio and TV stations, should be alerted well in advance and invited. D\*FY\*IT banners, posters, bumper stickers and T-shirts can be distributed to help publicize the program.

### **The Key Role of Merchant and Business Participation**

In June 1992, Joliet area D\*FY\*IT received the prestigious Illinois Governor's Cup Award being cited as the state's best example of the spirit of community volunteerism. D\*FY\*IT is a community effort. The support of area merchants and businesses, through the offering of discounts to D\*FY\*IT

members, direct donations to sustain the program, and the sponsoring of materials (e.g., shirts, posters, mailings) is critical. Over 100 area merchants and businesses presently participate in the program.

Examples of merchant participation in D\*FY\*IT range from 2-for-1 offers to direct discounts on merchandise. Student members of D\*FY\*IT can be helpful in making suggestions. By offering fun, unique discounts, or other incentives to D\*FY\*IT members, merchants know D\*FY\*IT kids will keep coming back.

D\*FY\*IT also pays businessmen additional dividends because the D\*FY\*IT card can serve as an additional "recommendation" to employers who are evaluating students who apply to work in their businesses.