

Kobler sees increase in students who care

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From the Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Daily Campus:

Almost 200 students can be seen sporting red and blue “Mustangs Who Care” wristbands, but it’s still too soon to tell whether the numbers show a sign of progress for student senate’s most recent drug and alcohol prevention program.

“The response has been great so far,” Student Body President Pat Kobler said on Oct. 6, shortly after program volunteers began training students to become “Mustangs Who Care.” At that time, four Greek organizations and a handful of individuals had been TIPS trained and prepared for the program, which consists of a 20-minute follow-up lesson taught by students on how to recognize signs of alcohol poisoning and drug overdose. It also teaches trainees how to use the Call for Help program, which grants both parties - those who call and those in need - medical amnesty.

“They’ve said it’s ‘quick and painless,’” senior Elisabeth Brubaker said of the students who go through the program. Brubaker is also involved in the Circle of Trust and the Gordie Foundation, although she said both programs still need more publicity.

“I got involved with [Mustangs Who Care] because it was another way to reach more students than simply promoting Circle of Trust,” Brubaker said. The Circle of Trust incorporates the six signs of alcohol poisoning as a part of its program.

The Interfraternity Council will soon require all active members living in an on-campus fraternity house to participate in the Mustangs Who Care initiative. Brubaker said she’s seen students not only wear their wristbands out socially, but also on campus and in class. Dr. Lori White, SMU’s vice president of student affairs said faculty members wear wristbands to show their support.

“I am so happy that so many students have taken responsibility into their own hands,” Kobler said in an e-mail on Nov. 11.

The Mustangs Who Care program is different than any other drug or alcohol initiative implemented on campus so far, which is why it may be the boost that the SMU Task Force and its offshoots need to effectively lower the record-high number of this semester’s first-year alcohol violations.

The exciting part about this program is that it’s primarily student-driven,” Dr. White said.

As a liaison between the university faculty and his fellow classmates, fraternity brothers and friends, Kobler had to look at both sides of the ongoing alcohol and drug argument.

“Having witnessed the university’s actions after the [three deaths] and backlash from the student body, I saw that everyone wants the same thing: responsibility and safety,” he said.

Hence, Mustangs Who Care was born with the premise of “realistic responsibility.” Kobler’s new initiative feeds upon classmate camaraderie and the good judgment of students to either ask for help or give it at social events on or off campus.

The program partners with the SMU Task Force, The Gordie Foundation and the Circle of Trust to grant students medical amnesty and arm them with the correct information to help friends in need until police or medical officials can.

While the deaths of three students three years ago generated national and campus concern about drug and alcohol abuse at SMU, Kobler said it’s unrealistic to think that any drug or alcohol prevention program will bring the numbers down to zero - at SMU or any other college or high school campus.

“It’s not an SMU problem; it’s a cultural problem,” Kobler said of underage drinking, which is why his next project may be introducing the program to other campuses - high schools included.

Still, one more program will not eliminate the problem.

“I don’t think there’s one solution to the challenges of substance abuse,” Brubaker said. “We have to continue to be mindful of the challenges and utilize whatever strategies we can [to prevent it].”

Kobler said that while the red and blue swirled bracelets may not be the most stylish, they represent a fashionable cause.

“I really feel this program has the potential to save a life,” Kobler said.