

TIPS training teaches intervention strategies

Rachel L. Jesten

Staff Writer

Thursday September 11 2008

Elizabethtown, PA -- As students graduate high school and make the transition to life on a college campus they are faced with a number of decisions regarding their interests, values and lifestyle. Among these is the decision to consume alcohol.

Whether students decide to drink or not, many will face situations in which alcohol is present. According to the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 63.7 percent of full-time students between the ages of 18 and 22 have consumed alcohol in the past month, 43.2 percent of which reported binge drinking or heavy use. Binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks on one occasion at least once in the past month. Heavy use implies consumption of five or more drinks on one occasion at least five times in the past month.

These numbers can be considered significant. In order to create a safer environment for the students of Elizabethtown, Mario Rapetti, Assistant Director of Residence Life; Joseph Allen, Area Coordinator for Royer and Founders; and Sara Richards-Oliver, Area Coordinator for Ober, Myer and Schlosser; completed Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS).

TIPS teaches bartenders and other servers, sellers or consumers of alcohol how to gauge how much a person has had to drink, when to cut them off and when the situation requires immediate medical assistance.

TIPS for Universities modifies this program to train students and those who work with them to responsibly handle situations in which excessive alcohol is consumed.

"TIPS' primary focus is on responsible drinking. Through the training and program, it enhances the skills to learn the positive, more action-oriented method to intervene with peers when necessary," Rapetti said. After completing training, Rapetti, Allen and Richards-Oliver trained the RAs at Elizabethtown and nearby Millersville University in the same program.

"The training that we provided through TIPS helps enhance the people skills students already have, give them confidence to use them effectively and show them some new strategies for dealing with situations that the RAs will need to intervene with people who are misusing alcohol," Rapetti said.

The RAs took a two-hour certification program that utilized lectures, discussion and video clips to show them how to handle specific situations.

"[The TIPS program] teaches students how to say to their friends, 'I've noticed you've been depressed lately and you're drinking more than you usually do. Why don't you finish that beer and we'll go to Denny's and talk?'" Richards-Oliver said.

As not all students have access to a program like TIPS, Richards-Oliver gave some helpful advice on how to recognize a dangerous situation and handle it responsibly. Clues that your friend may have had too much to drink include stumbling and staggering, slurred speech, and difficulty holding onto their train of thought. Too much to drink becomes alcohol poisoning when the student is passed out, shaking or turning blue.

"The strongest advice I can give is to trust your instincts," Richards-Oliver said. "If something feels wrong, it probably is. The worst thing you can do is assume it's going to be okay."