



Guiding Good Choices: Three Organizations Come Together to Offer an Exceptional Program

By Lee Martin

For the last three years, Children's Hospital, the University YMCA, and Seattle Public Schools have offered parents in our community a means to gain skills and boost family bonding through Guiding Good Choices, the five-week long parenting skills workshop. Working together, these organizations determined that offering the parenting workshops was one way to prevent underage substance use in our community and chose the Guiding Good Choices program for its strong, communication-based curriculum.

Prevention was key to all three organizations in deciding to implement Guiding Good Choices. Kelly Kerby, who teaches the program at Children's Hospital, says that Children's works to promote health and wellness in the community. "Dr. Ray Hsiao, a Prevention WINS coalition member, and Dr. Leslie Walker, Director of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital, feel that the best way to treat substance use in teens is through prevention," she explained. And working with "families as a whole, is one of the best preventative measures" to curb teen substance use. The YMCA's mission is to "build strong kids, strong families, and strong communities." Lisa Steenson, Associate Executive Director at the University YMCA, says the Guiding Good Choices program, with its "emphasis on family communication and bonding, was a good fit." Reema Ziadeh, sixth grade counselor at Eckstein Middle School, says that it was important to administrators at Eckstein that Guiding Good Choices was research-based and effective. Ziadeh says they offered the program "because teens who are healthy and have strong family relationships are more likely to be engaged at school."

Parents may feel overwhelmed in the face of pressures from the media and culture today, and Guiding Good Choices offers a way for them to take back control. Feedback from those who have participated in the workshops has been positive. Kerby, Steenson, and Ziadeh commented that often one parent will attend the workshop and then send the other parent to the next session because he or she felt it was so worthwhile. Attendees refer their neighbors and friends. Plus, for both the YMCA and Children's Hospital, the workshops provide an introduction to other programs they offer to families and teens.

Over the past three years, start-up funding for Guiding Good Choices was provided through Prevention WINS, the community coalition to prevent youth substance use in northeast Seattle. Although Prevention WINS will no longer fund the Guiding Good Choices program after this school year, the YMCA will continue to offer it in house. Children's Hospital and Eckstein are working to arrange a grant so that they can continue to offer it as well.

Inga Manskopf, Prevention WINS Community Coordinator, says that the effort by all these organizations to offer Guiding Good Choices to the community is "a great example of what coalition work is really all about—community members and organizations coming together to figure out why underage substance use is a problem in our community and then each taking on a role to prevent it." She says she is thankful to each organization. "Without them, we wouldn't have been half as successful implementing Guiding Good Choices."