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FMI Contact:

Medical Care Development, Inc.

107 Elm Street Ste 300A, Portland ME 04101

Phone: (207) 773-7737 • Fax (207) 622-3616

Email: 21reasons@mcd.org

Website: www.21reasons.org

LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL SEVENTH GRADERS GET SOBERING LESSON IN ALCOHOL USE

PORTLAND, ME. Seventh graders at Lincoln Middle School in Portland learned about the dangers of underage alcohol use today when Attorney General Steve Rowe visited their school to participate in a Reach Out Now Teach-In. Lincoln Middle School is one of hundreds of schools nationwide to hold a Reach Out Now Teach-In during the week of April 3–7.

April was declared Youth Alcohol Prevention Month by the City Council on April 3 to coincide with national Alcohol Awareness Month. The Reach Out Now National Teach-In is a nationwide program sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to help prevent underage drinking.

“Most seventh graders in our community are not using alcohol, but it is a decision many face,” said Malory Shaughnessy, Community Outreach Coordinator for Portland CMCA. “In Portland, 15% of seventh graders say that they already have started drinking alcohol, and that jumps to 24% in eighth grade. Far too many children are beginning to drink at a dangerously early age. This Reach Out Now Teach-In is an important step in helping our kids get a clear and consistent message at home and at school that underage drinking is dangerous, illegal, and unacceptable.”

For the fifth year in a row, SAMHSA teamed with Scholastic Inc., to distribute alcohol prevention materials to middle schools in America in time for Alcohol Awareness Month. Each classroom received Reach Out Now publications in formats for both classroom teachers and parents. Part of the focus is to get information to the parents and to encourage discussions in the home. SAMHSA reports that families exert a great deal of influence on whether a child uses alcohol.

“What parents may not realize,” says SAMHSA Administrator Charles G. Curie, “is that children say that their parents’ disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.” SAMHSA reports that children and teens are less likely to abuse alcohol if parents are involved in their children’s lives, make and enforce clear rules, and are positive role models.

Portland CMCA (Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol), in collaboration with SAMHSA, sponsored the Teach-In. Portland CMCA is a coalition of individuals and organizations with the common goal of building a safe and healthy community environment for the positive and drug-free development of all Portland Youth. SAMHSA is an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. SAMHSA partners in this effort include the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free, a national campaign led by Governors’ spouses to prevent use by 9- to 15-year-olds; the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America; Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD); the National Family Partnership; PRIDE Youth Programs, Inc.; and Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

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