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Project Ignition Students Explain What Works in Teen Driver Safety *Grants Available for High Schools to Implement these Effective Strategies*

ST. PAUL, Minn. (Sept. 29, 2011) – According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, traffic crashes remain the leading cause of death for teens in the United States. For seven years teens themselves, in partnership with their teachers and communities, have been working to change that staggering statistic through a program called Project Ignition.

Funded by State Farm® and coordinated by the National Youth Leadership Council®, [Project Ignition](#) helps students, teachers and communities address teen driver safety through service-learning. Grant applications are now being accepted so that more high schools can support their students in designing and leading awareness and engagement campaigns. Project Ignition is seeking applications by November 15, which utilize strategies students have found to be effective in motivating peers to change their driving behaviors:

1. Experiences like all-school assemblies or mock crashes can and do motivate, but the impact is intensified when the experience is discussed among peers and merged with classroom curriculum. Students examine what they experienced, what it meant to them, and what they want to do about it. “In physics class a state highway patrolman explained the role of physics in car crashes and I truly realized the extent of the damage my decisions behind the wheel can create,” said Shawn Smith, a Project Ignition student at Ridgemont High School, in Ridgeway, Ohio. Smith also now recognizes how physics concepts apply in the world.
2. Educating parents about the importance of their role in teen driver safety is critical and many Project Ignition schools have done that effectively. According to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, teen drivers whose parents are highly supportive and involved, set rules and monitor driving behavior have half the crash risk as parents who are less involved. Former Project Ignition student, Taylor Mock, from Rushville Consolidated High School in Rushville, Ind. confirms the research, “I know exactly what the driving rules are in my house and what would happen if I didn’t follow them, so I always follow them. Parents need to know that opening the lines of communication, setting rules, and being a positive example really does change their teen’s perspective on driving safely.”
3. Awareness activities like posters or buttons are most effective when combined with proven prevention strategies like advocacy to change or enforce laws. These are the types of classroom-based learning activities that students at Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School in Gibson City, Ill. have participated in to advocate for Illinois’ stronger graduated drivers licensing laws, cellular phone ban in school zones and road construction areas and state-wide texting ban. “All of that legislation was instrumental in changing the driving behaviors of my peers. And, as students, it was a tremendous experience to help establish new laws that promote safer roadways in the State of Illinois and see first-hand that teens really can and do make a difference,” said Joel Hood, a Project Ignition student there.
4. Identifying and shaping normative behaviors in their communities is another effective strategy students have used to persuade their peers. Project Ignition students help their peers understand that most people do the right thing. Jaylea Falk, a student at Eureka High School in Eureka, Calif. said, “We have used kidsdata.org in California to show that most teens are not actually drinking and driving like most tend to think. Getting the real facts helps students further commit to doing the right thing.” Project Ignition helps teens understand that most teens wear their seatbelt, most teens do not speed, most don’t text while driving and this approach has proven to be powerful.



“Teens are the new generation with a strong voice. The more we continue to speak out about this issue the more people, young and old, will listen. We do have an impact on all ages,” said Mock. Join in the effort to address teen driver safety through service-learning by visiting www.sfprojectignition.com for eligibility information, the application and tools to create a high-quality proposal. Twenty-five grants of \$2,000 each will be given. For more information, contact Melissa Mitchell, Project Ignition National Program Coordinator at mmitchell@nylc.org or 1-888-856-7026. Applications are due November 15, 2011.

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Source: National Youth Leadership Council

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