



Teen Maze Lets Teens Experience Life

Today's teenagers are faced with many challenges along the path of life, challenges some parents have never experienced and so struggle with how to help their teens make smart decisions. Heard County Community Partnership and its' collaborative partners including Heard County School System are taking action to address teen issues by announcing the county's participation in a Teen Maze.

Last year, through the efforts of Jane Gannon and Beth Daniel of District Four Health Services and Jane Gannon of Troup County Health Department, in collaboration with Troup County schools, the Teen Maze experience was made available to Troup County's 1,050 ninth-graders in its public and private schools.

This year, Troup has graciously allowed Heard students to have a window of time to experience the Maze. Heard County's eighth grade students, with parental permission, will be allowed to participate in HCCP's Teen Maze presentation in conjunction with Troup County's Teen Maze on Friday, Sept. 21, 2012 8:30 AM to 11:00 AM at West Georgia Technical College's Callaway Conference Center. Parents will have a preview night prior to the event. Parents also will have the opportunity for their students to opt out of the Teen Maze but that is strongly discouraged.

HCCP and Heard Schools have made the decision to include only our eighth grade initially to test the experience for impact and outcomes. This will minimize expense and give us some idea of effectiveness. Based on results and community support, Heard County will consider recreating the experience locally next year for older middle and all high school students.

According to Georgia Highway Safety Statistical Data, Heard County's teen crash fatality rate is 3.5 % higher than the state average. Heard County's teen pregnancy rate is 85 pregnancies per 1,000 teens.

The Teen Maze experience aims to show the youth of our community how the decisions they make now have long-lasting effects, not only on their lives but the lives of people around them as well.

The lifesize maze offers simulations of real-life choices, such as drinking and driving, texting and driving, drug use and abuse and shows the real life consequences of those choices allowing young people the experience without real life permanency. It provides choices that will affect teens the rest of their lives, and the maze, like life, doesn't let them choose their fate. It forces them to draw their fate out of a hat, then experience the consequences of the fate dealt to them, whether it be a pregnancy or STD from unprotected sex, or death from driving while texting. They may experience parenthood, DUI, hospitalization, incarceration or the ultimate goal, graduation.

Along the path, Heard County professionals in various fields of expertise will present information to students. A student who 'chooses' to drink at a simulated party will face the Franklin Police Department. Under the eye of a Heard County Deputy, a student who 'chooses' to drink and drive will experience driving a golf cart wearing impairment goggles that shows the

varying levels of intoxication and their effect on driving skills. Students will see a recreation of a crash scene and the emotional turmoil of a parent who's lost a child in the crash. A student who dies from drug abuse or an STD will see the Heard County Coroner, their own death certificate and their reflection in a casket. Students who make good choices will graduate with all due pomp and circumstance including a diploma. They may get a job and buy a home.

The ultimate goal of teen maze is to stimulate teens to think about the potential consequences of their choices before acting. By doing this, they have a better chance of reaching their ultimate goal in high school - timely high school graduation. We will survey the students before and after to determine the effects of the experience on their beliefs.

This project will not be possible without immense community support. It will take many individuals, agencies, departments, businesses, and organizations to fill the roles in this simulated community in the game of Life. We will need volunteers to prepare materials, donations of in-kind expenses like photocopying (1,000 or so pages), bottled water for volunteers, photography, etc.

Many agencies have been involved in preliminary discussions of the project and are already committed. A sampling of those to be included in the Maze and their roles include:

Heard County School System (graduation gowns and transportation)
Heard County Middle School (oversight, chaperoning and graduation ceremonies)
Heard County DFACS (adoption agency)
Heard County 4-H (pregnancy simulation and baby nursery)
Heard County Health Department (drugstore, pregnancy prevention, STDs)
Heard County Sheriff's Office (DUI, Impairment Simulations, Arrests)
Heard County Coroner & Pastor (Pronouncements, burials and notifications of next of kin)
Franklin Police Department (DUI, Impairment Simulations, Arrests, Traffic Court)
Heard County EMA (DUI crash scene simulation)
Ga. Dept. of Labor (career information)
Parents As Teachers Program (parenting info and assistance)

Others possible but not limited to:

Pathways (mental hospital)
United Hospice (bereavement, adoption)
Regions or Certus Bank (Banking, Mortgage information)

Individuals Needed (Estimated 50):

Chaperones
Check-In
Party Scene Participants
Maze Greeters and Guides
Lunch servers / providers / sponsors
Pre-Planning and Preparation
Exit Interviews with Students
Post Event Cleanup

Parents, community members, businesses, agencies, and civic groups are needed now to begin preparation for the September event. Adults will be needed to help guide students through the

maze and to assist in setting up and taking down the maze. Training sessions will be offered ahead of time so that volunteers understand their roles.

For information on similar mazes occurring around Georgia, you may Google “Turner County Teen Maze”, “Crisp County Teen Maze” or “Troup County Teen Maze”.

For more information, go to <https://www.facebook.com/#!/HeardCountyTeenMaze> or to volunteer, please contact Kathy Knowles with Heard County Community Partnership at 706-302 9776 or by email at kck@heardccp.org or Lisa Dennis with Heard County Chamber at 706-675-0560 or by email at lisa@heardchamber.com.