

GIRLSPEAK: ABSTRACT

The Institute for Substance Abuse Studies (ISAS) at the University of Virginia (UVA) proposes a three year project. GIRLSPEAK, which will target girls in six middle schools, in Charlottesville, Virginia, and four neighboring rural counties. GIRLSPEAK encompasses both the idea of helping girls SPEAK out about alcohol and tobacco issues and helping them achieve their PEAK performance level in school, and in their families and communities.

Successful media advocacy enlists the target audience to develop its strategies. GIRLSPEAK takes this principle to its logical conclusion by not merely consulting with the target audience, but engaging it in all facets of producing a media message--ultimately leading to norm-changing, a more protective environment, and ongoing support for peak performance behavior. The question this project seeks to answer is "will involvement in a media advocacy project and participation in a prevention strategy help increase the resistance of the target population to alcohol and tobacco use?" It is our hypothesis that the hands-on, interactive process of the GIRLSPEAK project will foster a greater resistance to pro-use media messages and peer pressure, and will also affect the perceptions of peers, parents, and the wider community, particularly about youth access and other policy issues. **GIRLSPEAK will empower young women to speak out on alcohol and tobacco issues, helping them to develop, test and produce a health promotion message focused on alcohol and/or tobacco.**

The major components of the GIRLSPEAK project are: **1) Focus Groups:** All facets of the project will be specifically tailored to suit the needs of each locality as revealed through formative focus group research and informational meetings held the first fall. **2) Group building/ Media Literacy:** In each school 7th grade girls will be recruited to join the GIRLSPEAK Club. The club will subdivide into small working groups of 10-15 girls, each co-facilitated by a female UVA graduate student and a female high-school student hired and trained by ISAS. At each school one faculty liaison will be hired to assist with recruiting and "selling" the program to the girls, their parents and the wider community. Transportation will be provided to encourage maximum participation. During the first year of the grant the co-facilitators will work with the small groups to create a trusting environment in which the girls feel free to speak their minds. During club meetings, which will include food, field trips and other fun activities, the girls will learn about the media and marketing -- especially alcohol and tobacco advertising. **3) Summer activities:** Each summer scheduled activities will keep the girls involved and maintain the small group and cross-age peer mentoring dynamic. **4) Health Promotion: Design and Production.** In the second year of the project the clubs will each conduct a health promotion campaign, choosing a message and target audience, and developing, testing and producing an alcohol and/or tobacco-related health message in one of six media areas: video, radio, computer, print, performance arts or fine arts. Local media experts will be retained as needed to assist each group. **5) Publicizing and Institutionalizing GIRLSPEAK:** In the third year all the by-now 9th grade girls will be offered public speaking and peer-facilitator training. That winter/spring they will either perform a community service project based on what they have learned in GIRLSPEAK, or they will begin to serve as the next generation of facilitators for the 7th grade girls. The project staff will work with local Steering Committees to perpetuate the GIRLSPEAK project. Using talk shows, newspaper articles and other media, the process and products of the project will be widely publicized, thus alerting local citizens and politicians to what young women have to say about the use and abuse of alcohol and tobacco.