

Design project engages students at Regis

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It's not often that high school students get to spend class time focusing on T-shirt design, but at Regis and other area schools, it's cool.



It's a combination of art and education about teen drinking in a "Project Change Reaction," a program designed by Break the Chain Apparel, an organization dedicated to increasing awareness of domestic violence and issues that harm families.

During the past year, Tammi Burns, the chief executive officer of Break The Chain Appeal, has been working to bring Project Change Reaction to local schools. Regis High School picked teenage drinking as the social problem to focus on. Students had an assembly earlier in the month and are now designing T-shirts with the theme. Once a winning graphic is chosen, artists will take the design and make it into a T-shirt that will be sold at school and stores. Funds from school sales will go to the Regis art department.

Each student comes up with a slogan, and designs a shirt for it. Becca Tabor, a freshman at Regis, came up with "Another Bottle, Another Life."

Tabor is impressed with the program.

"We had an assembly earlier, and that inspired my slogan."

Kathleen Gormley, a freshman, worked on "Better Things You Could Do," rather than drinking. Walking the dog, planting a tree, reading a book or knitting a sweater were on her list.

"I am probably going to buy a shirt," she said. "It is a good program."

Julie May, a freshman, was drawing a dead tree with empty bottles in the branches.

"The assembly got me creating my own ideas and got me thinking about the problem, and that is pretty cool. I would like to see my ideas on a T-shirt," May said.

Freshman Michael Usselman's focus was that teenage drinking kills.

"I am learning that I can't draw a straight line without a ruler," he said with a laugh.

The idea came from an abusive relationship and has grown into a program focusing on positive changes. Heads are beginning to turn, as Better TV, a television and Web show, will be at Mill City this week taping as students there begin their Project Change Reaction.

Burns thinks of the project as a tool, not a program.

"Our clothing speaks without saying a word," she said. "We are about getting people out moving and thinking. It is a complete change of mind. It is not acceptable to speak to people inappropriately. It is not acceptable and we are not going to take it anymore. We are going to open closet doors and shed some light on the problem. It is time for healthy families." Stephens Middle School raised \$2,000 for Family Building Blocks.

"We are about empowering kids that they can make a difference," Burns said. "You learn that what they are seeing and what they are saying is making a difference. If kids learn now that they can make a difference, what a world we will have later."

Sponsors contribute to make the projects possible. Each project costs between \$2,000 and \$5,000 to put on. Sponsorships start at \$50. Business such as Mike Adams Construction, Key Bank in Stayton, Best Heating and Cooling and Fresh to You Produce have helped communities by coming on board as sponsors.

Winners receive one-on-one training with a graphic artist.

Eric Loftin, an art teacher at Regis, is pleased with the program.

"I think it is a good reason to give an opinion about something that really affects our community," he said. "Some of the advanced art students were pretty in depth. Color was optional so we are basically designing a concept instead of the actual shirt."

Besides the learning and creative impact, the funds raised will help students too. The kiln at Regis needs some electrical repair, and staff is hoping that T-shirt sale proceeds will help cover that expense.

Madeleine Gere, the development director at Regis High School, wanted Regis to get on board and support the program.

"It engages the kids in the learning process and helps them become aware of other people's problems. It may not be their (problem), but they develop empathy towards others," she said. Gere saw the opportunity as a life lesson.

"You have to be prepared for life. You never know which situation or problem is going to affect someone's life," she said.

For information about the program or T-shirt sales, go to www.breakthechainapparel.com.