

[← Back](#)

TEENS AIMING TO BRING PEERS POSITIVE MESSAGES

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Peering out the front door of his high school, 18-year-old Je'aime Powell shrugged his shoulders and sighed deeply. Slowly, he turned his face to the camera and muttered, ``It's an everyday thing.''

``Good," said James A. Temple Jr., the man behind the camera. ``Let's do it again."

Temple, video technician for Portsmouth's cable channel, WGOV-TV, was filming a public service announcement that focuses on the prevalence of drug use among teens. The announcement will begin airing next month.

``Hunch your shoulders a little bit and let your brow furrow," Temple coached.

The public service announcement is the first project in a media blitz by Portsmouth students with the goal of sending their peers positive messages about making good choices.

In the next three months, about two dozen students will star in radio and TV public service announcements, perform in a live theater production, write newspaper editorials, and plaster their artwork on local billboards - all while touting the same message: ``Choices . . . The Stuff Destinies Are Made Of.''

The campaign, developed to curb juvenile delinquency in Portsmouth, is being funded by a \$13,738 federal grant to the city through the state's Department of Criminal Justice Services.

In a meeting this month to discuss the first TV public service announcement, five students, ages 13 to 18, voted unanimously to focus on drug use among teens.

``Smoking marijuana is like smoking a cigarette now," said Lori Harrell, 17, a junior at Churchland High School.

``Yeah, there are so many people that are doing crack and heroin, too," said Sarah Blake, 17, also a Churchland High junior. ``Getting into that is like waiting to die."

``I think it's peer pressure," said Sherrie Grant, 14, a freshman at Wilson High School.

As the students spoke, Temple took copious notes.

``What I'm visualizing for the video is, we're going to talk about drugs, and these are the

testimonies that you're going to tell," Temple said.

``These are real-life statements. . . .

``We want to make sure that it's clear that even though it seems normal, it's not normal. This is what you're trying to say to your friends, to the people in your community. It seems normal, but it's not. It's still wrong, it's illegal, and we need to remind them of it."

The public service announcements will be pitched to local TV and radio stations.

``We're getting the youth to say what's on their minds," Temple said, ``because if one kid is thinking it, there's probably hundreds of other kids thinking the same thing."

The campaign will culminate in the fall with a ``Back to School Youth Summit," where all of the media projects will be showcased.

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Date: May 18, 1997

Page: B9

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