

HC DrugFree: Keeping Howard County *in the KNOW!*
...knowledge is power, so just say KNOW

“If you don’t like the road you're walking, start paving a new one.”

Dolly Parton

Why HoCo Students Come Back

The essay below was written by Malhar, a Howard County high school graduate, a former member of our Teen Advisory Council (TAC), the big brother of a current TAC member, and now a college sophomore hired to teach our upcoming Life Skills classes to younger HoCo students. Malhar outlines his experience on HC DrugFree's TAC and our Life Skills classes, and the impact both have had on his life.

Academic and professional life has been increasingly changing in Howard County, with more students on social media and having access to more information and experiences than ever before. While this does enable better communication and interactions, it’s increasingly risky when it comes to making safe decisions regarding alcohol, safe communication, and drug use. School curriculums try to address these issues through mandatory health classes, but as a student who’s been through the school system, they make little lasting change because it’s more about “information” over “application”. I really didn’t understand how the concepts we learned were applied in real life and my first exposure to learning about this was when I joined HC DrugFree in high school.

I can honestly say that HC DrugFree’s program made a huge impact on my life throughout high school and college. When I first got to high school over 5 years ago, I had no idea what extracurriculars to do, what volunteer opportunities felt right for me, and how to even build my interpersonal skills. Freshman year I joined so many clubs and volunteer roles in a desperate search for something that aligned with my interests. I found HC DrugFree through the Howard County government website and signed up to go to their Teen Advisory Council (TAC) meetings, knowing nothing about the organization. Over the course of several meetings and Drug Take Back days across four years, I found that this was one of the few experiences I was doing where I could truly see the impact that was being made, whether it be the thousands of pounds of medications removed at Take Back events or students engaging and asking thoughtful questions at Life Skills classes. My younger brother, who used to tag along to Take Back days, even joined TAC after I graduated, because he saw how much I enjoyed it and grew from it.

One of the core reasons I became involved with Life Skills classes was that I believe that the program bridges the essential need that students have to be educated on safe decision making and addressing issues that are pertinent to our generation. While schools were still telling us cigarettes and alcohol were the leading culprits, our generation was facing new threats from social media, opioids, and vaping. Beyond that, Life Skills classes taught important lessons in communication, self-esteem, and mental health that even I've applied and grown from. By being taught by college and high school students, it makes sure that information is genuine, current, and conveyed through a trusted and safe medium that students can trust.

When I came to college, I thought I would never have to apply many of the lessons learned, as long as I followed safe decision making. However, this wasn't the case, as I often found myself advising peers on healthy communication, refusal skills, and even first aid and noticing early symptoms of alcohol poisoning. It reminded me that information never goes to waste and that being aware is one of the strongest resources in life, and it's why I continue to be involved with HC DrugFree and the Life Skills program. I've been able to apply my public speaking and communication skills at internships, and use the teaching experience to build my leadership with similar clubs and organizations.

Parents, if you want your middle school students to spend time with Malhar, Abbie, and Justin, the three Howard County students now in college and hired to teach our Life Skills classes starting next week, hurry to register your kids. High school students must hurry to sign up to join our team if they want to earn Community Service Hours while working with our college and adult team.

Start the Year with Young but Wise Role Models for Your Kids



Being a kid is all fun and games until you realize how slippery it can be.

Help your child learn how to navigate life's inevitable challenges with our Free Life Skills Class.

It's not too late to register your child for our popular FREE online Life Skills Classes for HoCo students. Classes will be held on **January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 27, and March 5** on Zoom from **5 - 6:30 p.m.**

College students will teach the evidence-based curriculum while **high school students will serve as role models and assist**. HC DrugFree staff will attend and oversee all classes. [Learn more](#)

Free Parenting and Grandparenting Classes Are Back!



Learn skills to help your HoCo kids and grandkids!

Guiding Good Choices® is an evidence-based curriculum that helps adults to build stronger relationships with their kids, all while teaching them how to deal with peer pressure and avoid risky behaviors. If you are the **parent, guardian or grandparent**, then this may be a powerful resource for you.

Learn how to:

- Prevent drug use in your family
- Develop healthy attitudes and clear standards
- Avoid trouble and response to peer pressure
- Manage conflict and express feelings constructively
- Strengthen family bonds
- and much more!

We urge you to attend all five of HC DrugFree's Zoom classes scheduled to be held on **Tuesdays, March 12, 19, April 2, 9, and 16** from **Noon – 1:30 p.m.**

[Learn more & register](#)

Create a HoCo Public Service Announcement

Submit your Public Service Announcement (PSA) by April 14!

Join HC DrugFree and the HoCo Student Film Fest for another year of creative filmmaking fun!

HC DrugFree is proud to have our own Public Service Announcement (PSA) category in the HoCo Student Film Festival, and our 2024 theme is "KNOW Your No." This category was chosen to showcase the ways teens stay true to their personal values, stand up to peer pressure, and avoid risky behaviors by using Refusal Skills, all while keeping their friends.



Enter now to flex your creativity, connect with other HoCo filmmakers, and

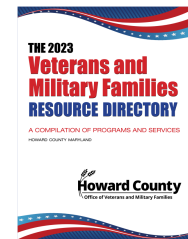
have a chance at winning a prize for the best PSA. Contact HC DrugFree's staff if you have any questions. The 20th Annual HoCo Student Film Festival will be held on May 3rd at the Miller Library, 7 - 8:30 p.m. [Learn more and get involved](#)

Sleepless Nights? Try Stress Relief Techniques

In a recent national survey, 44 percent of adults said stress had caused sleepless nights at least once in the previous month. All that tossing, turning and staring at the ceiling can leave you feeling tired and more stressed the next day. If you're caught in this vicious cycle of anxiety and insomnia, there's good news: Simple stress relief techniques can help you sleep better and feel calmer. [Read more](#)

Veterans and Military Families Resource Directory

The Howard County Government's **Office of Veterans and Military Families** has released the 2023 Veterans and Military Families Resource Directory to address the needs of the 20,000+ veterans and active duty members who live in the County. This comprehensive guide outlines the various programs and services that are available. [Download the guide](#)



Six Tips for Success with Dry January

Taking a break from alcohol for an entire month provides you with an opportunity to assess your patterns of alcohol consumption and how they affect you physically and mentally. It may also provide the space to cultivate alternatives for relaxing, socializing, and coping with stress. As a result, you may experience benefits such as improved sleep and vitality, or waking without the fatigue, malaise, and upset stomach of a hangover. You may also find that you lose weight without the extra calories from alcohol. Participants in Dry January have also noted positive effects on their relationships as well as saving money. [Read more](#)

Ho Co Students: Get Involved

HC DrugFree invites **all Howard County students in grades 8-12** to attend our monthly Teen Advisory Council (TAC) meetings and serve as student ambassadors in their schools and in the community.

Why join TAC?

- Earn Community Service Hours
- Gain experience for job & college applications
- Volunteer opportunities year round
- Be a leader and role model in Howard County!

[Learn more](#)

[Learn More](#)

Register Today! Teen Planning Committee Meeting: January 22

HoCo students grades 8-12 interested in contributing to our special February Teen Program should attend this meeting on Monday, January 22 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. It's not too late to get involved and **receive Community Service Hours**. Register to receive the January 22 Zoom link.

[Learn More](#)

Save the Date: February 5 Teen Advisory Council Meeting and Teen Program

Join us for a very special Teen Advisory Council Meeting/Program as we allow our students to take the reins and host a unique community program designed to give parents, teacher, and younger students a window into the life of a Howard County high school student. The meeting/program will be held on Zoom on February 5 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. **More info coming soon!**

SAMHSA Fentanyl Awareness Youth Challenge



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) issued a challenge to America's youth to raise awareness about fentanyl and reduce teen overdose deaths.

FentAlert: Empowering Youth for Safer Choices - SAMHSA Fentanyl Awareness Youth Challenge is an opportunity for youth, ages 14-18, to develop a community strategy to educate their peers about fentanyl and fake pills — and prevent drug overdose deaths. There's a total prize purse of \$80,000, with individual prizes up to \$5,000. Youth can participate individually, or as part of a team. Submissions are due by February 26, 2024.

[Learn More](#)

Save the Date: Community Teen Listening Session

Save the Date: Teen Listening Session

Monday, February 5 • 5:30 - 7pm via Zoom

Join Howard County teens as they present "insider information" for parents, educators, middle school students, and their high school peers during this special student-lead community program. This is a unique opportunity for community members to listen to the real experiences of HoCo youth to better understand and support them. **More info coming soon!**

NAMI FREE Peer-to-Peer Class



NAMI Howard County is offering another FREE Peer-to-Peer Education Program. This recovery-focused course for adults with mental health conditions is offered in a series of 8 sessions.

- Free and confidential
- Held weekly for 2 hours
- Led by peers with mental health conditions
- A great resource for information on mental health and recovery
- Offers respect, understanding, encouragement, and hope
- Builds on the strength and resilience of participants.

**Tuesdays from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
January 23 to March 12
At the NAMI HC Office and via Zoom**

[Learn more](#)



Participant Perspectives

"NAMI Peer-to-Peer is uplifting, life-saving and an eye-opening experience that changed how I see myself."

"The biggest thing I gained from this class was to become my own advocate and best friend."

"Seeing my peers' strength and dedication to their recovery was personally meaningful."

Medication Safety



Learn how to safely store and dispose of medication to remove the risk of intentional or unintentional misuse in your home. [Learn more](#)

Become a Friend of HC DrugFree

Please consider becoming a [Friend of HC DrugFree](#). Your support shows funders that you value the work that we do. Thank you for your continued support of the important work we do at HC DrugFree!

[Donate Now](#)

Please...Tell Us What You Think!

Please take our 2 second survey to let us know what you think of the content provided in this newsletter!

[Survey](#)

Resources

MAKE THIS THE QUIT THAT STICKS.

Get **FREE** coaching, nicotine patches and gum to help you succeed.



Are you looking for a New Year's resolution? Make 2024 tobacco free. Now is the ideal season to set your quit date and get free support from the Maryland Tobacco Quitline with coaching, nicotine patches and gum. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or Text READY to 200-400 [Learn more](#)



Exciting News! The 988 Lifeline launched new American Sign Language services for callers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. It's a new resource for people to access help when they need it. Visit 988lifeline.org and select "ASL Now."

[Additional Resources](#)

For more information, contact

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