

Students told to take charge against drugs

By Keith Postler
staff writer

Crelga Beverly's solution to fighting substance abuse is simple but powerful — if you want to win, you have to take charge.

More than 800 students and advisers from 106 metropolitan area high schools gathered at Roma's of Livonia Tuesday to exchange ideas on preventing drug and alcohol abuse among teens and listen to Beverly's message.

The daylong program, "Change Agents: Making a Better World in Your School," was part of Project Graduation's 5th Annual student leadership conference.

Beverly, a Wayne State University professor noted for his work with at-risk youth, delivered the morning keynote address in which he stressed the importance of leadership and unity in fighting drug and alcohol abuse.

"It becomes clear that if you are going to assume a leadership role in fighting this troubling disease in our

society, in our schools and among your peers, you will need to use all of your special gifts, talents and energies in this struggle," Beverly said. Beverly said student leaders need direction, vision, knowledge, strategy, planning, and organization, and humility to wage a successful fight against drugs and alcohol.

"A GOOD LEADER is one who knows that the agenda is not what is important, but it is the program that is important and knows that the difference between success and failure in whatever you choose to do . . . comes from the person who stands up one more time than he has been knocked down," he told the audience.

During the conference, Beverly led students through a number of sessions to get them thinking about effective policies, programs and activities for their schools to use against drug and alcohol abuse.

Road rallies, dances, assemblies, support groups, parent involvement and communication between schools were some of the ideas that student

leaders posed as solutions for substance abuse.

Those attending were energized by Beverly's message.

Matt Langdon, 17, a senior at Farmington High School, said, "I think programs like this are what we really need — confronting the problem. A lot of people out there who have the same ideas as others need to get everybody together and stress what's important."

"The ideas are out there, you just have to give people a chance to hear them. I was really impressed by what went on today," he said.

Like others, Langdon had a simple message for teenagers bombarded by peer pressure: "Love yourself, be yourself, have enough confidence in yourself to be the person you really want to be."

Joan Wang, a senior at Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills, said she would like more students to become aware of Project Graduation and Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD).

SHE WAS impressed to see so many student leaders gather to exchange ideas on substance abuse. "It's just great to see that so many kids got together voluntarily for such a good cause, to say they're against drugs and alcohol," she said.

Alena McBee, a 17-year-old senior at Bishop Burgess in Redford Township, expressed a similar sentiment.

"I think that the idea is good because it gives kids a chance to see what students from other schools are doing, and take those ideas back to their schools to help their peers put together prevention programs," she said.

Chris Berry, 16, a junior at Walled Lake Western High School, said substance abuse is a trap that many

teenagers fall into because they believe they are immune to it.

"I think the ideas we heard today are good ideas, but they should be made available to more than just SADD students," he said.

"It was very positive. I think we're taking the right steps, but we have a long way to go," added Scott Westover, 17, a senior at Livonia Churchill.

The fight against substance abuse in schools has to spread, Beverly said.

"It has to go beyond the school system itself, it has to involve the parents in the community, civic and church organizations — all of the elements in our community must be involved in the program," he said.

"Sometimes you find in many ways

that the adults don't solve problems that kids can't solve themselves if they are better educated."

The afternoon session focused on program student can conduct in their schools. Enceca for the afternoon were Vida Shaker and Eric Champnella, hosts of WTVS-Channel 56 teen series "Club Connect."

Project Graduation is sponsored by a coalition of more than 50 organizations including Birmingham Bloomfield Families in Action, Wayne County Intermediate School District, Junior League of Birmingham, Michigan PTA, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Oakland County Health Division, Oakland Schools, Wayne County Prosecutor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and WTVS-Channel 56.