

# NEWS RELEASE

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Madison County Health Department · 101 E. Edwardsville Road · Wood River, IL 62095

## **For Immediate Release**

**Date:** October 26, 2015  
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**16<sup>th</sup> Annual Madison County Youth Forum  
to be held on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Addressing issues related to substance abuse  
“Hugs Not Drugs”**

Wood River, IL –The 2015 Madison County Youth Forum will be held on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Morris University Center, Meridian Ballroom. This event is open to the public.

Madison County Youth Forum is possible through coordination from the following: Eta Sigma Gamma National Health Education Honor Society – SIUE, Madison County Health Department, Madison County Regional Office of Education, Madison County Schools, Madison County Youth Board, and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville – Department of Kinesiology and Health Education.

The Madison County Youth Forum gives youth in Madison County a voice in identifying the problems and developing solutions related the topic. The theme for this year’s Youth Forum is “Hugs Not Drugs” focusing on issues related to substance abuse. All public and parochial Madison County high schools were invited to participate by sending a cross-section of students representing Madison County schools and communities. Participating high schools include: Alton High School, Civic Memorial High School, Collinsville High School, East Alton-Wood River High School, Edwardsville High School, Granite City High School, Madison High School, Roxana High School, and Triad High School.

The 2015 Youth Forum provides an opportunity for Madison County teenagers to discuss real issues that currently affect youth. Amy J. Yeager, Health Promotion Manager at Madison County Health Department said, “This is a great opportunity to hear suggestions from teens for tackling the issues related to substance abuse facing youth today.”

Prior to the Youth Forum, schools participated in focus groups to identify problems related to

substance abuse. Focus group data was analyzed to determine which drugs and what about those drugs should be the focus of the discussion groups at the Youth Forum. Groups will focus on developing recommendations for solutions for access to and influences on four drugs including: alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and prescription drugs.

The students will be welcomed by Huaibo Xin, Ph.D., from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. During the afternoon, the high school students will hear an informational and motivational presentation from Tom Gibbons, Madison County State's Attorney to inform them of some key topic points and engage them in the process of voicing their concerns and creating solutions. The youth participants will spend most of the afternoon in small groups led by Madison County Youth Board members and college students from Eta Sigma Gamma Health Education Honor Society at SIUE creating solutions to the identified problems. In the evening, the students will present their problem statements and recommended solutions to a designated panel of local officials and the community. The evening session is open to the public.

"We encourage everyone in the community to attend the evening session from 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. at SIUE Meridian Ballroom to hear what the youth have to say and become part of the movement to help make changes for our youth in Madison County. The best way for these problems to be resolved is to engage youth, citizens, parents, community leaders, and schools in the process and work together for the solutions," states Amy J. Yeager, Health Promotion Manager, Madison County Health Department.

Student forums have generated change. Prior Madison County Youth Forums have been successful for changing and enacting policies such as the Zero Tolerance Law (state youth alcohol forum), breathalyzers at local proms, successful passage of community tobacco ordinances, an attempted passage of a county tobacco ordinance, a potential state bill, the initial development of a county teen center, collaboration with the Madison County Sheriff on underage drinking issues including the Anonymous Tipline (296-3000) to report underage drinking and parties, and changes in county and school policy. Last year's Youth Forum encouraged the Madison County Youth Board to focus on an initiative to increase water consumption among high school students. As a result, Edwardsville High School, Granite City High School, and Triad High School piloted the initiative with an assessment at the school level and the development and implementation of a plan specific for their school which varied from working with Administration to consider policy changes, surveys, campaigns for refillable water stations, request to increase water information in the curriculum, and hosting a Water Week to increase awareness and action. Student forums also shift social norms, dispel myths, and generate open conversations about problems that are typically ignored, disregarded, or denied that they exist.

The moderator this year is Mark Von Nida, Madison County Circuit Clerk. The panelists include the following: Nancy Davis, Outreach Coordinator, Gateway Foundation Alcohol and Drug Treatment Centers; Alan Dunstan, Chairman of the Madison County Board and Board of Health; Tom Gibbons, Madison County State's Attorney; Jim Greenwald, EdS, Granite City School District Superintendent; Deputy Kip Heinle, School Resource Officer, Triad High School; Kari Karidis, EdD, Assistant Principal, Collinsville High School; John D. Lakin, Madison County Sheriff; Donna Nahlik, Southern Region Director of Prevention, Chestnut Health Systems; Steve Nonn,

Madison County Coroner; and Lindsay Serrano, SIUE Alcohol and Other Drugs Task Force Coordinator.

**ALL** community members are encouraged to attend the **Speakout Session 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Morris University Center, Meridian Ballroom** to hear the recommendations from the youth, listen to their dialogue with the panelists, and become part of the solution by working with the youth and community leaders to make a difference for all of us in Madison County.

If you have questions regarding the Madison County Youth Forum, please contact Amy J. Yeager, Health Promotion Manager at Madison County Health Department, (618) 296-6103 or [ajeager@co.madison.il.us](mailto:ajeager@co.madison.il.us).

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