

The Immersion Experience: Observations of the Community

When I went to a Chattanooga Cares Educational Program held at East Ridge High School on November 6, 2006, led by John Doe, I left more informed and enlightened. Not only did the program confirm research I had already done, but Mr. Doe shared openly about his fifteen –year battle with being HIV positive. His partner at the time was using drugs and when high, would sleep with multiple partners. John had known this person for eight years and had no reason to suspect drug abuse because it was well hidden. John became sick with flu-like symptoms and found that he was HIV positive. His partner went to prison and died several years ago from full-blown AIDS.

In the first class, a student asked Mr. Doe if he knew anyone who was HIV positive; and if so, how it changed their life? The program became more upfront and personal as John shared honestly from his heart. As an observer, I could sense his urgency to communicate to this younger generation the importance of taking good care of themselves and being responsible and in control of their own sexual lives. John stated, “Don’t think that you have the right to do anything you want to do and it won’t affect anyone else. We all live in one big pond, and your lives always affect someone else’s life.”

Between classes, I thanked John for being so open, honest, and genuine. He shared with me that he has been doing educational programs for three years and believes that he is turning his suffering and pain into something positive. I agreed with John and wished him many more productive years of teaching about HIV/AIDS.