

Nome students talk about alcohol abuse and prevention

By Amanda Tördal

Monday afternoon at 2:30 p.m., students assembled at Nome-Beltz Junior/Senior High School to talk about preventing domestic violence and alcohol abuse in the community. With speakers including peers, community members and prevention professionals, students had the opportunity to learn about issues, ask questions and explore sensitive topics in a safe environment.

The assembly was arranged by Nome-Beltz students Kylie Evans and Ashleigh Minix. Evans and Minix, both sophomores, were inspired to host a school event about violence prevention and alcohol abuse after attending the Lead On! conference in Anchorage last November. They shared their experience with their peers during Monday's assembly and answered questions about taking part in Lead On!

Motivational speakers for the event included Nome EMT Volunteers and Safety Patrol members Greg and Kimberly Bishop, and Chris Steppe, Director of the Boys and Girls Club in Nome. Students learned how alcohol affects the brain and body, and heard Nome EMTs talk about what they see during calls involving alcohol or domestic violence. They also received tips on how to stay safe in the community, especially during upcoming Spring Break and Iditarod Week.

Chris Steppe of the Boys and Girls Club spoke to students about what substance abuse is, explained some common misconceptions about alcohol and addiction, and shared his own story about dealing with addiction during college.

"I just got up there and spoke and relayed as much information as I could in fifteen minutes," Steppe told *The Nome Nugget* in a phone interview after the assembly. "There's always a lot more questions. But this is what's really going on. If you're struggling with issues, you need to take a closer look, you need to seek

help," he said.

To further drive home his point about how easy it is to form an addiction, he opened a soda can slowly into the microphone to gauge students' responses during the assembly, and said there was quite the reaction. He explained how addictions could be triggered by sights, smells, tastes and even sounds, like popping open a soda can.

Steppe told *The Nome Nugget* that Nome-Beltz students were given a five-question survey prior to the assembly consisting of yes/no questions about alcohol and addiction, plus a bonus question: "What's the most addictive substance in America?" The answer: caffeine, which was clear to many students after witnessing the crowd's reaction to the sound of a soda pop.

Steppe is a Prime for Life instructor, which is a substance abuse prevention course aimed at informing and equipping persons to protect themselves from developing a substance related problem or realizing that they already have a substance related problem and what the next steps are.

"I have been an instructor for six years, and hope to continue to educate our youth about the dangers of substance abuse," Steppe told *The Nome Nugget*. He not only speaks at local schools and the Boys and Girls Club about substance abuse, but also gives courses to youth who have been convicted with an MCA – or minor consuming alcohol – charge.

"There's a huge circle of people in this community who want to help, and to refuse their help is something kids shouldn't do," said Steppe. "Alcohol abuse is a struggle — kids see it every day just by driving down to the post office or grabbing an ice cream at Milano's."

Steppe said the whole idea behind his talk, the assembly, and the Lead On! program as a whole, is to encourage kids to speak out, get help, and prevent problems before they start.



Photo by Brian Adams, courtesy Recover Alaska

TAKING INITIATIVE— Kylie Evans and Ashleigh Minix arranged an assembly on Monday to talk about prevention of domestic violence and alcohol abuse.

Nuk Thann, Family Services Coordinator at the Nome Community Center, is a Lead On! mentor and chaperoned students during the Anchorage conference last November. Thann told the *Nome Nugget* that students Ashleigh Minix and Kylie Evans wanted to reach out to their school community, help their friends understand alcohol, and encourage everyone to be safe during Spring Break and Iditarod time.

"I'm really proud of the girls," said Thann, sharing the highlights from the assembly. "They were really genuine and themselves, and that's the best way to impact their peers."

Thann said she is glad that the students have so much support from the

community, their counselor, school principal and their parents.

Evans and Minix both expressed joy at being able to share their experience with their peers and introduce Lead On! at the assembly. The young women have hopes to not only encourage more of their peers to attend Lead On!, but also to inspire change and make a difference in their community.

"I really want other people to go and make a difference," Evans told *The Nome Nugget*. "It felt empowering, I feel like I want to keep doing things like this. Maybe something with our culture – that was one of the big ideas we had, too."

Lead On! is a youth-based movement designed to benefit local com-

munities by preventing domestic and sexual violence in Alaska. It is sponsored by Stand Up, Speak Up Alaska and the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, or ANDVSA, for short. Lead On! hosts a conference each year in November, gathering young Alaskans from around the state to develop leadership skills to take back to their communities.

The school wide assembly was made possible through a grant from Stand Up, Speak Up Alaska and partnership funding from ANDVSA and Recover Alaska. Coming this spring, with funding from the same grant, there will be a "Healthy Relationships" workshop at the high school and Boys and Girls Club in Nome.