

# Participants learn to say no to drugs at conference

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There were no holds barred at the 13th annual "Too Cool to do Drugs" conference hosted by Sanctuary Inc. yesterday.

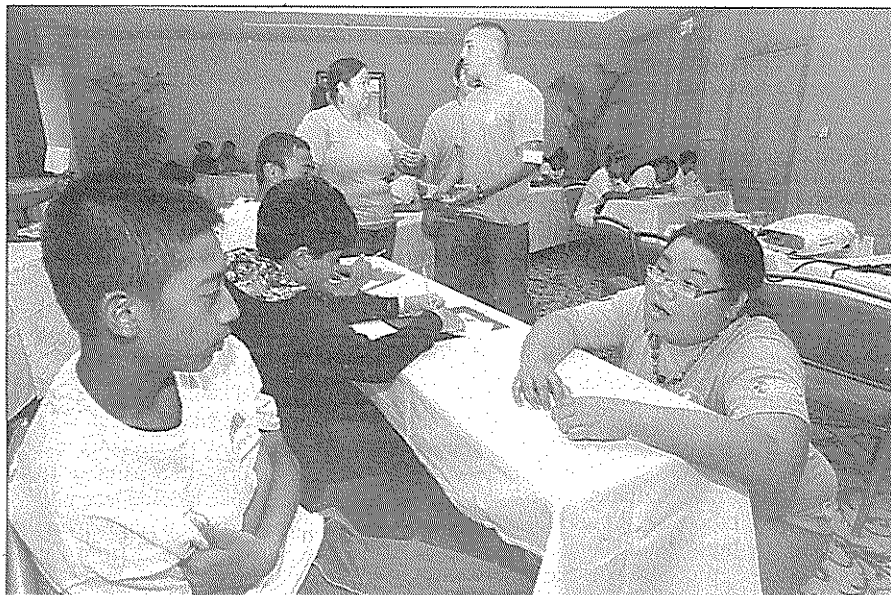
The participants — ages 12 to 18 — spoke frankly about suicide, drug abuse, peer pressure and even shared their own encounters, as many of them said they have been in situations where they have had to turn down drugs.

Sanctuary Inc. has hosted such a conference every Labor Day weekend as a proactive step toward educating teens and parents on how to prevent and reduce drug and alcohol abuse. Yesterday's conference was at the Westin Guam Resort.

Sanctuary's Executive Director Sarah Thomas Nededog said the conference was unique in that it required the teens to come with a significant adult in his or her life. That partnership is essential in combating drug abuse and alcoholism, Nededog said, because substance abuse prevention starts at the home.

Clinical psychologist Lilli Ann Perez, one of the plenary speakers, said in Guam's cultural context, the extended family plays a role because Chamorro and Filipino culture is family-oriented. Teens come into contact with their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins more often, and the frequent interactions may create potential problems, or misunderstandings.

The conference featured lectures, breakout sessions and discussions on suicide prevention, communication and saying no to drugs. Perez said at the start of the day she had the teens generate ideas on how to prevent drug abuse, and the No. 1 so-



Photos by Masako Watanabe/Pacific Daily News/mwatanabe@guampdn.com



lution the teens came up with was communication.

Eighteen-year-old Jonilyn Delrosario, a student of Guam Community College, said substance abuse issues start when a child is facing

problems at home. Children feel depressed and turn to drugs for relief when they are not adequately supported by their parents, she said.

"If the parents don't understand their child, then the child will turn to

**Left:** Myracle Mugol, right, and other AmeriCorps volunteers lead participants in a session about active communication and ways to say no to drugs. The session was part of Sanctuary Inc.'s 13th Annual "Too Cool to do Drugs" Parent/Youth Conference at the Westin Resort Guam.

## AT A GLANCE

▲ Sanctuary Inc. was founded in November 1971 by Father Robert Phelps as a safe haven and temporary alternative to detention for Guam's youth. Over the 38 years of its existence, the organization has expanded to offer a full continuum of services that includes:

- ▲ 24-hour crisis intervention services;
- ▲ Temporary safe refuge during family conflicts and abuse;
- ▲ Supportive counseling for

youth and families;

- ▲ Drug and alcohol outpatient and residential treatment;
- ▲ Support groups in Chalan Pago and Astumbo in youth, and adult anger management, tobacco cessation, parenting skills and parent support group; and
- ▲ Prevention and awareness presentations in local private and public schools.

## TO LEARN MORE

- ▲ Call Sanctuary: 475-7100

**Left:** Students participate in an activity during a suicide prevention session at Sanctuary Inc.'s 13th Annual "Too Cool to do Drugs" Parent/Youth Conference at the Westin Resort Guam yesterday.

something else," she said. "The parents play a big role."

The conference not only taught families how to communicate with one another, but also imparted information on the negative effects of alcohol and certain drugs. One panel demonstrated how drug abuse damages the brain.

"As we know, young people are very much influenced by their peers, and they receive a lot of information about sex, drugs and other things from their peers," Nededog said. Delrosario said much of the information they receive from their peers is

wrong, which is why conferences such as yesterday's event help to set the record straight.

Carina Maanao didn't need to be told twice. She said she stays off of drugs because she finds it disgusting. She has been offered drugs by her peers before, but the 13-year-old doesn't think it's cool, and she tells those who offer that it's detrimental to their health.

That's one of the reasons that stopped a 16-year-old conference participant from selling marijuana for easy money. The teen, who is not named because he's underage, said he enjoyed the highs and the independence of being able to buy things with his own money — until he was sent to drug court. Now, the 16-year-old turns to sports for his high.

He said he advises his peers to do the same if they plan to finish school.

"Now I got a better way to use my mind," the 16-year-old said.