



For Immediate Release

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Milwaukee Youth Create “My New Friends” PSA

Friends like “Ox,” “Xan” and “Lean” can’t be trusted

Milwaukee—Today, on September 15, Community Advocates Public Policy Institute in partnership with Connected Health Solutions, ArtWorks for Milwaukee, and Milwaukee County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (MCSAP) are releasing the video “My New Friends,” produced with young people in the city of Milwaukee to raise awareness of drug misuse.

“My New Friends” can be found at rebrand.ly/NewFriends, along with prompts for a guided discussion and resources about substance misuse and mental health.

This youth-driven video focuses on the realities of young Milwaukeeans’ lives—the challenges they face from peer pressure, racism, and self-growth—as well as the importance of friendships in their lives. New friends are represented by “Oxy,” “Xan,” and “Lean,” stand-ins for Oxycodone, Xanax, and the codeine-laced drink “Lean,” and demonstrate how friendships and drug use can be intertwined in a risky attempt to cope with life challenges.

While we are living in extraordinary times, the daily struggles of life continue to be present in young people’s lives, and may even be exacerbated by the COVID-19 health crisis and current spotlight on racist policies and practices, including law enforcement. According to Milwaukee youth surveyed by MCSAP in 2018, the number one reported cause for youth substance use was to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression. “My New Friends” raises the voice of young people and compels the audience to consider how they cope with of the stress and anxiety of daily life and how drug use factors into this process.

This production is part of an effort to move past the fear-mongering style of typical substance misuse PSA’s, which evidence has shown is ineffective. The young Milwaukeeans who created the video hope “My New Friends” will spark a serious conversation with other young people and their families to address the root problems that lead to drug misuse and abuse later in life.

The production plan was put together in a week-long program in the summer of 2019 by young people from around the city. The program is called MyMediaLife, and it was created by Kenny Shults who has, over the last ten years, worked with dozens of agencies and hundreds of teens around the country to facilitate youths’ production of videos that address teen health and wellness issues. The week started in a five-day workshop for the young people to learn about the role of media and social media in their lives, and its influence on making decisions.

In order to conceptualize, write, and produce the video, participating youth learned about the various aspects of drug misuse, its impact on teens' lives, social determinants for its misuse, its characterization in the media, and MCSAP's survey results. The young people in this program used this research to inform the video that they hope will be a message to which other young people can relate.

The Milwaukee youth were completely responsible for the script and material in the production. They were able to use their talents and insights to produce a creative and authentic video to reach their audience.

“For the first time, I felt I could use my artistic skills and ideologies to help to create something that will be seen and appreciated by the community. It was a unique and incredible opportunity that I'm happy I was able to be able to be part of.” – Alex

“During my experience, I learned a lot about filmmaking and also the importance of advocating for the issues I care about in my community.” – Idalia

Interviews with the video's creators can be arranged by emailing Lisa Kaiser at lkaiser@communityadvocates.net.

About the Partners:

[Community Advocates'](#) leadership created the [Public Policy Institute](#) in 2008 to address the root causes of poverty through policy advocacy and community collaboration on economic and public health issues, including substance use. [Connected Health Solutions](#) is a team of public health and production professionals dedicated to positive applications of “new media” and behavior science to improve the lives of vulnerable, underserved communities. The [Milwaukee County Substance Abuse Prevention coalition](#), housed at Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, is a diverse coalition of Milwaukee County partners who prevent and reduce substance use and misuse. [ArtWorks for Milwaukee](#) provides high school students with paid and unpaid internships in the arts.

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