Project Graduation Committee
Kennett High School
North Conway, NH

History of Project Graduation:

Project Graduation emerged in the Oxford Hills area (Paris/Norway) of Maine, in 1980, the result of community energies empowered through a state initiative. It has long since been recognized as a prototype for the nation, helping to protect the lives of graduating seniors in all states.

Beginning in 1978, an Alcohol, Other Drugs and Highway Safety Prevention/Intervention Program was initiated by the Division of Alcohol and Drug Education Services, within Maine's Department of Education, designed in cooperation with the Bureau of Safety. The thrust of program was to help schools and communities locally address problems associated with alcohol and other drugs.

Oxford Hills and five other communities sent teams of school and community leaders through intensive training sponsored by the division. After an 11-day, live-in program of initial training and then follow-up instruction, these teams were prepared to implement an action plan to develop comprehensive alcohol and other drug prevention and education programs in their home communities.

One of these teams, the Drug and Alcohol Team of Oxford Hills (DATOH), aimed to prevent recurring tragedies as Oxford Hills had experienced the previous year (1979), when seven alcohol and other drug related teen deaths occurred during the commencement season. Led by DATOH, area schools and communities provided the Class of 1980 at Oxford Hills High School with information about the risks of drinking, drugging and driving. The seniors were offered an alternative to the "traditional" graduation-night drinking event that drew hundreds of people to the local fairgrounds. They called this chemical-free party "Project Graduation." The entire process, a huge success, was covered by the news media and was adopted as a major program initiative of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Education Services.

Through the work of the division and Maine's communications media, other schools and communities became involved in Project Graduation the following year. In 1981 there were 12 Project Graduation sites, and the following year, 36 sites with a consistent decline in alcohol-related teen highway deaths. This decline reached zero fatalities in 1983 when there were 86 sites involved. In 1986, there were 139 sites, or 98 percent, of Maine's high schools. Project Graduation activities were attended by 80 percent of the Class of 1986. In 1987, 139 schools, or 94% participated in Project Graduation with 80% of the seniors attending.

In 1990, there were no youth fatalities attributed to drinking, drugging, and driving in Maine during the May 15-June 20 commencement season. It was the third consecutive year there were no Maine youth highway fatalities during this critical period. Recognition of Project Graduation's impact continued. More than 40 states had Project Graduation contact persons.

The primary aims of Project Graduation activities are to increase awareness of the dangers of drinking, drugging and driving and to reduce the number of youth involved in alcohol and other drug-related highway crashes. Across the country, Project Graduation and the chemical-free celebrations it inspired are the new tradition for graduating seniors. In Perspectives in Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Project Graduation- Maine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention observed that "Project Graduation has become much more than an event that occurs on graduation night. It is a community wide planning process that strives to create a caring, supportive environment and more open communication between youths and adults."

Source: http://www.khsmwv.com/students/project-graduation-3