

Growing up in rural Missouri can present many challenges. With limited entertainment options in the community, many adolescents turn to substance abuse. In my home near Fulton, Missouri, the normal Friday night activity was to go to a farm and enjoy a few drinks and cigarettes. This was especially true after school events, like Homecoming and Prom.

Finding few options for entertainment, I sought out resources to make a difference. No community should have to suffer because of lack of ways to keep youth entertained, and these gateway substances could lead to further abuse in adulthood. That is why I found the Missouri Youth/Adult Alliance and the staff at ACT Missouri. These dedicated individuals cared so much about what was going on not only in my community, but across Missouri. Through training and access to resources, I was able to put together a plan for schools and communities to host events for youth after large school functions. I shared this training at many youth leadership events, including Speak Hard and HOBY.

After graduating high school, I started school at Southeast Missouri State University. While at SEMO, I worked for the Boys & Girls Club of Cape Girardeau. Programming at “the Club” included speaking to students in K-12 with programs about making good, informed choices, and then gradually introducing them to substance abuse prevention curriculum. Many of these resources came from ACT Missouri. Working with youth at such a young age made a difference.

When I completed my undergraduate studies, I returned to Jefferson City and began working with youth at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Luckily, I was just up the road from my friends at ACT Missouri. Being able to be involved after years of learning and engaging was amazing. No longer was I seeking resources to work in my community, but I was becoming a resource for youth substance abuse prevention. I got to share with a team of dedicated students as the Youth Ambassador Program’s Coordinator. These elite students brought me back to when I was so eager to make a difference.

Learning more about prevention methods is something that will always help me to grow as an individual, especially one who works with youth. I’m lucky my story started with ACT Missouri, and I’m glad I get to help youth start their prevention story today.

