

Rich, H. and I. Kelman. 2008. "Teens Learn to Save Lives – and Do". RiskPost (New Zealand Society for Risk Management), issue 7, no. 4, January 2008, pp. 4-5.

Full text

Recent years have witnessed a wonderful expansion of initiatives on youth, education, and disasters. PreventionWeb hosts the Disaster Risk Reduction Education Network and the Children and Youth in Disasters Network. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction has a Knowledge and Education Cluster and is developing a digital library for disaster risk reduction education materials. The ProVention Consortium provides Research and Action Grants for young researchers to undertake disaster-related projects.

A program in Pueblo, Colorado, USA has also done impressive work in putting into action these ideas, particularly through educating high school students about emergency management. Initiated and led by one of us (Haley) on an entirely voluntarily basis, a program has been developed and implemented at Pueblo West High School, in Haley's community. Based on the USA's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) (for a similar program in Turkey see http://www.ahep.org/ev/egitim5_0e.htm), she developed Teen SERT (School Emergency Response Training) for teenagers to practice responding to multiple casualty scenarios.

The multiple casualty exercises are held with adults watching and taking notes and photos. That is, only the teenagers are involved in the incident command and emergency management--and as casualties. So if an emergency happens and no adults can assist, the teenagers have experience of managing the situation without any outside assistance. After each exercise, full debriefings are held with adults.

As a direct result of the first aid training received through the Pueblo West High School's Teen SERT program, ten Pueblo citizens' lives have been saved so far. The additional benefits of the program reveal leadership skills, empowerment, and community dedication for the students involved along with a newfound awareness and respect for first responders and government services. That translates into as simple an action as pulling over to the side of the road when a response vehicle with flashing lights is behind. The positive and proactive impacts of this program reach far beyond the basic preparedness and response training.

On 16 February 2005, Pueblo West High School was presented with two "Outstanding Leadership Awards" by the United States Department of Homeland Security for the efforts to prepare the students for disasters. Youth are the adults of the future. They will be running society, making decisions, and teaching the next generation. By letting them learn and teach disaster risk reduction as part of their basic education, society will perpetuate its own disaster resilience. Start your program today!

For further information:

- On the program and how to create your own, see <http://www.cert-la.com/links/teensert.htm>
- To join the TeenSert email list, see http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Teen_SERT
- For a slide show about the program, see <http://www.fliptrack.com/watch/m5yU1XXirl>
- For help in creating fake injuries (the art of moulage) see <http://www.fliptrack.com/watch/EA6SpiJDFJ> and <http://www.flickr.com/photos/20338047@N08/?saved=1> and <http://www.certla.com/education/moulage.htm>

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