

SCSU Minnesota Highway Safety Center studies teen sleep deprivation

By Marisa Adler

It was a string of chance meetings that resulted in a groundbreaking project and collaboration between the SCSU Minnesota Highway Safety Center, the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorder Center and WCCO.

Barbara Brody, coordinator of the novice driver's education program at SCSU, and Mark Monowald, director of

the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorder Center, were both speakers at a conference in Spring of 2000. A discussion between the two professionals uncovered a shared interest in studying sleep deprivation and teens.

The possible partnership benefitted both entities. "We have the medical knowledge, and the Minnesota Highway Safety Center knows how to put the information together so teachers can use it," said Connie Buraglio, a nurse at the Sleep Disorder Center.

That preliminary discussion between Brody and Monowald started the ball rolling, but it was another chance encounter that made the plans come to fruition. While covering a story for WCCO, reporter Trish VanPilsom was visiting the Hennepin County Medical Center. Plans for the sleep disorder study, which was in its infancy stage, were discussed with Buraglio. VanPilsom expressed interest in participating in the project and a partnership was soon formed, allowing all three entities to have a part in the study.

The study involved testing two college students on the Minnesota Highway Safety Center driving course as a base for scoring driving abilities. The students were then kept awake for 24 hours and sent through the course again. The goal of the study was to cre-

ate the conditions available when teens drive home after pulling "all-nighters" and to test the effects sleep deprivation has on their driving abilities.

"This study is one of the first in the country, in the world," Brody said. "Studies have been done on sleep deprivation, but never before have they focused on teens."

Test results shocking

The results of the test were frightening. The first participant, stoic and analytical in nature, made a mind game of the study. Although he seemed to stay coherent during the second test, his driving capabilities were hampered considerably. The second participant, enthusiastic and energetic during the control study, actually fell asleep behind the wheel during the second driving test. While awake enough to go through the driving motions, she was officially in stage-one sleep.

The experience was condensed into an effective 16-minute video that will be available for drivers education instructors to show in their classrooms. The tape has all of the elements that constitute an effective teaching tool. While the beginning of the piece focuses on the data collection and results of the study, the conclusion showcases a tragic story of sleep deprivation.

Katie "The Law" Drentlaw was a

promising track star at Prior Lake High School. Her life ended on what should have been one of the best days of her life. Katie was driving home from the famous Drake Relays in Iowa, where she had just been offered a scholarship to a Division One school. She fell asleep behind the wheel and never made it home.

Darla Drentlaw, Katie's mother, allowed Katie's story to be shared in the video because she hopes that it will connect with teenagers.

"Stop and stay" is a constant plea that Drentlaw makes in interviews and presentations. Although talking about Katie's story and its aftereffects is difficult, Drentlaw finds inspiration in her daughter's determination and in her own determination to make a difference. "I know Katie would want me to do it, and I don't want this to happen to anyone else," she said.

The video made its debut April 6 at the Annual Conference for Minnesota Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association in St. Cloud. Drivers education teachers watched the eye-opening video intently. Drentlaw then made a personal plea to the educators, encouraging them to utilize the video in their classes. The session ended with Brody teaching the instructors how to teach the sleep deprivation program to their students.



Darla Drentlaw displays a photo of the daughter she lost due to sleep deprivation.