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Home

Tuesday February 7, 2006

Local News

Wednesday, September 10, 2003 9:49 pm

Let's talk about sex: Valley students emote

By Jennine Zeleznik
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EDINBURG — They want to know about sex. That's right. S-E-X. What's the real deal about sex in teens' lives? Scenarios USA is offering a chance for teens in the Rio Grande Valley to tell their stories about sex, pregnancy, relationships and choices through a writing contest: "What's the Real Deal?"

Those who submit the best stories about relationships and personal behavior will be chosen to work with prominent filmmakers to produce their stories into short films that are shown nationwide.

"The Valley is starving for resources," said Maura Minsky, co-founder of Scenarios USA, based in New York. "School districts, communities, teens, all needed a program to address the issues that teens were facing. Plus, the rate of HIV, teen pregnancy, STDs along the border is so high — this actually fits the needs of the Valley."

Scenarios USA also takes submissions from teens in New York and Miami, but co-founder Kristen Joiner spent a lot of time working in the colonias here. "I worked with teens who were dropping out of school because they were pregnant or got someone else pregnant," Joiner said. "I felt very committed to them."

Along with the writing contest — three short films, by the way, have already originated from Valley kids — Scenarios USA offers its films as a way to start discussions in class on choices teens can make.

"This is a fantastic program," said Rosanelia Boykin, a health teacher at Hidalgo High School who attended a seminar Wednesday on the contest. "It's a wonderful opportunity for the students, and teaches a lot of critical thinking and problem-solving skills."

"Oh yes, I will use these."

Scenarios USA was founded in 1999, following the successes of similar programs in France and West Africa. Because the stories are not only about teens, but written by them, they often connect better with that audience — what Joiner refers to as an "insider's" point of view.

"We hope to get every person in the Valley involved, from Laredo to Brownsville," Joiner said.

The existing Scenarios USA films will actually be shown on Showtime in early December as part of National AIDS awareness week. The films have also garnered notice at festivals around the country and in the national media.

"This is great — it's something new for us," said Liz Avitia, a health teacher in Brownsville. "It's a good way for us to present abstinence and the importance of healthy decisions."

After a story is chosen, Scenarios USA will return to Texas to actually cast Valley students in the newest film.

"Because Scenarios was born there (in the Valley), it feels like we're returning home," Minsky said. "We're glad to be able to provide the opportunity for hundreds and hundreds of students to be able to participate in the community

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this year.”

The deadline for story submissions is Dec. 10 — students should check out their Web site — www.scenariosusa.org or talk to their teachers for more information. They can also call 1-866-414-1044.

Jennine Zeleznik covers education and general assignments for [The Monitor](#). You can reach her at (956) 683-4434.



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