



A Message from the H.E.A.R.T.

It just took one moment. Nancy Scharenbroich's son, Eric, and his girlfriend, Angee, were gone. Killed by a drunk driver, the lives of two high school students were taken away in an instant. The drunk driver was a young man who had just turned 21, and his blood alcohol content was nearly twice the legal limit.

Immediately after Eric's death in 1998, Nancy discovered a poem he had written a month prior titled "Young Life," which reflected upon the journey of adolescence. Eric wrote how young people may not have all the answers or know what life holds for them, but they have "one chance." Inspired by Eric's words, Nancy knew she had a chance to touch others' lives.

Knowing the tragedy was preventable, Angee's mom, Jo, and Nancy viewed awareness as a means of prevention. Later that year, Nancy started spreading a message with a clear call-to-action, "Save Innocent Lives – Get a Ride – Don't Drink & Drive." This message blossomed into an organization: **From the H.E.A.R.T.** In 2002, **From the H.E.A.R.T.** was granted 501(c)(3) status, making it an official nonprofit organization. Developed into its acronym, **From the H.E.A.R.T.**'s goal is to "Help Eliminate Alcohol-Related Tragedies."

The organization accomplishes its goal through various outreach efforts. One of the organization's strongest efforts is its bumper stickers. Seen all across the long, winding highways of the Mount Rushmore state, the bright yellow stickers with the bolded phrase, "GET A RIDE – DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE," have caught the eyes of many and serve as a reminder of their own personal responsibility. **From the H.E.A.R.T.** started distributing these stickers in

1998 and by 2015 had distributed over 500,000. Since then, the numbers have continued to climb.

From the H.E.A.R.T.'s message is applicable to all drivers, but the organization specifically aims to reach young people. At driver's license exam stations across the state, the organization places its bumper stickers and "I PROMISE" cards—billfold-sized cards people can take and sign, committing to a lifetime devotion to safe driving. Whether tucked in a wallet or hung on a fridge, "It's another reminder," Nancy said.

From the H.E.A.R.T. also has an educational video that plays at the driver's license exam stations. The video not only discusses the importance of not drinking and driving but also tells the story of Eric and Angee. The personal account, and perhaps the closeness in age, resonates with youth. Nancy hopes this spurs important discussions about their own safety as well as the safety of their friends and family.

When asked which aspect of **From the H.E.A.R.T.** Eric would be most proud of, Nancy replied, "I think he'd be most proud of the fact that I took it to the kids." This was not her original vision; Nancy had planned to promote her message in businesses and bars all across the state. However, her husband, Paul, encouraged her to "take it to the kids," saying, "they're the ones that are going to make a difference." Now she calls the shift toward a younger audience the "biggest, most amazing moment" of her project.

Reaching over 18,000 students in South Dakota and neighboring states, Nancy has witnessed young people immediately take her message to heart and a generational impact as well. "And now another



generation has come and those kids that I talked to the very first time, they have children that are driving now, and that's just amazing," she said.

From the H.E.A.R.T. has shown tremendous success thanks to the support of the people of South Dakota and various partnerships. Nancy is extremely thankful for the South Dakota Office of Highway Safety (SDOHS) which provides support to *From the H.E.A.R.T.* and similar organizations. The mutually beneficial partnerships have made South Dakota roadways safer.

This partnership is evident in the 911 project, which *From the H.E.A.R.T.* worked alongside SDOHS to develop road signs for rest stops across the state that read, "Don't Drink and Drive/To Report Drunk Driving/Call 911." People have responded well, taking part in getting drunk drivers off the road.

"The partnership between the South Dakota Office of Highway Safety and *From the H.E.A.R.T.* has grown and evolved immensely over the past decade. It is a unique and special partnership, and it has been an honor to help Nancy share her story about Eric and Angee," said Amanda Hossle, director of SDOHS. "Nancy has worked tirelessly over the years to inform people about the dangers of drunk driving. Her passion for educating people, especially youth, has made an incredible impact on impaired driving fatalities in South Dakota. The Office of Highway Safety is proud to have a lifetime advocate in *From the H.E.A.R.T.*"

From the H.E.A.R.T.'s efforts have had a positive impact on the state. In the last 20 years, alcohol-related fatalities in South Dakota spiked in 2003 at 94 deaths. Although the number of lives saved by the efforts of *From the H.E.A.R.T.* cannot be directly measured, the state has experienced a steady decrease in the number of alcohol-related fatalities.

Nancy knows from first-hand accounts that her message has intervened in dangerous decisions. She recalled one specific instance in which a young man spoke to her about a night he had almost driven home after drinking. It was a glance toward a *From the H.E.A.R.T.* keychain that caused him to call a friend for a ride rather than drive.

There are countless untold similar stories and there will continue to be more life-changing moments as *From the H.E.A.R.T.* continues to expand its reach nationwide and worldwide. The determination of Nancy and her husband through *From the H.E.A.R.T.* serves as inspiration to help make a difference; inspiring just one person to make the right choice can save a life and change the future

Sources:

<https://dps.sd.gov/safety-enforcement>

<https://www.be-responsible.org>

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