



## FRANKLIN PIERCE STUDENTS OFFER MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS A 'REALITY CHECK'

BY CHERRYL JENSEN

**B**ullying, drunken driving, drug use, cutting, sexual harassment, sexually-transmitted diseases, domestic violence. Most teenagers have some experience – directly or indirectly – with these challenging issues.

"Reality Check," a student group at Franklin Pierce University, is bringing these subjects into the open through dramatic skits at schools and other venues throughout the Monadnock Region. Members of the 17-person drama team recently lived through their own teen years and can understand and connect with their student audiences.

Most have no prior acting experience, just a desire to let other young people know there is help out there and they don't have to go through tough experiences alone.

Stephen Altieri, a junior from Everett, Mass., is in his third year as a member of Reality Check. He's "been there," he says. "I've lost friends to suicide and drunk driving," he says. "I've been bullied."


Niki-Lynn Zirola, a Franklin Pierce sophomore from Johnston, R. I., like many of her cast mates, saw Reality Check perform at freshman orientation. "When I saw the abuse skit, it hit me," she says. "I want other people to know they don't have to go through this, that there are ways to get out of the situation."

Reality Check was formed 10 years ago at Franklin Pierce by then-student Daniel Lee White, who now lives in Providence, R.I. The group still uses many of the skits that White wrote and he works with current members to create new ones. Since 2005, White has returned to campus each summer to conduct a five-day "boot

camp" for Reality Check members to prepare them for the student orientation presentations.

Marabeth Farmer, assistant director for community service at the University, has worked with the group since its inception. "Franklin Pierce encourages students to participate in community service," she explains. "Reality Check is one of many ways students can get involved in a service project."

Members estimate they have reached more than 2,000 individuals between the ages of 12 and 70 in the past year alone.

Following their performances, "Reality Check" performers take questions from their audiences and often get into lively discussions. Audience members often come up to them afterwards and talk about their own experiences. The Franklin Pierce students' message is always the same: "Talk to someone – your guidance counselor, an adult, a friend. You have the power to get help – and to help others." 

*Reality Check was the recipient of the New Hampshire Campus Compact 2008 President's Award for Outstanding Leadership. Campus Compact for New Hampshire is a statewide consortium of college and university presidents and private sector partners united in their commitment to the civic purposes of higher education. In its award presentation to Reality Check, Campus Compact commended group members for "awe-inspiring" presentations that drew from members' personal experience to bring a message of support, hope and courage to teens and others.*