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## 'In One Instant' Teaches Teens Dangers of Drunk, Distracted Driving

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Reporter

Your life can change in one instant.

Those were the first words that flashed across a screen on Monday, March 23 at the **Palisades High School** presentation on the devastating effects of distracted driving accidents.

The program was created by the non-profit organization **In One Instant**. Palisadian **Gail Schenbaum Lawton**, the organization's co-founder and president, was inspired to take action after recognizing the lack of teen education focusing on alcohol and distracted driving related car accidents in the Palisades.

The presentation consisted of a keynote speaker and a film depicting the events leading up to a fatal teen drunk driving accident. The film emphasized the rippling effects decisions like drinking and driving or texting and driving can have.

The gym at Pali High was crowded with students, faculty, Station 69 firefighters, LAPD officers, David Leger for Congressman Ted Lieu, Violence and Injury Prevention and representatives from USC Trauma and UCLA Health.

Once the lights dimmed and the film started, small talk



*In One Instant* club members (l to r): Mercedes Nixon, Klay Dageset, Tessa De Nicola and Mackenzie Solton.

stopped and students were instantly drawn into the film by the relatable characters.

The fictional film ends with one student choosing to get behind the wheel while under the influence. The intoxicated student crashes into another student's car, leading to one student being killed and another becoming paralyzed.

**Emily Ramirez**, a freshman, said the film was very sad.

"I wouldn't want to see anyone I love or care about die in that way," she said. "You take a step back and realize how your actions could affect you and your family for the rest of your life."

Keynote speaker Jesse Santiago, 25, spoke of his personal brush with a near-fatal drunk driving accident. Santiago spoke of his accident in

2011, when he chose to get behind the wheel while intoxicated with his best friend in the passenger seat.

"I woke up with pain all over...one minute I was driving and the next I woke up to flashing blue and red lights," Santiago said. "I was arrested and taken to L.A. County, the scariest place in the world. It was there that I found out that my best friend was fighting for her life and was paralyzed from the neck down."

Santiago emotionally told Pali High students that he is haunted by that time of his life and how it only takes one event to change the lives of many. "I tell my story over and over because I feel compelled to help people and influence them for the better."

Many students of Pali High left the presentation

with a different outlook on life.

**Rayne Camden**, a freshman, said it had a powerful impact.

"The whole presentation was very deep. I have to admit that I got teary-eyed when they showed how the deaths of loved ones influenced the course of their lives," Camden said.

Senior students and best friends, **Tessa De Nicola** and **Mackenzie Solton** assisted in bringing the program to their school.

De Nicola and Solton, president and vice president (respectively) of the **In One Instant** on-campus club, were individually empowered by their personal experiences with these issues.

Solton said her siblings have had close friends pass away from distracted driving-related accidents, giving her a passion for educating her peers on the importance of making the right decisions when getting behind the wheel.

"It's very personal and special to both Mackenzie and I, so I am just overwhelmed that we were able to do this for our school community," De Nicola said.

To learn more information and to get involved with **In One Instant**, visit: [www.streetwisemedia.org/program/in-one-instant.html](http://www.streetwisemedia.org/program/in-one-instant.html).