

Engagement of the Criminal Justice System: The Zero Adult Provider Project

Focusing on Social Providers

Minnesota's Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) program has a strong focus on reducing underage access to alcohol and creating environmental change. Since EUDL began, Minnesota has funded work to increase compliance checks, provided responsible beverage service training and promoted youth and coalition involvement in underage drinking prevention.

Minnesota's challenge was identifying successful strategies to reduce social access to alcohol such as youth getting alcohol at parties or from other non-licensed providers. In 2003, Minnesota's EUDL program decided to expand its support of the Zero Adult Providers (ZAP) model that had begun in 1999 as a local effort in St. Paul. They now provide mini-grants and technical assistance to counties across the state to implement this program. To date, 17 of 87 counties have undertaken ZAP with an average 253 percent increase in illegal provider arrests in the first year of the project.

What is ZAP? "It Starts Before the Door Knock"

ZAP started as a partnership among the St. Paul Police Department, City Attorney and the Ramsey County District Court, including probation services. Sgt Jim Ramstad explains how ZAP improved law enforcement tactics in responding to underage drinking parties. "In most communities, responding to a party starts with a door knock. In St. Paul we'd knock on the door and tell them to turn down the music and stop bothering neighbors." Under ZAP we changed our mindset", Ramstad continues. "Once we agreed that an underage drinking party is a crime scene, every officer knew exactly how to handle it." Eventually city leaders in St. Paul began to connect the dots between underage drinking parties and the myriad of problems that can result from what sometimes is viewed as "just a nuisance."

When implementing ZAP, officers surveil a party scene to determine how many officers are needed. They call in additional on-duty and off-duty officers as needed. Only once they have enough people to control the scene do they approach. Officers also know that finding the source of alcohol is the priority. They gather evidence, interview people at the party, identify suspects and go through the routine investigative steps of handling a crime scene. They have overcome the misperception among many officers that identifying providers is nearly impossible.

Enforcement is More Than Cops

Another critical aspect of ZAP is the involvement of prosecutors, judges and probation. "Many communities feel stuck. Until everyone is in the same room, it's easy to point the finger elsewhere and say 'If only judges would...' 'If only probation would....' We get everyone on board from the start," said Sheila Nesbitt, ZAP community organizer at the Minnesota Institute of Public Health, who works with communities across the state.

Judges play an important role by sending the message that they'll take illegal provider cases seriously. Judges have also changed the standard sanctions against underage consumption to provide chemical use pre-assessments. Chisago County has found over six years of ZAP nearly one-third of underage consumers need further assessment or treatment. The late Judge Douglas

Swenson often stated that identifying and helping youth who need chemical dependency services is one of the main successes of ZAP.

Judge Donna Dixon of Roseau County is known for insisting that youth appearing in her courtroom divulge the source of their alcohol. If they refuse, she will hold them in contempt of court. Word spread like wildfire and now youth more frequently and easily provide information on their source. Experience has shown that when judges take underage drinking and provision of alcohol seriously, it changes expectations and behaviors in communities very quickly.

Court Services and probation have also been strong partners in several ZAP communities. In most communities they are responsible for administering the chemical use pre-assessments and supervising community service and other conditions of probation. They also have the best insight about what sanctions are effective with providers and underage drinkers. In some communities courts have worked with youthful clients to give law enforcement information about upcoming parties, which, in turn, counts toward their community service hours.

ZAP in action

In August 2006, law enforcement officers in Freeborn County, MN, responded to a report of a possible burglary. A neighbor had been asked to watch a home while the family was out of town. Late on a Friday night, he saw several men climb a fence and enter the property. Law enforcement approached the home. They saw movement at a window. Officers entered the house with weapons drawn prepared for a burglary in progress. What they found instead were four 20-year-olds having an underage drinking party.

“Those kids had no idea how serious the situation was. Anytime we approach a scene with guns drawn, the stakes are pretty high,” said the late Lt. Phil Bartusek of the Albert Lea Police Department. “Not to mention the inherent danger of the party itself, the risks to themselves and the property were significant.”

The youth were cited for underage drinking. Because of ZAP, the story didn’t end there. Law enforcement was prepared to investigate the source of alcohol. Prosecutors and judges had also made illegal provider cases a priority for the court system. In the first year of their project, Freeborn County achieved a 500 percent increase in charges against the illegal providers of alcohol.

When Albert Lea officers found those three underage youth drinking, they began an investigation into the source of the alcohol. At first, the youth wouldn’t provide any information. Freeborn County officers kept at it. They questioned the youth individually. They reminded the men of the seriousness of a fourth-degree burglary charge. One by one they each provided detailed information about the 22-year old that purchased the alcohol for them.

The next day, the alleged provider was interviewed at the police station. He gave a full confession and was charged with a gross misdemeanor for providing alcohol to a minor.

Because of the partnership with prosecutors, officers know what is needed to form a solid case. They also know that judges will take this provider case seriously. If found guilty, the provider

will likely serve 30 days in jail with an additional 180 to 360 day suspended sentence. He will pay a fine close to \$1000 and will be on probation for one to two years.

ZAP projects participate in evaluation to provide useful information that will likely lead to future project improvements. Evaluation findings may be viewed in the ZAP Project Highlights document that may be found on the Minnesota Institute of Public Health website.

For more information

More information on ZAP, including downloadable materials, is available on the Minnesota Institute of Public Health website at <http://www.miph.org/projects/eudl/zap> or contact Sheila Nesbitt at snesebitt@miph.org or 800-782-1878 x128.

The Judicial Probation Outreach Project is a program of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation and is supported by Grant No. 2007-AH-FX-K003 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). OJJDP is a component of the Office of Justice Programs. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.