



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program
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NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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The OJJDP Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative supports cooperation between community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.

Alabama Youth P.A.S.S. on Drinking

In Autauga County, Alabama, Peers Are Staying Straight (P.A.S.S.) has grown from a school organization to a communitywide coalition of youth, parents, merchants, and officials. In the past several years, the coalition has achieved remarkable success in transforming their alcohol environment.

P.A.S.S. began in 1988 as a response to the tragic death of a local student at the hands of a drunk driver. His classmates decided that an organization dedicated to reducing drunk driving would be a fitting memorial to the student, so they established P.A.S.S. It continued as a school organization—similar to S.A.D.D.—until being “adopted” by the local Chamber of Commerce. With the Chamber’s backing, the organization hit stride in 1996 and began expanding its scope and membership. Although still primarily a youth organization, P.A.S.S. became the center of a community coalition of students, parents, business leaders, and elected officials.

One of the program’s most significant activities has been the “Don’t Let Your Business Go Up in Smoke” seminars offered quarterly or semiannually to local merchants of alcohol, tobacco, and other restricted products. The seminars cover youth-access laws, fake ID detection, and other issues relating to sales to minors. Youth lead the seminars, assisted by representatives from the local police and sheriff’s departments, the State Alcoholic Beverage Control office, and the mayor.

The seminars are not the only effort to reduce underage drinking. P.A.S.S. also works with local law enforcement, conducting and tracking compliance checks to ensure that merchants are obeying the laws. This two-pronged approach—education with strict enforcement—has seen dramatic results. Since the program began, compliance checks failure rates have dropped from 33% in 1997 to less than 13% in 2000. Martha Ellis, executive director of P.A.S.S., calls the reductions “tremendous.” She estimates that only 10% of local establishments are currently failing compliance checks.

Their success in drunk-driving and underage-drinking issues has led P.A.S.S. members to pursue other forms of involvement in the community. For example, they have up to 100 volunteers working on a teen and truancy court. The organization also has been working with a local supermarket to implement a “Designated Lanes” program, which would allow alcohol purchases only at certain “designated” checkout stations. As P.A.S.S. continues its work, finding new ways of encouraging youth in Autauga County to stay straight, the group serves as an example of the effectiveness of youth organizations in reducing underage drinking.

➤Our Point:
Communities, states, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.

For more information, contact Martha Ellis, Executive Director of PASS, at 334-358-4900.