



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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Persistence Supports the Passage of a Social Host Law in Connecticut

On June 2, 2006, Governor Jodi Rell signed an act that makes underage drinking on private property illegal. The state law will go into effect on October 1, 2006. This law prohibits any

person from knowingly allowing anyone younger than age 21, to possess or drink alcohol on private property, unless accompanied by his or her own parent, guardian or spouse over the age of 21. Passage of the bill resulted from 5 years of sustained support and education by members of the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking (CCSUD), a statewide coalition of volunteers dedicated to reducing underage drinking and the often fatal consequences.

To change public perceptions and accepted practices regarding underage drinking, the CCSUD initiated its work at the municipal level. Since its inception in 1997 the CCSUD has provided training and technical assistance to community coalitions working to reduce underage drinking across the state of Connecticut. Over the past seven years, partnerships have developed resulting in 50 communities passing local ordinances prohibiting possession of alcohol by minors on both public and private property, while also holding the "social host" responsible if underage drinking occurs, even if that person did not actually purchase or directly provide the alcohol. To date, there has been little resistance to these ordinances. With such widespread public support for making house parties illegal and the need to create a unified approach to the problem, the CCSUD turned its attention to advocating for a state law that would apply to all 169 towns in Connecticut.

In 2001, the CCSUD brought together representatives from community coalitions, state agencies, law enforcement, and the State Legislature to advocate for a law that would make "house parties" illegal. In recent years, the incidence of alcohol related deaths, sexual assaults, violence and drunk driving, associated with underage drinking has dramatically increased. With support from the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection (responsible for

liquor control), the Chief State's Attorney, the State's Attorney General, and The Connecticut's Police Chiefs Association, youth and adult members of the CCSUD began meeting with legislative leaders from both parties, to educate them about these alarming statistics and the many other negative consequences due to alcohol consumption. Over 5 years, adult and youth leaders of the CCSUD continued to educate policymakers of the Judiciary Committee to draft a bill that would close the existing loophole in Connecticut's law, thus reducing youth access to alcohol.

During this time, multiple strategies were used; subsequently, no single strategy is directly linked to the success of this campaign. As the news media focused on the issue, following the occurrence of several underage drinking house parties, the added publicity resulted in a stronger push for action. Linda Degutis, Co-Chair of the CCSUD, notes that creating partnerships with State officials, parents, and youth leaders were the keys to success. "A joint effort with a clear focus and purpose along with strong support from many segments of the community helped policymakers understand the importance of this issue to their constituents. Youth involvement was one of the most important parts of this – we were working with them, and they participated in all aspects of the effort." Craig Turner, Vice Chair of the CCSUD, emphasizes the personal side of the partnerships. "In many cases, community members, both youth and adults, who joined us in our efforts, told stories that personally connected them to the issue of underage drinking. These folks were passionate about reducing the harms associated with underage drinking. The Youth in the coalition played an important leadership role in the passage of the bill."

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The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the Office of Juvenile Justice for Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) or the Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center (UDETC) and are solely of the author/source.



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