



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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With support from the OJJD Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative, community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens are working collaboratively to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.

Massachusetts Youth In Action

The Greater Boston Area Youth In Action team saw their alcohol purchase surveys make a positive difference in two communities in Massachusetts.

Under the guidance of Amy Fradette of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the team conducted alcohol purchase surveys in the town of Marlborough in March of 2000, using adult decoys to attempt purchases without identification. Marlborough is a town of approximately 35,000 people located west of Boston.

Of the seven outlets initially surveyed, five did not ask for age identification. Publicizing these results through a media event the following May, the YIA team drew the attention of local law enforcement personnel, who then conducted compliance checks using minors. Of twenty-one outlets checked in Marlborough, nine were subsequently cited for selling alcohol to a minor.

Following these checks, the Youth in Action team conducted follow-up surveys to assess any change in selling patterns. In December 2000, the team surveyed outlets and found only two that failed to ask for age identification. "Our team's efforts made the difference," says Amy Fradette. "Now the local police department is coming to us when it needs information about underage sales."

A similar pattern emerged when the Youth in Action team conducted alcohol purchase surveys in the

city of Cambridge during the same year. Cambridge, home to Harvard and MIT, sits just across the Charles River from Boston. In April 2000, the team surveyed twelve alcohol outlets in Cambridge and discovered that half of them failed to ask for age identification.

The local Cambridge License Commission was initially skeptical when informed of these results. "They just didn't believe us at first," says Amy Fradette, who encouraged the Commission to conduct independent compliance checks in the city. Again, the result was 50% noncompliance. The Commission was no longer skeptical.

Following these compliance checks, the Youth in Action team and the Cambridge License Commission held a well-attended news conference to draw public support for enforcing underage drinking laws in Cambridge. Youth activists from the team addressed city commissioners, and several owners of alcohol outlets that were present to offer their support.

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

To determine if the compliance checks and the public awareness event had changed selling patterns, the Youth In Action team conducted follow-up alcohol purchase surveys in February 2001. This time, only one in ten failed to ask for identification. Says Fradette, "Our opinion is that these surveys helped begin a strong relationship, increase enforcement, and create an environment with better compliance."

For more information, contact Amy Fradette, Executive Director of MADD Greater Boston, at 508-875-3736 or fradette@mail2.gis.net



11710 Beltsville Drive, Suite 300, Calverton, MD 20705
Phone: 877-335-1287 Fax: 301-755-2799