



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.

Massachusetts Youth In Action Track Three Years of Purchase Surveys

For 3 years, Massachusetts Youth In Action members have been conducting alcohol purchase surveys and tracking the results. Since the first surveys, the youth have seen a 17 percent drop in failure rates.

The Massachusetts Youth presented their findings in a press conference last summer. Taylor McGuinness, age 15, welcomed the journalists and told them, "Preventing underage drinking is everyone's responsibility." She explained that underage drinking is a costly problem and that changes in behavior will come only from youth and adults working together. Alcohol purchase surveys are a way for youth and adults to monitor ID checking for sales of alcohol. Nicole Damstetter, age 16, emphasized the importance of checking IDs. "How hard is it to check an ID and potentially turn someone away?" she asked. Nicole described the importance of the minimum-drinking-age law and the tens of thousands of lives saved since its inception.

Purchase surveys are not stings or compliance checks. Krystal Sales, age 15, described the alcohol purchase survey process: "An alcohol purchase survey uses a legal age buyer that looks young . . . we want to know if the young-looking legal-aged buyer will be carded at the time of purchase." Alcohol purchase surveys thus serve as a way to monitor and assess compliance in support of law enforcement. Krystal also presented the results of the YIA surveys during the past

3 years. With the first surveys, only 64 percent of retailers asked for ID. That rate has climbed to 81 percent today. This substantial increase demonstrates the importance of monitoring of sales and enforcement of minimum-purchase-age laws.

Samantha Finnegan, age 17, stressed the main idea: "These surveys show that education and enforcement work." But, she said, "They also show that not all stores are complying with the law." Indeed, the surveys have shown a significant increase in compliance—which is cause for celebration—but nearly a fifth of stores still failed to check for ID.

The press conference closed with Caitlyn Monat, age 16, who offered suggestions for reducing underage drinking. Among other things, she asked that liquor license holders make a commitment to ask for IDs, that adults never provide alcohol to minors, and that schools implement and support science-based prevention programs.

**>Our Point:
Communities, Law Enforcement, and States are changing regulations, laws, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.**

Reporters from the two major Boston papers and a spate of local weeklies and dailies attended the YIA conference. According to Amy Fradette, Youth Coordinator for MADD Massachusetts, it was "absolutely effective in getting the attention of the people doing the enforcement." The purchase surveys and press conference are a prime example of community activism coupled with media advocacy; with this combination, YIA is leading the way in Massachusetts.

For more information, contact Amy Fradette, Youth Coordinator of MADD Massachusetts, at 508-836-9923.



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