



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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July 2007

Successful Collaboration Among Enforcement, Community, and Media Results in a Sustainable Program

Rutland County, Vermont, a rural community in Southwest Vermont, historically has had a significant problem with underage drinking, especially during prom season. In the past, some communities have been rather accepting of underage drinking around proms as part of a "rite of passage." Law enforcement, through aggressive enforcement, has made significant progress in changing the norms around drinking.

About 3 years ago, at a meeting of law enforcement officials, SADD members, and members of the Rutland Area Prevention Coalition, a student stated that there was a need to reinforce the message that underage drinking is not acceptable at prom time. In that meeting, it was decided that an easy way to reach prom goers was to place a flyer with a hole in it over the hanger of every tuxedo rented for proms. In green, the flyer listed the costs of a prom: the tickets, the tux, the gown, etc. and the total cost; in red, the flyer showed the "real" cost of adding alcohol to the equation: the loss of scholarship, attorney's fees, and court costs. This idea motivated more conversation resulting in discussions with a printer and the region's premier men's clothier, McNeil & Reedy. The community collaborators then scrapped the hanger idea, replacing it with an insert for the front pocket of the tuxedo. This strategy grew quickly, and other tuxedo rental outlets in the county signed on. Community members decided to extend the outreach to female students, so they placed an insert into the boxes of each prom corsage bought at floral shops.

The local media was the program's primary media source. Photo shoots at a tuxedo rental outlet were arranged, which not coincidentally was an advertiser

in that newspaper. The photos included enforcement officers representing their agencies, the Vermont Department of Health, the Rutland Area Prevention Coalition, and SADD chapter advisors. The newspaper's reporter also included an article covering the tuxedo inserts, and the newspaper's editors placed both the article and the photo on the front page at no cost. Another weekly paper did a similar photo shoot and article at one of the floral shops, this time with female students in prom gowns. This coverage was repeated every year using these two newspapers at no cost. The program was developed by Ashleigh Mahoney, Judi Tompkins, and John D'Esposito (who acts as the program's administrator).

The program has continued to grow since its inception about 3 years ago, and now, other Vermont communities have begun to use this model. Additionally, other communities in other States, after being exposed to this outreach program at various conferences, have also undertaken this project. The Vermont example is an impetus to others to prevent underage drinking through similar programs, such as substituting prom gown sellers for the floral shops. Rutland County's innovative underage drinking prevention strategy is an example of good collaboration between enforcement, community, and media that can lead to a successful and significant community outreach towards positive change.

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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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