



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

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Consistent Enforcement Produces Positive Results for La Crosse, Wisconsin

In 2005, the La Crosse Police Department in Wisconsin began conducting compliance checks aimed at reducing the availability of alcohol to underage youth. During the checks, if the minor successfully purchased alcohol, the officers immediately issued citations to both the seller and the establishment's owner (i.e., the alcohol license holder). If the minor was denied the sale, the officers informed the seller and the owner that they successfully passed the compliance check. To show its appreciation, a follow-up letter was also mailed to the business owner from the Chief of Police praising the sales clerk and the business for not selling alcohol to an underage person.

Wanting to improve compliance rates and understanding the need for regular enforcement, the department continued performing compliance checks in 2006. During the first round of checks, officers visited 56 establishments and issued 36 citations, yielding a 64 percent compliance rate. During the second round of compliance checks, officers completed 139 compliance checks, and the compliance rate increased to 72 percent.

Although there was some initial resistance from The Tavern League (an association of bar and restaurant owners), much of the community supported the compliance checks. In fact, the Mayor's Alcohol Task Force recommended that the police department conduct the checks as part of a broader enforcement approach.

Another strategy they employed was developing and implementing a hands-on training program for servers and sellers of alcohol. This training helps

servers identify fake, altered, or borrowed identification. The training also provides tips on how to prevent underage people from entering taverns. Within four months, the department provided this new training free of charge to more than 200 servers and retail employees.

The implementation of complementary strategies and regular compliance checks has been effective for La Crosse. The most recent round of compliance checks in 2007 produced a 79 percent compliance rate.

Conducting retail compliance checks on a regular basis when they have not previously been conducted often will meet resistance, and initial findings may not be good. Fortunately, when the La Crosse Police Department encountered these realities, it did not retreat. Rather, it enhanced its work and persevered. This perseverance is now beginning to pay off, and with a similar attitude in the future, things will only continue to improve.

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

