



# Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

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.**

## Minnesota Youth Press for Penalties

Brainerd, Minnesota's Youth In Action and MADD chapters persuaded their city council to enact stiff penalties for outlets that sell alcohol to minors. The ordinance was passed over the vocal opposition of local merchants.

In spring of 2000, the Brainerd City Council decided to revisit their ordinances concerning sales of alcohol to minors, with the aim of making the penalties for such sales more effective. However, the Council's proposed revision was actually weaker than state guidelines for such penalties. Under the proposed ordinance, the first offense would be met by nothing more severe than a warning letter from the chief of police. The second offense would warrant a three-day license suspension, and the third would warrant only a 30-day suspension.

Upon learning of the Council's plans, the Crow Wing County Chapter of MADD leapt into action. Coordinator Pat Bluth began attending subsequent Council meetings, and she was joined by the Brainerd Youth in Action team. According to Bluth, 10 to 12 members attended each of several meetings, with some of the members speaking in favor of the tougher ordinance. Says Bluth of their presence, "just being there really affected the council."

Megan Kohls, now a student at Hamline University, spoke at two of the meetings. Megan joined YIA as a sophomore in high school, having lost her best friend

to a drunk driver some years prior. According to Kohls, approaching City Council about the ordinance was the first big thing their chapter did, and they faced "a lot of barriers" from bar and liquor store owners. But, says Kohls, "most of the city council took me seriously. [Having youth speak] actually worked better, and the whole group was there to support me." The rest of the group attended the meetings in their "Brainerd-Crow Wing County Youth In Action" t-shirts, sending a clear message to the Council about their support for the tougher ordinance.

MADD and Youth In Action were joined in their efforts by local law enforcement, dozens of whom signed a letter to the Mayor and City Council. The letter read in part, "Common sense dictates that serious sanctions are needed to anyone that gains a profit from the sale of liquor to underage persons," and affirmed the officers' support for their local MADD chapter.

**>Our Point:  
Communities, states, and law enforcement are successfully changing laws, regulations, and enforcement practices to reduce underage drinking.**

Under the new ordinance, the first offense nets a \$500 fine. The second offense in a three-year period earns the retailer a \$1000 fine, and the third offense costs \$2000. After the fourth offense, the City can revoke the retailer's license altogether.

By pushing for stricter laws concerning sales to minors, the MADD and Youth in Action chapters in Crow Wing County have demonstrated the effectiveness of youth advocacy in reducing underage drinking.

**For more information, contact Pat Bluth of the Crow Wing County Chapter of MADD at 218-828-5055.**



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