



# Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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**With support from the OJDP 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.**

## In Wake of Incident Town and Gown Tackle Underage Drinking

Last spring, an underage drinking party on the campus of Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, got more than just a little out of control. When local police were called by campus security to control a group of approximately 300 people, some partygoers reacted aggressively and attacked three police officers. Eventually, it took 15 officers from three agencies to settle the disturbance. The brawl garnered media coverage state wide, and the local newspaper, *The News Register*, named the incident one of the top ten news stories of the year. Fortunately, the story does not end there.

In the aftermath of the skirmish, some local prevention advocates acted to ensure that misperceptions about the college and its students would not take root. They knew that most Linfield students did not engage in high-risk drinking; indeed, many students had contributed positively to the broader community. So they pulled together a coalition of community and college representatives to make sure that alcohol-related problems like the spring incident would not reoccur. The community was represented by members from two local prevention groups (McMinnville Together and the Yamhill County Prevention Council), the police department, and local high schools. College-affiliated coalition members came from the housing department, campus security, the faculty and the administration,

fraternities and sororities, and the general student population. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission also participated.

With support from the Governor’s Task Force to Reduce Underage and High-Risk Drinking, the coalition implemented a multipronged approach for addressing alcohol use by Linfield students. Their plan seeks to (1) increase communication between the college and the community; (2) implement a social norms-based media campaign at Linfield; and (3) provide students with alcohol-free alternatives. The McMinnville Police Department also received separate funding to increase enforcement around the college.

Since the fall of 2000, communication among all interested parties has improved tremendously, resulting in several meetings focused on laws, community behavior, and safety issues. Because Linfield College had been collecting data on student drinking behavior for at least two years before the spring of 2000, it was possible to develop the media campaign relatively quickly. The campaign notes, among other statistics, that 80 percent of Linfield students drink alcohol once a week or less. Alcohol-free alternatives have included dances, midnight basketball, “mocktail” parties, and late-night movies, all designed to cover the 11:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. stretch of time when underage drinking is more likely to occur. Finally, the prevention grant has focused attention on college alcohol policies, specifically on instituting parental notification of student alcohol violations.

With the second grant dedicated to enforcement, the McMinnville Police Department has increased enforcement activity significantly. Before last May’s incident enforcement of underage drinking laws was

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virtually unknown. Now, police officers conduct on-campus enforcement regularly through pedestrian and party patrols. Officers cite youth who possess alcohol and stop for questioning any youth who appears intoxicated or even just smells of alcohol.

Students reacted with outrage last fall when 34 students were cited during homecoming weekend (the department's first on-campus enforcement patrol). When college administrators and police departments continued enforcement efforts, student criticism abated and now enforcement of alcohol laws are accepted as a fact of life.

Members of the coalition understand that change will not occur overnight nonetheless, but they believe their multi-pronged approach will eventually yield desired results: reductions in underage and high-risk drinking behavior. Increased communication has resulted in greater support for enforcement and greater awareness among college administrators of the behavior of Linfield students off-

campus. Greater enforcement has resulted in increased citations issued to youths who possess and adults who provide alcohol. The social norms/media campaign is generating a great deal of discussion about the acceptability of drinking behavior on campus, and creatively conceived and well-implemented alcohol-free activities are proving increasingly popular with students.

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

An annually conducted CORE survey is expected to capture changes in Linfield students' alcohol-related behavior, perceptions, and attitudes over time. Stay tuned...

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