



Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition

2006 REPORT TO THE RENSSELAER COUNTY COMMUNITY

**“UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE
WHAT ARE THE YOUTH SAYING ABOUT IT?
WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP THEM?”**



Kathleen M. Jimino
County Executive



Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition

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“UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE WHAT ARE THE YOUTH SAYING ABOUT IT? WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP THEM”

This spring the Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition sponsored two “Town Hall” meetings. The first was held at Holy Spirit Church in East Greenbush on March 28, 2006 and the second at St. Jude the Apostle in Wynantskill on May 9, 2006. The purpose of these meetings was to gather information from youth and the community at large about the reality vs. the perception of underage alcohol use. In addition, recommendations were requested from the attendees to assist in the development of a more comprehensive countywide plan to address the issue of underage alcohol use.

Speakers included local law enforcement and county officials, including the county executive, Kathleen M. Jimino, who has made decreasing underage alcohol use a priority for her office. The highlight of the evening was comments by youth panels made up of various local high school students who answered questions from organizers of the events as well as from adult attendees.

At the ‘town hall’ meeting on March 28th there were approximately 80 people in attendance. After the presentation by our youth the attendees broke into groups for discussion and were asked to return with barriers and recommendations for change. On May 9th there was a smaller group of about 30 participants. Rather than break into groups a large group discussion took place with the youth panel responding to questions and spurring conversation.

On the following pages you will find the input we received at the ‘town hall’ meetings. Our hope is that you will read them and make a decision to help us to make change in Rensselaer County around the issue of underage alcohol use.

At the end of this report you will find contact information and a highlight report on some of our current strategies to reduce underage alcohol and other drug use in Rensselaer County. You can get involved in a variety of ways in your own local community, in your place of worship, or in organizations you belong to.

What did we find out from our teen panels?

- The youth say that most if not all of the youth in their schools are using alcohol
- Most report between 50% and 95 % of the youth in their school use alcohol and between 75% to 90 % of the youth in their schools smoke marijuana
- The youth also tell us that adults look the other way when alcohol is believed to be the issue
- The youth also tell us that parents often are the ones who supply alcohol to teens
- All youth on the panels acknowledged knowing other students who have alcohol or drug problems
- The youth tell us that there is peer pressure to use but also respect from their friends if they choose not to use
- The youth tell us alcohol is readily available in homes in Rensselaer County
- The youth tell us that older siblings often purchase alcohol for younger teens
- The youth tell us even when other activities are offered the party with alcohol is often the activity of choice
- There is a great deal of pressure for some students to use
- Some students are respected for who they are and their friends do not pressure them but the non-using students do attend parties where alcohol is served either with parents present or not
- Youth tell us that they were between 12 and 14 years of age when they first attended parties where alcohol was available
- Either before proms, during or at after prom parties there are youth using alcohol and other substances at a rate of about 75% – 90%
- The youth tell us that they believe that using youth will not attend sober parties sponsored by communities, parents or schools
- Youth believe that parents should start talking about substance use by age 8 and the younger the better

- Youth state that parents need to let youth know the consequences and what is expected of them in regard to risky behaviors
- Some youth stated that schools and especially teachers turn a blind eye to students who are using in school
- The youth tell us that they all know of students who are using alcohol and other substances during school
- Some students are supported by friends in their decision not to use alcohol or other drugs
- The non-using student has trouble finding other non-using students to hang out with but when they do they become their own small group

What are some of the barriers to reducing alcohol use by teens?

- It is too easy for youth to get alcohol
- Parent denial that their child is drinking
- Parental denial that youth's primary access to alcohol is in their own homes
- Glorified use of Alcohol-Tobacco and Other Drugs in the media, particularly the internet
- Kids have more money available to use for illegal substances
- Internet access to purchase alcohol
- Most schools can not require substance abuse treatment for student infractions
- Parents lack of information about the consequences of providing alcohol to youth
- Glorification of alcohol in advertisements
- Parents afraid to ask other parents to enforce a no drinking stance at parties
- Parents are afraid to ask other parents if parties will have adult supervision
- Parents relieved that youth are 'only drinking' compared to 'doing drugs'
- Parents seeing alcohol use as a 'Rite of passage' – I drank and I survived
- SAFE HOMES parents are afraid of their child being shunned by their peers for having alcohol free, supervised parties
- America accepts widespread teen alcohol use

What can you or I do about this as a community?

- 1-866-UNDER21 PR campaign – TV, radio and newspaper
- Hold Community Town Hall meetings in every school – Kids talking to Parents
- Hold a mandatory kid town meeting – kids talking to kids
- Make public the CTC Youth Survey results of each school (alcohol & drug use)
- Engage local businesses that support the anti-under age drinking message
- “Shame campaign” to inform the community about businesses that sell to minors
- Get parents buy-in
- Parents need to recognize students drinking
- Decrease availability in home
- Work to change community culture
- Support our teachers and schools when they take a stand, enforce a code of conduct or discipline users
- Persistence and commitment to this issue
- Provide consistent programming beginning in early elementary school
- Support parents, educate parents
- Seek increased funding for initiatives
- Create safe spaces for youth and teens
- Involve students in all aspect of prevention – empower them
- Students are powerful, use them in prevention efforts to spread the message
- Develop video, theater, commercials
- Use consistent repetitive messages against underage use
- Increase ways to have fun without alcohol

- Create caring community
- Engage those that don't traditionally come and participate
- Create and support role models
- Work for less public advertising of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Stop the mixed messages sent to teens for example the "wineglass" as giveaway for prom – (subliminal message)
- Alcohol ads like anti-smoking ads made by students...
- Include alcohol education as part of comprehensive character education program
- Monitor enforcement, consequences, consistency by all involved (**schools, families, and law enforcement**)
- Provide parenting classes on a regular basis supported by the community
- Youth speaking to youth about why not to use
- Consistent responses to youth who are found using
- Sports contracts that are followed
- Encourage parents to take responsibility for keeping their youth safe
- Educate parents of the need to lead by example
- Increase the response from law enforcement

Everyone needs to take a stand

What have we been doing here in Rensselaer County to bring about change in attitudes about underage alcohol use?

2001 formed the Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition

Activities and partnerships of the Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition:

Surveying of grades 6,8,10 and 12 in all public schools in 2004 and 2006 to gather data on usage rates and risk and protective factors

Merchant training to educate alcohol licensees about the risks of sale to minors and how to protect themselves from minors attempting to purchase alcohol

Compliance checks done by the NY State Police, NY State Liquor Authority, Rensselaer County Sheriffs Department and other local law enforcement

Educate Youth is a program developed by Hudson Mohawk Recovery Center in partnership with the Coalition to offer education to youth who get into trouble while using alcohol or other substances

Parents Who Host Lose the Most is a 12 county effort using a strategy developed in Ohio to educate parents that it is against the law for them to serve alcohol to minors. With law enforcement as partners it puts strength into the enforcement side of the campaign

Strengthening Families is a prevention program for parents and their youth ages 9-14. Training was given to 30 individuals from schools and agencies in the county to become facilitators of this program

Guiding Good Choices is a parenting program for parents of 9-14 year olds. It focuses on helping parents prepare for the drug using years to keep their youth safe

Project Alert in the schools where there is prevention staff has been offered starting in 2005

Youth Summit is held twice per year to train youth in prevention, sending them back to their schools to do projects and then to let them show off their projects in the spring

A newsletter has been sent out twice per year to alert the community of prevention activities

We have successfully assisted two communities to develop youth focused coalitions. The Hoosick Area Partnership for Parents and Youth and the Castleton Schodack Community Partnership are now financially independent. Other communities have expressed an interest in forming grassroots coalitions to work on these problems

What can you do?

Join or start a local community coalition in your town or school district

Tell others about what is happening in prevention in Rensselaer County

Invite a member of the Coalition to come and speak to your local organizations – Rotary, Elks, Kiwanis, town board, school board etc

If you hear about a party where alcohol will be served to youth call 1-866-UNDER21

Help us find funding to support prevention efforts, send a tax deductible donation to Parents Who Host Lose the Most

Talk with your child, or grandchild and let them know your expectations in regards to alcohol use. It is not acceptable for them to use, it is illegal and puts them at risk

If you belong to a faith community ask them to host a parenting program for your members

Offer to organize a teen speak out in your community

Speak to your legislators about increasing funding for substance abuse prevention

Join our the Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition and represent your community

For more information please call 270-2821 or 270-2905