



“STAND TALL AGAINST ALCOHOL”

In May, the Concerned Citizens Coalition received grant monies from the State of Wisconsin’s Department of Health Services to assemble a strategic plan that would address the problem of underage drinking in Kenosha County. Kenosha was one of 20 grantees throughout the state to have received these Strategic Prevention Framework/State Incentive Grant (SPF/SIG) funds.

From May through August, 2009, four committees were formed and charged with assembling this plan. A total of 43 committee spots were filled, and 11 separate advisory meetings were held. Eighteen community readiness interviews and 10 environmental scans were completed. Four focus groups met, and a community forum was held. From these various meetings, the Coalition secured 14 Memoranda of Understanding from various key community stakeholders. This was an enormous undertaking that had to take place in a short period of time. Thanks to all who have helped with this process and to those who have committed to implementing this strategic plan for our community.

A Different Answer to the Same Problem

For decades, society’s response to the problem of alcohol abuse among our youth has been educational and programmatic in nature. Efforts within our schools continue to raise awareness of the problems associated with alcohol and other drugs. Several years ago, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) determined to tackle the problem of underage drinking with a distinctly different approach: employing environmental strategies to limit access and acquisition of alcohol by our community’s youth...*by applying a figurative tourniquet.*

This outcome-based, data-driven initiative seeks to change the *culture* of drinking within our community by leveraging Coalition commitment with those most able to effect positive change.

Implementation Phase

During the various community readiness interviews, it became clear that, in spite of all of the data showing significant negative consequences, Kenosha was largely ambivalent to the problem---that is, unless one of those consequences had affected someone personally. Injuries, property damage, violent behavior, deficiencies in school and work performance, unwanted/unsafe sexual practices, and suicides were read about in the Kenosha News every day. In keeping with the Concerned Citizens Coalition’s mission, something had to be done.

The Coalition's Epidemiological Committee gave its determinations to the Policy Committee for selecting one (or several) state-approved strategies. The Policy Committee provided a short list to the Coalition's Steering Committee, and the following strategies have been determined to be of the highest likelihood for success:

- Enhance law enforcement capacity and commitment to address alcohol laws;
- Establish a procedure for "party patrols" targeting open parties in residential settings that are unlicensed taverns and outdoor areas with a history of attracting underage drinkers;
- Create a program and protocol for entering private homes by law enforcement to check for underage drinking *with the prior consent of the homeowner*; and
- Implement a "Parents Who Host, Lose the Most---Don't Be a Party to Teenage Drinking" campaign. (For the State of Wisconsin to approve this strategy, it had to be used in conjunction with other strategies.)

Over the coming year, it is our plan to triple Coalition membership. It is the Coalition members, after all, who will be putting in the "sweat equity" it will take to interface with law enforcement, prosecution, judges, parents, schools, and youths so that there is an increased awareness of the problem of underage drinking. More importantly, it is the Coalition that will be advocating for ordinance change at the local level---and statutory change at the State level---that will result in a measurable reduction of negative consequences.

"The longest journey begins with a single step"- Lao-Tzu

- Wisconsin leads the nation in risky/binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one occasion).
- Wisconsin leads the nation in heavy drinking (60 or more drinks per month).
- Wisconsin leads the nation in risky drinking among women of reproductive age.
- Wisconsin leads the nation in drinking among high school students.
- Wisconsin leads the nation in underage (12-20) drinking.
- Wisconsin leads the nation in admitted drinking and driving.

CDC, BRFSS, 2007; SAMHSA, Combined 2004-2005 NSDUH Data; Impact of Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use in Wisconsin, UW PHI.

For more information on this project and how you can help effect positive change in the Kenosha community, please contact SPF/SIG Process Director Steve Fredriksson at (262) 652-3358; email: steve@hopecouncil.org.