



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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With support from the OJJD Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative, community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens are working collaboratively to change local ordinances, State laws, and enforcement practices.

Jammin' without the Booze

County Jam USA is an annual summer outdoor 4-day music event that draws more than 30,000 spectators each day to the venue located 20 miles outside of Grand Junction, Colorado. According to local community coalition members, the festival fostered an environment that encouraged excessive drinking by all participants, especially among those concerts goes younger than age 21. Determined to reduce youth access, prevention groups and law enforcement officials decided to proactively address their concerns and bring about positive change.

In March 2002, members of the Mesa County Sheriff's Office and the Fruita Police Department came together with members of Mesa County Build A Generation, the Mesa County Health Department, and Drug-Free Mesa County in an effort to begin seriously addressing underage drinking in the community and create a task force. Other members of the task force included emergency room doctors, State liquor inspectors, health organizations, educators, event planners, and vendors.

Based on problems identified in previous years, the following changes to the festival's social environment were implemented: specially marked arm bands to indicate underage attendees at the festival; no keg beer was allowed in the campground; serving of only one drink per customer at the bars; posting an anti-underage drinking banner at the entrance/exit to the festival's

campground, physically separating the "partying" from the family campground, and broadcasting an anti-underage drinking television message on the festival's "Jumbotron."

The Sheriff's Office, in consultation with the 21st Judicial District Attorney's Office and the Chief District Attorney, organized a multi-agency law enforcement team specifically to target underage drinking at the festival. The Task Force also began an intense media campaign that warned of the new measures and the increased enforcement.

The results proved the efficacy of the implemented strategies. In 2002, only one juvenile was transported to area hospitals for overconsumption of alcohol, compared to 2001 when 60 juvenile transports were reported. Underage drinking citations increased from 3 in 2001 to 152 in 2002.

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

"This single endeavor not only brought about substantial savings to the taxpayers of Mesa County for emergency room-related costs (a minimum of \$800 per visit not including those youth that required stomach pumping, IVs, hospital admission, and transport costs), but more importantly, reduced the potential for harm to our youth," stated Drug-Free Mesa County co-chair Ruth Michels. She added, "Clearly, a community that takes a unified, proactive approach can make a difference in its youths' decisions about alcohol use."

For more information, please contact Ruth Michels, Drug-Free Mesa County at rmichels@acsol.net