

## UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

### BACKGROUND

“Talk. They Hear You.” is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention’s (CSAP) Underage Drinking Prevention National Media Campaign. The goal of the Campaign is to reduce underage drinking in youth aged 9 to 15 by providing parents and caregivers with information and resources they need to start addressing the issue of alcohol with their children early. The Campaign focuses on:

- » Increasing parents’ awareness of the prevalence and risk of underage drinking;
- » Equipping parents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to prevent underage drinking; and
- » Increasing actions by parents to prevent underage drinking.

“Talk. They Hear You.” adds to the current knowledge base about underage drinking prevention. The Campaign team held conversations with parents and children through focus groups and interviews, and it has talked with many stakeholders to better understand the needs and attitudes of parents with children aged 9 to 15. This information has formed the foundation of the Campaign and provided a road map for its strategic direction.

### Implications of Underage Drinking

Underage drinking is a national public health issue with serious implications. According to a study by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health,<sup>1</sup> an estimated 10 million people under the age of 21 drank alcohol in the past month in the United States. However, many young people start drinking before the age of 15.<sup>2</sup> The age range between 11 and 18 is an impressionable period when youth are especially susceptible to outside influences such as peers, family members, and the media.<sup>3</sup>

The Monitoring the Future Survey found that 33 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 70 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States had tried alcohol at some time in their lives. The survey also found that 13 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 27 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders said that they had consumed alcohol in the 30-day period before the survey.<sup>4</sup>

Underage drinking has severe consequences, many of which parents may not be fully aware. Consequences may include: injury or death from accidents;<sup>5</sup> unintended, unwanted, and unprotected sexual activity;<sup>6,7</sup> academic problems;<sup>8</sup> and drug use.<sup>9</sup>

## **Why Is This Campaign for Parents and Caregivers?**

Studies have shown that parents have a significant influence on young people's decisions about alcohol consumption,<sup>10</sup> especially when parents create supportive and nurturing environments in which their children can make their own decisions.<sup>11</sup> When parents know about underage alcohol use, they can protect their children from many of the high-risk behaviors associated with it. Furthermore, parents who do not discourage underage drinking may have an indirect influence on young people's alcohol use.<sup>12</sup>

Many parents with children between the ages of 9 to 15 acknowledge that peer pressure and media influences can often lead to alcohol use.<sup>13</sup> To reduce the prevalence of this dangerous behavior in youth, parents must understand the seriousness of the problem and overcome the perceived barriers they face when talking to their children about underage drinking. Providing parents with knowledge, tools, and confidence is necessary to help them start the conversation about alcohol use with their children.

## **Development of Campaign Messages and Materials**

The Campaign provides parents with information and resources to address the underage drinking issue by increasing their level of comfort with the topic and encouraging open communication between them and their children. The Campaign will reach parents and caregivers of children between the ages of 9 to 15 through radio, television, and print ads; online PSAs; social media; partnership networks; and direct outreach. During the development process of these materials, parents of youth in the target age range provided feedback on the PSAs and messages in focus groups.

The Campaign messages will focus on beginning conversations about underage drinking at an early age and easing the feelings of apprehension that many parents experience when talking to their kids about this issue. The messages and materials will:

- » Emphasize the importance of parents talking to their kids about underage drinking before they reach the age when alcohol use typically begins (before the age of 15);
- » Offer advice on preparing children to deal with peer pressure issues that may lead to alcohol abuse;
- » Focus on helping parents to address the issue of underage drinking in a manner that emphasizes their children's ability to make autonomous decisions; and
- » Model behaviors and situations when parents can begin the conversation about the dangers of alcohol with their children.

## Pilot Site Program

An important component of the Campaign is the Pilot Site Program, which will test and refine creative material and achieve the Campaign's national goals at the community level. SAMHSA, through its contract with Gallup, awarded subcontracts to one community-based organization in each of the five National Prevention Network (NPN) regions. Pilot sites are required to refine and incorporate the Campaign messages and materials into their existing underage drinking prevention and education activities and host an awareness event. The pilot sites also plan to incorporate underage drinking research information into their existing programming and educational materials. The results of the Pilot Site Program, which concludes in July 2012, will inform the overall Campaign strategy.

The Campaign pilot sites and their corresponding NPN regions are:

- » Asian Health Coalition, Chicago, Illinois (Central)
- » Erie County Council, Buffalo, New York (Northeast)
- » Metropolitan Drug Commission, Knoxville, Tennessee (Southeast)
- » People Reaching Out, Sacramento, California (Western)
- » Summit Prevention Alliance, Frisco, Colorado (Southwest)

## References

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