



# Reaching Out

## Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Spring 2009



### Spotlight on Teen Drinking

#### Increased Enforcement

As the school year winds down, our teenagers are beginning to anticipate the freedom that summertime brings. While the Norristown Area is buzzing with activity and plans for the months ahead, the Norristown Police Department (NPD) is gearing up for a plan of their own.

Local surveys given to the Greater Norristown Area youth reveal that 73.4 percent of 10th graders have had alcohol at least once in their lifetime. This makes our youth's alcohol usage higher than that of most other Pennsylvania communities.

The NPD is responding to this rising problem by providing officers overtime hours to increase their level of underage drinking laws throughout the summer months in connection with nighttime curfew laws. Serious consequences, such as fines and license suspension, can be imposed if teens are found drinking.

## Summer Risks and Underage Drinking

By Alissa McBride, MSW, Community Prevention Coordinator

Research tells us that many young people experiment with alcohol for the first time during the summer months. They are too old for baby-sitters and too young for long periods of unsupervised time. Because alcohol is legally attainable for adults over the age of 21, the younger set find it fairly easy to get. Local youth surveys reveal that older friends or even strangers going into a store for their own alcohol purchases are willing to supply them for the right price. These surveys also reveal that 53.3 percent of eighth graders and 73.4 percent of tenth graders have used alcohol; 14.3 percent of eighth graders and 31.3 percent of tenth graders have used in the past 30 days.

Some adults view underage drinking as a rite of passage and are grateful that our children are drinking, rather

than using drugs or having sex. They believe that such behavior is relatively harmless and turn a blind eye to the problem.



It is important to remember that underage alcohol use is a serious issue in our country and in our community. Physical growth, brain growth and hormonal changes cause young people to metabolize alcohol far differently than adults. Not only are they prone to developing an addiction to alcohol five times more quickly than someone over the age of 21, but their already compromised

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judgment is effected to the point where they often make life-altering mistakes. Of the 10.7 million underage youth who drink, 7.2 million of them are binge drinkers. Alcohol abuse by teenagers can result in brain damage, possibly permanent, and impairs intellectual development.

It contributes to DUI-related accidents and deaths, interacts with conditions such as depression and stress to increase suicide risks, makes youth more likely to be the perpetrators and victims of sexual assault and to engage in high risk sex.

Parents and youth also need to be aware that the legal consequences of underage drinking are

significant (fines, driver's license suspension) and can impact future work and college opportunities.

What parents can do:

- Talk to your child about underage drinking. Let them know that it is not acceptable in your family. Ex-



plain why you are taking this position. Make them aware of the consequences that they will face if they drink.

- Pay attention to your child's friends. Do they choose to avoid alcohol?
- Encourage your child to join youth groups and participate in supervised activities. Kids aged 12 to 17 who spend time in those activities are less likely to get into trouble.
- Make your child's friends feel welcome in your home. Provide them with a safe and healthy environment in which to interact. Learn the signs of alcohol use so you can spot them in your children or their friends.

## No One Will Know

By Jennifer Yeager, Youth Services Specialist

The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PLCB) wants you to know that preventing underage drinking is only a phone call away. The PLCB hosts a tip line that makes it easy for you to report underage drinking parties (planned or in progress), establishments that serve alcohol to minors and individuals who sell fake identification cards. When you call **1-888-under-21** an operator takes your information and passes it on to the appropriate law enforcement agency, anonymously if you choose.



### Why is alcohol a problem for teens?

Alcohol use is a primary risk factor in the three leading causes of death of teenagers: unintentional injuries, suicides, and homicides.

### Don't the police have more important things to do?

Underage drinking leads to assaults, vandalism, impaired driving and disorderly conduct. Enforcing underage drinking laws protects the community from these behaviors. Individuals who report underage drinking are helping the police do their job.

### Isn't alcohol a college problem?

National statistics reveal that 13 is the average age for youth to experiment with alcohol for the first time.

# Party at Your House?

By Jennifer Yeager, Youth Services Specialist

Parents play a major role in their children's choices about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. A national survey conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University revealed that one third of teenagers have been to parties where they and/or their peers were drinking, smoking or using cocaine, Ecstasy or prescription drugs while a parent was home. By age 17, nearly half (46 percent) of youth have had these experiences.

Norristown Communities That Care for Youth is working with the local police departments, Norristown Area School District, residents, community groups, as well as governmental and social service agencies, to send a unified message that teen alcohol consumption is not acceptable. It is illegal, unsafe, and unhealthy for anyone under age 21 to drink alcohol.

## Keep in mind:

- Parents who give alcohol to their teen's friends under any circumstances, even in their own homes, are breaking the law.
- Parents who knowingly allow a person under 21 to remain in their home or on their property while consuming or possessing alcoholic beverages can be prosecuted and everything



associated with such a violation can be confiscated, including personal property.

- Parents can be sued if they give alcohol to anyone under 21 and they in turn hurt someone, hurt themselves or damage property.

Underage drinking is a serious problem that often leads to harmful consequences for youth and their families. Parents can protect themselves and their teens by following these guidelines when hosting parties for their children:

- Host safe, alcohol-free activities and events for youth during prom and graduation season.
- Put your phone number on the party invitation and welcome calls from parents.

- Call parents of any teen who arrives in possession of alcohol or under the influence. If you can't get in touch with the parents, keep the teen there or call the police if necessary. You can be civilly liable if you know they have been drinking and you let them leave.
- Refuse to supply alcohol to children or allow drinking in your home or on your property.
- Be at home when your teenager has a party.
- Make sure your teenager's friends do not bring alcohol into your home.
- Secure all forms of alcohol and other hazardous items in your home in a safe place.
- Talk to other parents about not providing alcohol at youth events.
- Frequently look in on the party area with sensitivity to teens' needs for privacy and independence.

It is crucial for parents to take a firm stand on the issue of underage drinking. When hosting a party for your teen, be mindful of the safety, legal and financial issues that can arise if you allow illegal activities to take place under your roof. Whether they realize it or not, your teenager needs for you to be their parent, not their friend.

**Who can find the time to keep up with their kids lives?**

**[www.FindYour25thHour.org](http://www.FindYour25thHour.org)**

Norristown Area  
**Communities  
That Care**



**for Youth**

KEEPING YOUTH  
SAFE  
&  
DRUG FREE

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**Communities That Care (CTC)** is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

For more information, visit our website at [www.NorristownCTC.org](http://www.NorristownCTC.org).

## But is it a Fact?

By Jennifer Yeager, Youth Services Specialist

Every day we are bombarded with messages about alcohol from a variety of sources. Whether they come to us through commercials, music, or are the result of conversations with friends, we are impacted more than we know. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate facts from fiction. The following information may be useful in sorting it all out.

**Fiction**—Alcohol can't hurt my teenager.



**Fact**— Approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die each year as a result of underage drinking.

**Fiction**— My teen won't be able to get their hands on any alcohol.

**Fact**— Nearly 90 percent of 10th graders and 75 percent of 8th graders think that alcohol is either "fairly easy" or "very easy" for them to get.

**Fiction**— Drinking as a teen will help my child be able to be more responsible with alcohol during college.

**Fact**— Forty percent of children who start drinking before the age of 15 will become alcoholics at some

point in their lives. If the onset of drinking is delayed by five years, a child's risk of serious alcohol problems is cut in half.

**Fiction**— Tobacco and illicit drugs, like marijuana, are more of a problem than underage drinking.

**Fact**— Young people between the ages of 12 and 20 are more likely to use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs, including marijuana.

**Fiction**— Most teens just drink at parties for fun.

**Fact**— The highest occurrence of alcohol dependence is among 18 to 20 year olds.