



# The Valley Prevention News

Volume 1, Issue 1

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## Lower the Drinking Age—A Bad Idea!

### WHO ARE WE?

Our prevention efforts began in 1988 with the creation by local community members of a Drug Free Schools & Communities Advisory Board. With the receipt of various grant funds starting in 1998, we became a community partnership. DVCP has evolved and grown over the years and now oversees many community programs & activities serving our youth.



#### Vision:

The Deerfield Valley will be a healthy and safe community.

#### Mission:

To reduce drug and alcohol use among our youth.

*The incidence of alcohol dependency and abuse in later life has been shown to be 4-5 times higher in those who begin drinking before the age of 15.*

The Amethyst Initiative has been getting a lot of media coverage over the last couple of months. John McCardell, former President of Middlebury College, and several representatives from other colleges, are advocating for opening discussion on lowering the drinking age to 18. Their rationale is that the high degree of binge drinking among college students is related to the fact that 18-20 year olds can't drink legally.

Binge drinking among young adults is a real problem but the solution isn't lowering the drinking age. Dozens of studies have shown that a higher drinking age is associated with a reduction in alcohol consumption among young adults.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the higher drinking age has prevented over 17,000 alcohol-related fatalities on our roads since 1975. In addition to a 63% decline in alcohol-related crash fatalities among young

drivers since 1982, the NHTSA reports that the number of DWI arrests, youth suicides, marijuana use, crime and alcohol consumption by youth have also declined.

Jim Hall, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board states, "State Age-21 laws are one of the most effective

*The behavior of 18 year-olds is particularly influential on those younger than themselves .....youth 15-17 who imitate the behavior of those slightly older ....*

public policies ever implemented in the nation...I am chagrined to report that some...officials would like to repeal them."

Nationally, high school seniors who could not legally drink until age 21, drank less before age 21 and between the ages of 21-25 than did seniors in states with lower drinking ages. Lowering the legal drinking age will influence youth to drink more and at

a younger age. The behavior of 18 year-olds has been shown to be particularly influential on those younger than themselves—especially youth 15- 17 who typically imitate the behavior of those who are just slightly older as opposed to those who are significantly older.

European countries are often cited as examples of societies that successfully allow drinking at younger ages. In most European countries 16-18 year-olds can purchase alcohol and studies consistently show that teen-agers in Europe drink more often than teens in the United States. In addition, alcohol related diseases are twice as common in Europe as in the rest of the world.

The incidence of alcohol dependency and abuse in later life has been shown to be 4-5 times higher in those who begin drinking before the age of 15.

(Continued on page 2)

*The Deerfield Valley Community Partnership serves the towns of Wilmington, Whitingham, Dover, Halifax, Readsboro and Stamford.*

## DVCP'S 2008-2009 STRATEGIC PLAN APPROVED

### Many New Initiatives Planned for Coming Year

In 2007, DVCP began participation in a five-year grant called the Strategic Prevention Framework-State Incentive Grant or SPF-SIG in acronymland. This federal/state initiative is designed to enhance alcohol and drug prevention efforts at the local level among those under 25 years of age. In January 2008, DVCP hired two new staff members to carry out the grant's mandate. We are pleased to have Andy Hauty of Marlboro as Project Director and Anne O'Sullivan of Wilmington as Grant Evaluator. Most of this year has been spent researching and gathering information on our community, its needs and its readiness with respect to addressing substance use and abuse among our youth.

This grant mandated that we address underage drinking as our first priority.

#### MYTH vs REALITY

##### Lowering the Drinking Age:

**Myth:** Makes alcohol less attractive to minors.

**Reality:** Makes alcohol more available to even younger minors.

**Myth:** Encourages responsible drinking.

**Reality:** Does not change behavior. Countries with lower drinking ages have similar or worse problems than the U.S.

**Myth:** Is more fair. Kids can vote, join the military, etc at 18 so they should be allowed to drink.

**Reality:** Fairness is not the issue. Different issues require different actions based on risks and benefits.

**Myth:** Minors still drink so Age-21 laws don't work.

**Reality:** Age-21 laws do work. They reduce drinking by minors and saved over 17,000 lives.

Staff and coalition members spent many hours on assessment-reviewing data and applying their knowledge of our community's readiness. They decided upon high risk drinking in persons under 25 as the second priority to be addressed.

In November 2008, DVCP's strategic plan was approved and an \$82,500 implementation grant was received. Many other grantees have been designated as Capacity Grantees, but because of its long history of success and its level of organization, DVCP was seen as an organization that was ready for an implementation grant and able to "hit the ground running".

The Plan includes DVCP's goals and objectives and describes the initiatives designed to achieve those goals and objectives by addressing issues our research identified as contributing to alcohol use among youth in our community.

#### Bad Idea-Cont. from Page 1

Furthermore, studies show that repeated exposure to alcohol during adolescence and young adulthood create lifelong problems with judgment, memory, visual/spatial skills and attention span.

Barbara Cimaglio, Director of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs in the VDH comments that, "The minimum legal drinking age is the most well-studied alcohol policy in the United States." She cites a review of forty years of literature on the effects of minimum drinking age. Their conclusion—"The bottom line here is that a higher legal drinking age *reduces* alcohol consumption."

So don't believe everything you hear. Years of research have shown that lowering the minimum drinking age is a bad idea and one that we will pay for with the lives of our young people.

#### Completed Assessment

##### Activities

- Law Enforcement interviews with Dover/Wilmington Police Chiefs and Regional Liquor Control Officer
- Two focus group meetings with 18-25 year old Deerfield Valley residents
- Two focus group meetings with local college students home for the summer
- Community scan to assess the number of alcohol outlets and alcohol-sponsored events in our community as well as any local restrictions
- Community Forum to obtain input from the community
- Community Resources and readiness survey
- Coalition Capacity survey

#### Parent Tip:

Research shows that young people are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs if their parents set clear rules.

#### Rulemaking Tips:

- \* Set clear rules and discuss in advance the consequences for breaking them
- \* Set a curfew
- \* Consistently enforce rules
- \* Employ minor punishments, not severe negative consequences

## Assessments Help Identify Risk Factors

### DVCP FOCUS ON FOUR AREAS

As a result of its assessment activities (see insert Page 2) DVCP was able to narrow the focus of its SPF-SIG efforts down to four broad areas or “risk factors” which appear to support and/or encourage use and abuse of alcohol among young people in our community. These factors aren’t unique to the Deerfield Valley and indeed, show up as major contributors to alcohol consumption among youth in most communities. DVCP was faced with assessing not only the scope of each risk factor but whether or not the community is ready to address it and in addition, whether the resources (both dollars and people) exist to impact the problem.

The four focus groups held with local youth between the ages of 18-25 were especially productive. The participants were open and forthright in their assessment of their own experiences, what they perceived the current drug and alcohol climate to be and what influenced them most with respect to the use of alcohol and other substances. They provided insight into the broader community climate which they perceived as having an impact on their future plans. Two issues specifically raised at every session were the lack of job opportunities in the Valley and their desire for a community center to provide a variety of recreational opportunities in an alcohol-free environment.

The four risk factors identified through the assessment process are:

- (i) The perception of young people, their parents and the general community that alcohol is not harmful along with the tendency to minimize long-term effects.
- (ii) The ease with which underage youth can obtain alcohol through social means such as raiding their parents’ supply and/or having someone older buy or give it to them.
- (iii) The belief that alcohol use among young people is a “rite of passage” and acceptable within the family environment; and
- (iv) The community’s acceptance of underage drinking as the norm.

#### Risk Factors

- Low Perceived Risk
- Easy Social Access
- Family Norms
- Community Norms



TVHS Pride/SADD students at the Governor's Youth Leadership Conference in Burlington this fall: Connor, Desiree, Scott, Andrew, Brittany and Devon.

### Deerfield Valley Community

#### Partnership

#### Steering Committee

Karen Molina

Bob Edwards

Arlene Palmiter

Judith Fellows

Lynn Redd

Ronda Lackey

#### DVCP Coordinator

Cindy Hayford

#### SPF SIG Grant

#### Project Director

Andy Hauty

#### Grant Evaluator

Anne O'Sullivan

#### Grants Fiscal Agent

Windham Southwest

Supervisory Union

#### Student Assistance Counselors

Dawn Borys-TVHS

Kristen Trudeau-TVMS

#### Leadership Coordinators

Suzanne Fontas-TVMS

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#### Prevention Curriculum

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We're on the Web!  
[www.dvcp.org](http://www.dvcp.org)



### ***Message from the Coordinator's Desk.....***

*Dear Neighbors,*

*I hope you find our first edition of The Valley Prevention News informative and useful. We're very excited and optimistic about our new initiatives and look forward to working with the Deerfield Valley community to reduce alcohol use among our young residents. We plan to keep you up-to-date on the latest information about the dangers of alcohol use and report on our activities through quarterly editions of this newsletter. In addition, look for news stories, ads and other publicity as we implement our plan.*

*I find it troubling that so many of our young people are attending parties where alcohol is readily available. I worry that some adults in our community try to minimize the dangerous effects of drinking by allowing drinking parties to occur in their homes or on their property.*

*My hope is that through our upcoming campaign to educate our community about the dangers of underage drinking and the laws against furnishing alcohol to minors, we will see an increase in the number of adults who join us in our attempt to reduce the number of adult-sanctioned parties which make alcohol available to young people. As Parents the Anti Drug Campaign states:  
"Asking your kids who, what, when, where, why, isn't pestering.....  
**IT'S PARENTING"***

*Please join us in our efforts to keep our children & young adults safe and healthy!  
To get involved or ask any questions please call me @464-1698.*

*The DVCP staff and I send our very best wishes for a Happy & Healthy 2009.  
**Cindy***

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