

For Immediate Release

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### **“Prevention is Everyone’s Business,’ Part I”**

Prevention is defined in the Meriam-Webster dictionary as “to be in readiness for; to deal with beforehand; taking advanced measures against something probable or possible.” In substance abuse prevention, it is often referred to as reducing or eliminating risky behaviors before they start. Right now, our American culture is conditioned to a “wait and see” model. An example of this is includes a person waiting until he or she has lung cancer before quitting smoking or having a heart attack before eating better and exercising. Americans tend to react to an event instead of preventing it from happening. An example of this is a community making a plan to reduce underage drinking only *after* an alcohol-related tragedy has occurred.

The number of prisons has increased dramatically in recent years across the United States; many of these prisoners are there due to an alcohol or drug-related crime. The heartache and suffering individuals and communities must endure due to these crimes, and the suffering of those incarcerated, could be substantially decreased if preventative measures were taken more seriously now.

It is clear Iowa, and the United States in general, need to prevent underage drinking. In Keokuk County, 42% of 11th grade students are regularly using alcohol, according to the Iowa Youth Survey. Of these same students 32% are binge drinking (5 or more drinks in the same setting). Iowa has the fourth highest binge drinking rate in the nation for kids ages 12- 17.

Our roads are unsafe, with an estimated nationally 3 million youth ages 12 to 20 driving under the influence of alcohol each year. Other illegal drugs are another problem. More than half of adults report using marijuana for the first time between the ages of 12 and 17, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The data shows that before age 12, children *need* to know how to refuse alcohol and illegal drugs. Children consistently receive education about drugs and alcohol in school, but this message needs to be reinforced in the home and in the community. It is certainly true that “it takes a village to raise a child.” Our children are everyone’s business, and everyone’s responsibility.

Next time: "Part II: What can parents do?"