

For Immediate Release

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### “‘Prevention is Everyone’s Business,’ Part III—What Our Community Can Do”

It has been said “Holding young people solely responsible for underage drinking is like holding fish responsible for dying in a polluted stream.” Our community is not exactly a polluted stream, but it is true that many of our young people are accessing alcohol illegally, usually through adults right in our own community.

Iowa has the fourth highest alcohol consumption rate in the United States. In 2004, state troopers made 2,238 DUI and 2,331 narcotics arrests. Alcohol is the number one drug of choice in the United States. According to the Keokuk County statistics from the 2005 Iowa Youth survey, 22% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, 28% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, and 76% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students have tried alcohol. According to that same survey, 85% of Keokuk County’s 11<sup>th</sup> grade students think it is easy or very easy for students their age to access alcoholic beverages.

We have the chance to change things, but everyone must do his or her part and work together to reduce underage drinking in this community. It starts with having no tolerance for underage drinking. Teen drinking is more dangerous than adult drinking. 70% of all adults in the U.S. drink alcohol, but 90% of them drink according to low-risk guidelines. When teens drink, they tend to drink to the level of serious intoxication. It has been shown that the effect of alcohol on the teen brain is quite serious. Memory is affected days after one night of drinking. Alcoholism happens faster in teens, and impairment problems such as fighting or falling, or having unprotected sex, are all part of the problem of teen drinking.

When most people think of this county, they think of these words: open, caring, and giving. The changes we want start with the spirit of the community to be open, caring, and giving. We should care about what is going in the community. If we hear of risky behaviors, such as underage drinking going on, we should tell someone. Not too long ago, neighbors and others would let parents know if their son or daughter was doing something they weren’t supposed to do. In that way, youth knew they were being watched, and that the community cared about them, even when their parents weren’t present.

A second thing we can do is to give our time to youth. Every young person needs positive adult role models. A commitment can be as large as coaching a summer softball league for teens or as small as acknowledging a teen with a "hello" in the convenient store. In doing these small acts of kindness, we express our interest and concern. There are opportunities in everyone's daily life to encourage our teens.

And lastly, we can be open to educating ourselves about youth issues. We can pay attention to headlines and attend events that inform us about these issues. There is a surplus of information out there. Several government websites, such as [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov) can give us accurate information and further resources.

Together we can all make a difference. We don't have to put up with the "status quo" or turn a blind eye to this dangerous behavior. Prevention is everyone’s business—so let’s get to work.