

# NavCo Coalition Against Drug Abuse

A Coalition of Concerned Navajo County Residents Banned Together to

- EDUCATE the Community on the methamphetamine & drug crisis
- REHABILITATE those who have fallen into the addiction
- ENFORCE laws pertaining to the spread of meth & drugs in our communities



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Navajo County Youth Draw the Line on Alcohol

By Dr. Mary Jeanne Munroe

Underage drinking is illegal!! The Governor of Arizona has indicated we need to "Draw the Line!" Research regarding the serious impact of alcohol on the adolescent brain, judgment and potential for addiction is not widely known. So, in an effort to widen this knowledge base in Arizona, a student project recently was undertaken in the state of Arizona.

Navajo County Coalition Against Drug Abuse was awarded one of five grants in the state to employ youth and advisers in five county communities to map locations, as licensed by the Arizona Liquor Board, for alcohol distribution within half a mile of schools, churches, libraries, malls, recreational facilities, spectator arenas and eateries and other establishments frequented by youth. An additional location of "other" fit many categories of student "hang outs". The survey aim was to determine whether retailers were safely placed among our community's youth.

Under the direction of local advisers, teams of Navajo County students mapped Heber-Overgaard, Pinetop-Lakeside, Pinon, Snowflake and Winslow, often on foot. Usually the survey area was limited to the school district; however, Winslow was bounded the city limits. With this data, specific to their area, students reflected on what they learned and expressed their surprise that there were so many establishments where alcohol was sold. They also noted that when the local "hang out" was a parking lot, perhaps additional recreational activities were needed. For the county as a whole, data indicated there were two or more youth attractions within the half mile radius of all the retailers mapped.

Data collection was structured and information gained; however, the young workers were not satisfied with just numbers. Their concerns were: 1) we need to tell others about what we did and found; 2) provide education and prevention

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*Mission Statement:*

To develop a diverse community representation, coordinate a sustained effort in educating and preventing the use and abuse of crystal meth through a plan for change in local social norms through prevention, treatment and vigorous enforcement of existing laws.

avenues to reduce the preteen and teen use of alcohol. These youngsters want to get the word out. They were not willing to just sit by. To address these concerns and what leadership skills are required, 19 students and advisers attended a Leadership Retreat on March 8, to refine information, prepare visuals and obtain print materials to use in presenting to school boards, city councils, tribal councils, service organizations and fellow students. Advancing the knowledge base of their community was a priority.

Beyond just talking, the team members want Students Against Underage Drinking to take a stand. Organize clubs and groups to demonstrate that alcohol is not the way to “have a good time” and that “it isn’t cool”. Community members are urged to support your teens in their efforts.

### **Numbers Above the Line**

Statistics are alarming and emphasize Arizona’s. Data from the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission’s Arizona Youth Survey (2006) identifies underage drinking, and indeed bingeing, as the #1 substance abuse problem for youth in Arizona. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance by Arizona’s 8th, 10th and 12th graders.

Use by 8th 10th and 12th graders is higher in Arizona than it is nationwide (National Monitoring the Future, 2006). Alcohol is called a gateway drug, as it is a pathway to other drugs. Research reports that underage drinkers are 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine (Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University). The adolescent brain is not fully developed and therefore, alcohol causes greater damage than in adults. Loss of memory, decision-making skills and other thinking patterns are harmed.

Arizona ranks 29th among all states for the percentage of youth ages 12-20 who report binge drinking within the past 30 days, meaning only 19 states have more binge drinkers (SAMHSA, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2003-4). Binge drinking is defined as five drinks for males, four drinks for females in less than two hours. Driving under the influence (DUI) arrests in Navajo County are 62 percent alcohol related.

Alcohol under the age of 21 is illegal; yet, 47 percent of Arizona adults believe it’s okay for youth to drink alcohol under parental Supervision (Arizona Attitudes on Youth Drinking Survey, 2006). Attitudes need to change! Alcoholics nationwide report becoming addicted before 18 years of age; and 47 percent became hooked before age 21 (Youth Alcohol Prevention Center, Boston University School of Public Health, 2006).

Research shows 88 percent of Arizona adults are concerned about underage drinking (Underage Drinking in Arizona Data Findings and Analysis, 2007).

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Draw the line! Talk to your teen about alcohol and its harms. Let them know you care. Forty one percent of parents thought their 12th grader was using alcohol when in fact, 68 percent of the students reported use within the year.

These data reinforce the problem with alcohol and youth. Address the needs in your community. Support is needed and the young people who invested their time and energy in the mapping project. They look to adults to be positive role models and mentors.

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**Mogollon High School students and administrators meet with Governor's Office liaison Christopher Boddington (center, blue shirt) to discuss their findings in the state-funded Navajo County Alcohol Retail Mapping in Proximity to Youth study. Project director Dr. Mary Jeanne Munroe, standing, observes. (Photo Debe Campbell)**

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**From left: Jason Owen, Snowflake Adviser/teacher; Courtney Nash, Tomi Adair, Keegan Cook, all of Mogollon, listen intently during the leadership retreat. (Photo April Weston)**



**From left: Navajo Times reporter, Navajo County Juvenile Probation officer Pat Hollins. Pinon Adviser Ann Cambridge, Kristi Tausinga of Winslow and Jason Owens. (photo April Weston)**