

The Zero Adult Provider (ZAP) Coalition

The last issue contained articles discussing how Chisago County was successfully working with a wide variety of groups to prevent youth from obtaining alcohol. The following article explains a similar effort in St. Paul, designed to effectively address adult providers of alcohol and problem college party houses.

The Zero Adult Provider (ZAP) Coalition focuses on preventing underage drinking and youth access to alcohol. Since 1999, ZAP has brought together residents, law enforcement, public health, campus representatives, city prosecutors, judges, and other community members to find ways to effectively address adult providers of alcohol and problem party houses in the residential neighborhoods surrounding St. Paul's college campuses.

For years, residents in the neighborhoods surrounding St. Paul's colleges complained of noisy parties and disturbances from intoxicated college students. Many people were trying to deal with the situation, but it didn't seem like anything was having a huge effect.

In 2000, several factors came together to significantly change the picture of underage drinking in St. Paul. The Police and Public Health Departments received a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety for targeted enforcement of loud parties and underage drinking around the campuses. At the same time, judges from the District Court, prosecutors from the City Attorney's office and other criminal justice personnel came together to discuss a huge issue in many of the juvenile cases they were facing—alcohol. They began to look at how prosecutors and judges could have more of an impact on underage drinking.

In the past, patrol officers responding to a noisy party complaint would

usually ask kids to pour out their beers and head home. Officers only had a few minutes at a party before they would get another call and need to leave. In serious cases, officers would write tickets for minor consumption, but they didn't do that too often because they knew the youth only had to write a small check and mail it to court.

The picture in St. Paul began to change. With a small amount of funding, St. Paul hired two overtime officers to respond to noisy party and underage drinking calls on certain weekend nights. The officers took the time at the party to identify underage drinkers and, very importantly, to investigate the source of the alcohol.

Due to a new bench policy issued by the Ramsey County chief judge, those charged with underage consumption or providing alcohol to a minor now faced a mandatory court appearance. At court they were sentenced to a year's probation, community service, a chemical use assessment, an alcohol education class, and fines to cover court costs.

ZAP worked with local residents to educate them about the project and encourage them to report underage drinking parties. ZAP also involved the colleges in educating students about the risks of underage drinking and the increased enforcement. Over time, many students decided it was too risky to host an underage drinking party.

The ZAP Coalition showed what can happen when the entire criminal justice system and the community work together.

Who is Involved in ZAP?

ZAP has involved many partners over the years, but key members include:

- St. Paul Police Department
- St. Paul-Ramsey Public Health
- Ramsey County District Court
- St. Paul City Attorney

- St. Paul City Council
- St. Thomas University
- Other universities, including Hamline, St. Catherine, and Macalester
- Neighborhood residents
- Minnesota Join Together

How Does the ZAP Law Enforcement Operate?

ZAP patrols are St. Paul police officers who are hired on overtime to target underage drinking parties. They respond to reports of noisy parties and underage drinking. Once they gain access to the party, they check age identification on everyone at the party, separating those who are over 21 from those who are underage. Police write tickets for minor consumption. They also do investigations to determine who purchased the alcohol. Once found, the adult provider is charged with a gross misdemeanor for providing alcohol to a minor.

How is ZAP Funded?

Over the years, ZAP has found funding from a variety of sources. The formation of the coalition and increased enforcement was first funded through a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety through its Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) program. Since that initial grant, ZAP has received funding as a special appropriation from the St. Paul City Council and then as a budget item in the St. Paul Police Department. At one point, there was a gap in funding from the initial grant and the City Council funding. A small grant from the University of St. Thomas carried the project through the gap period.

How Are Judges and the Criminal Justice System Involved?

In most areas in Minnesota, minor consumption violations are a "payable offense," meaning youth can simply write a check to pay the fine just like a parking ticket. In Ramsey County, judges and other criminal justice personnel saw an opportunity to have greater impact on youth. The Ramsey

County Chief Judge issued a bench policy requiring a court appearance for minor consumptions. All of these charges were then scheduled through Community Court. The benefit of Community Court is that there are fewer judges so coordination is simplified. Also, large numbers of the charges can be scheduled for one afternoon and handled efficiently.

The bench policy also provided a matrix of recommended penalties for minor consumption, including 1-year probation, 1-year abstain from all drugs including alcohol, self-administered chemical assessment, and 25 hours community service. In some circumstances, a full chemical assessment is ordered.

What Else Does ZAP Do?

Coalition members knew that increased enforcement would not be enough to significantly reduce youth access to alcohol. They also work to educate students and the community

about underage drinking and the ZAP Coalition. Members have distributed informational packets to students living off campus, presented at campus forums, mailed flyers to community residents, and displayed posters on campus. It is important to let the students and community know about the program so it can have its full deterrent effect.

Is ZAP Working?

ZAP has not undergone formal evaluation, but initial feedback and results are positive. Many factors indicate students are more aware of the risks, especially legal risks, of underage drinking and providing alcohol to minors. There have been several articles in campus and neighborhood newspapers, students-hosted forums, and other student communications about the project.

The number of house party disturbances has decreased. Campus

officials have indicated that students are hosting fewer parties. When they do have parties, the parties are smaller and more responsible.

Some people have expressed concerns that students are just traveling away from the immediate campus area to have parties. Some students have indicated that they can go to neighboring cities for large parties. While ZAP is certainly not a silver bullet for eliminating underage drinking, members do feel it is having a positive effect on the students and neighborhoods.

For more information about the ZAP Coalition, contact:

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