

## Time to Take Action

By Cindy Genau

I just received the most wonderful phone call to my office. A group of young adults want to celebrate spring by having a formal or special prom night of their own, which is not so unusual. March is the time to start thinking about spring events which include rituals as high school proms and college fraternity and sorority formals. What was surprising about this group of young adults is that they want to include education as part of their prom night. In particular, they are planning the event to be alcohol-free and they want to remind each other about the dangers of the abuse of alcohol and drinking and driving.

I am very proud of this young group of people for taking the kind of action we all should be taking to keep our teens and young adults safe. Sometimes we only read about the youth that cause trouble but these youth are being role models for all youth. They are using education as a tool to facilitate change. They are also making a statement that they can have an enjoyable evening that does not have to revolve around alcohol. This group of young people is holding this event right around St. Patrick's Day which is normally associated with bar crawls featuring lots of green beer. I applaud them for taking action to change their own environment to create an event that does not succumb to the normal peer pressure and popular culture. What a lesson for all of us to pay attention to. I wish my own children were so courageous to take this kind of stand.

This request was very refreshing in light of the data from the Governor's Council on Lifestyle and Fitness, the University of Delaware Center for Drug and Alcohol Studies Delaware School Surveys and the Delaware Youth Risk Surveys. I was surprised to learn from the data that by the time a child in Delaware reaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade 21% will have tried an alcoholic drink and about half do not perceive great risk if someone drinks daily. By the time Delaware children reach 8<sup>th</sup> grade 55% have drunk alcohol and about half do not see a risk in binge drinking. It is not surprising that by 11<sup>th</sup> grade 75% have used alcohol and 23% report binge drinking within the past two weeks. The surveys also indicate that 19% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students have driven under the influence, 6% within the past month. I don't think I have to say that none of these students are close to the legal drinking age.

It is no surprise that 31% of our 18-24 year olds and 43% of our 25-34 year olds are engaging in binge drinking. I am not against having a glass of wine or beer but alcohol abuse is a serious problem that can no longer be ignored or considered a right of passage. Drinking underage and binge drinking is alcohol abuse.

The top three killers of youth are trauma due to motor vehicle crashes, homicide and suicide and alcohol is a leading factor in all three. We also know that teens who drink before age 15 are 4x more likely to become alcoholics. The part of the brain that controls memory and learning is much smaller in teens who drink alcohol. More than 4,000 young people die each year from alcohol poisoning. Alcohol is involved in 90% of all campus rapes. Alcohol is involved in 60% of fires and 68% of drowning deaths.

So where do these young people get their alcohol? Who is buying the alcohol? Who is selling the alcohol? Why is drinking starting at such a young age? What are we doing to protect our children from alcohol abuse and the trauma, violence, and health risks associated with alcohol abuse? It is time to take action and a stand on preventing underage drinking like the young adults who called my office. If you would like more information and would like to join in protecting our youth and your children, please join the community in taking a stand at the Community Action on Alcohol and Teens on April 25, 2007. To register online, visit [www.udel.edu/usa](http://www.udel.edu/usa) or contact Mary Perno at 302-831-4470.