

**Pima County-
Tucson
Commission on
Addiction
Prevention and
Treatment**

Pima County Task Force to Reduce Underage Drinking Underage Drinking Town Halls

Evaluation Results 2006

One of the first projects undertaken by the Pima County Task Force to Reduce Underage Drinking was to plan a series of Teen Town Halls on Underage Drinking.

The purpose of the Town Halls:

- To raise public awareness of the issue of underage drinking in Pima County
- To gather community feedback regarding underage drinking for the Task Force



There has also been a recent national initiative through SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to conduct town halls on underage drinking, with mini-grants offered to local coalitions sponsoring town halls. Compass Health Care received some of these funds.

Nine town halls took place in Pima County during March and April 2006:

- Sunnyside High School, sponsored by Kino Weed & Seed and Liberty Partnership. Attendance: 110
- Pima Partnership High School, sponsored by the Commission. Attendance: 80
- Northwest Neighborhood Center, sponsored by the Pima County Parenting Coalition. Attendance: 25
- Luz Academy High School, sponsored by Luz Social Services. Attendance: 80
- Ace Charter High School, sponsored by Ace Charter High School. Attendance: 90
- Tohono O'odham Council Chambers, sponsored by Arizona Youth Partnership. Attendance: 32
- South Tucson, sponsored by South Tucson Prevention Collaborative. Attendance unknown
- Calli Ollin Academy. Attendance: 33
- Toltecalli Academy. Attendance: 40



Family Town Hall sponsored by Pima County Parenting Coalition on March 28 at Northwest Neighborhood Center.

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Coordinating and Supporting Other County Efforts



Teen Town Hall sponsored by Luz Social Services on March 29 at Luz Academy High School.

The Task Force took SAMHSA's national initiative as an opportunity to help coordinate and evaluate the town hall events around Pima County, in order to gather information from the community and increase its visibility in the community as a leader in the issue of preventing underage drinking.

Of the nine town hall events held in Pima County, six participated in a coordinated evaluation: Pima Partnership High School (PPHS), Luz Academy High School, Ace Charter High School, Calli Ollin Academy, Toltecalli Academy, and Pima County Parenting Coalition (PCPC). The town hall hosted by PCPC targeted parents, while the other three targeted teens.

- An estimated 481 people attended the six town hall events included in this evaluation.
- A total of 260 participants completed retrospective post-test surveys.
- 43% of participants were male, 53% were female, and 3% were transgender.
- 68% of participants were Hispanic, 10% White, 5% African American, 2% Native American, and 5% multiracial. A small percentage (6%) identified themselves as "other."
- The majority (90%) of participants were under age 21.
- Out of the 260 town hall participants surveyed, 15% identified themselves as parents.

Outcomes

The survey results from these town hall events showed that the town halls led to significant increases in participants' knowledge about underage drinking issues. On the survey, participants were asked to reflect on the town hall experience and then score five statements about their knowledge of underage drinking in terms of what they knew **prior** to the program, and what they knew **after** the program. This retrospective method showed statistically significant¹ improvements in the average scores of all five knowledge measures:

- 11% improvement on *I believe that underage drinking is a problem in my community.***
- 9% improvement on *I know the laws on underage drinking in Arizona.***
- 20% improvement on *I know that more kids are killed by alcohol than by all other illegal drugs combined.***
- 20% improvement on *I know what I can do about underage drinking in my community.***
- 21% improvement on *I know where to go for information and help on alcohol issues.***

¹ For the purposes of this report, two asterisks ** indicate that the result is significant and that there are less than 1/100 odds that this result occurred by chance ($p < .01$). One asterisk * means that the result is significant and that there are less than 5/100 odds that this result occurred by chance ($p < .05$). The presence of small odds leads to the inference that the change can be attributed to participation in the town hall event.

Content Analysis

A number of common themes emerged in the question and answer sessions following the panel presentations at each town hall. The themes differed, however, between the teen town halls at schools and the town hall targeting parents at the Northwest Neighborhood Center.

Teen Town Halls

- The most asked questions were directed toward panelists who were injured, or who lost family members as the result of a drunk driver or underage drinking. Questions for these individuals largely addressed themes of relationships and emotions:
 - What happened to the person who injured you?
 - How do you feel about [the person who injured you] [the person who killed your husband]?
 - What was the first thing you thought when [you woke up] [your husband passed away]?
 - What toll has this taken on your life?
 - How do you feel about being an example?
 - How long did it take you to recover?
 - How did your family feel after the accident?
 - What do you regret?
- The second most common types of questions were directed at law enforcement. These questions centered around clarifications of the law and hypothetical scenarios:
 - How much is too much to drink when you are 21?
 - Are drugs as much of a problem as alcohol?
 - What are the consequences for underage drinkers who get DUIs?
 - If a group of teens are drinking and one dies, who gets in trouble?
 - What happens if you are a passenger and the driver gets pulled over for DUI?
 - If a friend is drunk, and I drive without a permit, can I get in trouble?
 - How many times have you pulled someone over for DUI and heard that it was their first time drinking?
 - What happens when parties are busted and minors are drinking?
 - Since it is hard to stop underage drinking, do you get tired of trying?
- Two of the teen town halls had youth in recovery as panelists. Questions for youth in recovery were very popular. These questions focused on the reasons why someone would use alcohol/drugs at a young age, family relationships, and emotions:
 - Why did you start drinking [using drugs]?
 - What made you want to stop?
 - Do you blame your parents?
 - What happened to your family?



- When your mother was drinking, did you hate her or help her?
- How do you feel after being at the bottom and now recovering?
- Two teen town halls had either the school Vice Principal or the Principal on the panel. Questions asked of these familiar authority figures focused on the Principals as role models, and the impact of underage drinking on their particular school community:
 - What has influenced you to live a healthy lifestyle?
 - How would you feel about your own kids drinking?
 - Have you drunk alcohol before?
 - How is underage drinking affecting our school?
 - How do you deal with students who come to school drunk?
- A number of questions were directed at all panel members, with a variety of themes:
 - How can we make non-alcoholic parties more fun?
 - How does underage drinking affect your life?
 - How old were you when you first got drunk?

Northwest Community Center Town Hall (Parents):

The town hall targeting parents differed from the teen town halls in that parents commented and engaged panelists in discussion more than they asked questions.

- Several comments/questions emphasized the responsibility of authority figures and elected officials to obey the law and not be arrested for DUI.
- A question was posed to a parent in recovery regarding her perspective as a sober parent compared to when she was an alcoholic parent.
- A question was posed to the panel about what alternatives to drinking are available to youth in our community.
- One comment was made regarding the power of corporate sponsorships and advertisers in sending the wrong message to youth.
- One comment was made about parents not taking responsibility and not knowing what their children are doing.
- Two participants shared stories of personal loss related to alcohol.



Media Coverage:

The town hall events in Pima County raised awareness not only among participants, but also throughout the community due to local news coverage. News features covering the town hall events included both television and newspaper stories:

- KGUN 9, 3/13/06, evening news
- KOLD 13, 3/24/06, evening news
- KGUN 9, 4/27/06, evening news
- KVOA 4, 4/9/06, Impact news interview program (30-minute interview, 2 TF members)

- Arizona Daily Star, 4/27/06, "Underage drinking the topic of town halls." Metro Briefing section, 129 words
- Arizona Daily Star, 3/29/06, "Fight against underage drinking." Metro Briefing section, 131 words
- Arizona Daily Star, 3/8/06, "Curbing underage drug use, drinking is focus of meeting." Front section, 129 words
- Arizona Daily Star, 4/14/06, "Charter gets \$1.8M to fight youth drinking." 299 words.

Implications and Lessons Learned:

Evaluation results indicate that the Pima County Task Force to Reduce Underage Drinking successfully achieved its two objectives in coordinating town halls: 1) to raise awareness of the issue, and 2) to gather community feedback. Post-test participant surveys showed significant increases in the knowledge of underage drinking issues, indicating that town halls were an effective means of raising awareness. Content analysis of town hall proceedings provided valuable information about the concerns of youth with respect to underage drinking. Future underage drinking prevention efforts targeting teens should center on these concerns, which include relationships, consequences of law and personal loss, the impact of underage drinking on their immediate community and schools, alternatives to drinking, and the actions of their role models.

In addition, these underage drinking town halls offered the benefit of a few “lessons learned” which can be used to improve future town hall efforts. If community feedback is a primary objective, future town hall events should be structured to elicit more discussion and commentary from participants. Three suggestions:

1. Panelists or presenters should adhere to strict time limits in order to save ample time for audience participation.
2. Solicit participation from the audience/participants in the form of comments and responses rather than questions. Recognizing the audience as “experts” in their own right may encourage their feedback, ideas, and commentary.
3. Carefully select and prepare panelists to present clear messages that do not inadvertently glamorize underage drinking, especially when panelists will offer testimony about personal experiences with alcohol.