

Survey reveals youth views on substance use

By Mike Bowen, Ledger Community Editor Friday, June 29, 2007 5:58 PM MDT

From the Lamar, CO, Daily News.

P3 (Prowers Prevention Partners) recently released information gathered from surveys it has done with Prowers County youth in 6th - 11th grades in Granada, Holly and Lamar. According to Meg Day, P3 project director, 84 percent of the 6th - 11th graders were represented in the results. The surveys were completed last year as part of the requirements of the group's grant. The data released by P3 are aggregate results.

On the survey, students were asked about alcohol and drug use over the past 30 days of taking the survey. The results showed that about 35 percent of the students drank alcohol in that time span, 59 percent had used alcohol at some point in their life and about 37 percent had engaged in binge drinking. Over half of the kids tested said that access to alcohol was not difficult to attain.

Fifty one percent say it is easy to get beer, wine and hard liquor, said Day.

Lamar interim Chief of Police Dave Dougherty said he knows youth have easy access to alcohol and there is quite a bit going on with underage drinking.

We have a zero tolerance for MIP, said the chief. He said that if Lamar Police officers are tipped to an MIP party and they arrive and find underage persons either drinking alcohol or in close proximity to the alcohol, we cite them.

According to the project director, Youth think peers, parents are favorable of ATOD (Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs). She said that was the response of 38 percent of peers and 35 percent of parents.

The interim chief said he has heard of parents who have hosted parties for youth where alcohol was served. Though he has heard it has happened, he said it hasn't been a problem with people tipping officers about those parties while they are happening.

Dougherty encourages parents to know what their children are doing and where they are.

There is a curfew in Lamar. Persons under the age of 18 are not to be in or on any public street, highway, road, alley, park, playground, public grounds, public building, vacant lot or other public place within the city between the hours of 12 midnight and 5 a.m. of the following day, as stated in the City of Lamar Municipal Codes-General Offenses. It is also unlawful for a person under the age of 15 to be in those same locations within the city between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. On Friday and Saturday nights, the curfew hours for children ages 15-17 shall be extended to 1 a.m.

To help enforce the laws regarding underage drinking, Dougherty said there may need to be stiffer penalties. Another question asked by P3 on the surveys was whether the youth have an awareness of dangers of ATOD. According to the released information, about 40 percent say it is low risk. Sixty three percent of the students questioned said they had not used alcohol in the past 30 days. Thirty five percent said they have never used alcohol.

Prowers County Sheriff Jim Faull said he knows there are students that drink but does not believe the problem is any worse than anywhere else in the state.

It is close to the state average now, said the sheriff commenting on underage drinking in the area.

Faull said underage drinking does occur in the area and is happy that Prowers got this grant. It (P3) is a good program.

It is easy access, said Faull. He said he doesn't think it is a problem for youth to get alcohol. He also said the liquor stores are pretty good at checking id.

Approximately 10 -15 MIP tickets are issued a year, said the sheriff.

In 2004 the Lamar Police Department issued 60 DUI and 152 MIP. In 2005 they issued 50 DUI and 59 MIP. In 2006 they issued 55 DUI and 42 MIP.

Other questions asked of students about drug use helped to determine the child viewpoint on it. Seventy two percent said they have never tried marijuana and 86 percent said they hadn't smoked marijuana in the past 30 days.

Seventy five percent of the students surveyed said that people at home encourage them to do their best and follow the rules.

Sheriff Faull said he believes the vast majority of youth are responsible.

For those youth that are not responsible about obeying the law, MIP may be cited.

I give my deputies discretion, said the sheriff. Faull said he allows his deputies to look at the situation and if some kids at a party are not drinking and some are, it is possible that only the ones drinking would be cited for MIP.

Our first obligation is to get those kids home safely, said the sheriff. Also in the survey issued by P3, kids were asked about their future and what they want to do with their lives. Almost all of the kids tested say they want to finish high school and go on and live successful lives. According to the readiness level P3 received, they have been evaluated at vague awareness.

P3 also surveyed parents to gain an understanding of what parents thought about the same issues asked of the students.

Of those parents questioned, many said it was easy for underage drinkers to obtain alcohol. Forty four percent said yes they did know parents were hosting parties where alcohol was being served.

From the information gathered, P3 has established goals to help tame this problem in Prowers County. Goal number one is to address easy access of alcohol among underage youth by implementing a beverage training program for retail sales and service establishments.

B.R.I.T.E. (beverage retail industry training and education) task force will conduct TIPS classes for liquor license holders and their employees. Goal number two is to address the low perception of risk and social acceptance of underage alcohol use held by adults and youth by developing and implementing a social norms process and subsequent media advocacy campaign.

The release states that information and education for the entire community (adults and youth) can bring change to the social norms.

Goal number three is to address the use of alcohol by underage persons by sponsoring evidence based ATOD prevention curricula in the schools.

Day said that various programs will be continued, renewed, or started in the schools. For now, grades fourth - eighth will be targeted. Goal number four is to supplement the evidence based prevention curricula with positive ATOD free alternative activities for youth. P3 will also be holding training for some of its coalition members on social norming. P3 strives to create activities for Prowers County youth with alcohol and drug free environments. Here is a list of summer activities the group has planned:

For further information, please contact Prowers Prevention Partners at 719-336-7486 extension 123. Project director Meg Day may also be reached at meg.day@prowerscounty.net.