

Prevention = Protecting What We Value Most

By Deb Naro, CADY Executive Director

CADY is pleased to announce that our signature program, "Project Monitor" tip line has gone statewide! After much discussion with the State Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services, the Bureau of Liquor Enforcement and 2-1-1 New Hampshire, "Project Monitor Under 21" was launched in December.

Project Monitor Under 21 is an **anonymous** tip line that is available to parents, teachers, students and community members in every New Hampshire community. By reporting and sharing information about underage gatherings where alcohol or other drugs are likely to be accessed by minors, a call to 2-1-1 might prevent a harmful situation from ever happening. *Project Monitor Under 21* allows people to take action and halt the harm **BEFORE** it occurs.

Calls to 2-1-1 are anonymous and instead of going to a voicemail line as the local calls did in the past, the new phone line is answered 24/7 by trained 2-1-1 dispatchers. Dispatchers will relay information to authorities for response by local police in the appropriate jurisdiction. *Why do we need tools like Project Monitor Under 21?*

Some people feel we shouldn't be concerned about underage drinking, believing it's a harmless rite of passage. A generation ago if a parent caught their daughter using alcohol, a common reaction might be, "At least she's not taking drugs." Back then, their attention was more likely focused on the dramatic increases in illicit street drugs. Today, we think differently because of research advancements and science-based facts that point to alcohol as our number one youth drug problem in New Hampshire.

Across America, coalitions like CADY work to increase the knowledge, skills, and resources of individuals, families, communities, and local governments to prevent and reduce alcohol use by youth. Did you know that underage alcohol use is six times more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined? (Source: MMWR, Report 51, 2002) Further research from the American Medical Association shows that alcohol use can negatively affect your child's memory and brain development. We also know that alcohol has a negative affect on decision making and behavior in ways that may lead to lifelong problems. There are many reasons why kids and alcohol don't mix: injury; assault; unsafe sex; vandalism; police involvement; academic problems; drunk driving; health problems; addiction; suicide attempts; and even death.

*The reality is alcohol and drugs are way too easy for kids to access. Did you know that one of the easiest places for kids to get alcohol is in our own kitchens? In fact, in the Pemi-Baker region of the youth who drink alcohol, one out of two reported that beer, wine, or liquor was "easy" or "very easy" for them to obtain and one out of three reported drinking at home or at a friend's home **without** parental permission (TAP, 2007). The reality is we need to limit social access opportunities—no one can drink too much if they can't get it! We also need to help our children understand the risks of underage drinking so they will make the healthy choices that will keep them safe. Be sure they know how important it is to you—and to them—that they do not use alcohol.*

Prevention is one of the most important and cost effective ways we know to address the problem. Prevention is at the core of Project Monitor Under 21. Don't wait until teenagers make mistakes and get in trouble—help shape the environment and stop underage drinking. Remember—an anonymous call to 2-1-1 may prevent a call to 9-1-1!