

**Contact**

Rebecca Elwell  
Coordinator, Tiverton Prevention Coalition  
**Release**  
401-835-5311  
[rebecca@tivertonprevention.org](mailto:rebecca@tivertonprevention.org)

*For Immediate*

**COMMUNITY ATTITUDES, EASY ACCESS, AND INFLUENCE OF GANGS NAMED AS “ROOT CAUSES” OF UNDERAGE DRINKING IN TIVERTON**

**Tiverton, RI (date)** – Easy access to alcohol, community attitudes, inconsistent knowledge of alcohol-related laws, and peer influence, including the growing presence of gang members from nearby cities, were identified by the Tiverton Prevention Coalition’s strategic planning committee as root causes of underage drinking in Tiverton.

“Like towns and cities across the country, Tiverton does have an underage drinking problem,” said Rebecca Elwell, TPC coordinator. “The problem was underscored again in a recent survey of students in grades seven through 12, where more than 60 percent of students reported consuming alcohol in the previous 30 day period. Identifying root causes is the first step toward developing action steps to address this problem,” Elwell added.

The Coalition’s strategic planning committee uses the Logic Model, an organizational tool that focuses on measuring the outcomes of any program. Identifying the root causes of underage drinking is the first step toward implementing intervention strategies in the community. The committee includes Tiverton educators, counselors, health professionals, Town and State government officials, parents, concerned citizens and representatives from the Tiverton Police Department, who reported a rise in suspected gang-related activities in Tiverton.

“Changing attitudes is the key to reducing underage drinking,” Elwell said. “Tiverton and communities across the country think about underage drinking the way we thought about smoking 30 years ago. It wasn’t necessarily seen as harmful. Many parents and older friends and siblings, many of whom smoked tobacco, saw a teen’s first cigarette as a ‘rite of passage.’ The attitude was, it’s just something that kids do. That’s what we’re facing now with underage drinking and, like smoking, it’s going to take time and effort to change community attitudes about how harmful it really is.”

The Coalition’s work is funded by a \$90 thousand grant from M.A.D.D. of Rhode Island to enhance the Enforcement of Underage Drinking Laws. The Coalition is also in the process of applying for additional federal block grant monies for EUDL programs.

Tiverton residents who would like to become actively involved in the Coalition’s work may contact Elwell at 401-835-5311.

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