

February 2013



# coalition news

Prevention news and information from the Tiverton Prevention Coalition

## THS Students Unveil “Un-Marketing Weed” Program to RI State Legislators

Seven Tiverton High School students took advantage of an opportunity on February 26 that no one had anticipated: the chance to go to the Rhode Island State House and tell a group of legislators, in person, about an in-school marketing campaign around marijuana that they had created.

“Un-Marketing Weed,” a new extracurricular community service and learning program at THS was launched last fall. It challenged student volunteers to develop a marketing campaign for their peers around the issue of “risk of harm,” a standard predictor for youth marijuana use. If youth do not perceive smoking weed as risky, evidence shows, they tend to use more marijuana.

According to a 2012 survey of THS students about substance use, 56% of the school population perceived little risk or harm associated with regular marijuana use, which is

“one reason why marijuana use among youth in Tiverton and in the state has been on the rise,” said Rebecca Ellwell, coordinator of the Tiverton Prevention Coalition, which funded the UMW program with monies from a federal block grant to the state.



“Let’s face it,” Ellwell said, “attitudes and legislation around marijuana are changing in Rhode Island and across America and this in turn affects the attitudes of our youth. But one thing has not changed: the fact that adolescent marijuana use is risky and harmful. There’s more than enough science to say that and that’s what the UMW campaign wants to say in a way that gets a teen’s attention. It’s not a ‘just say no’ campaign. It’s a ‘just the facts approach.’”

Believed to be the first such program in the country, The Coalition retained O’Toole + Parr, local marketing professionals with extensive experience in the prevention industry. O+P taught the students the principles of marketing and guided them through the process of creating



*The UMW Team: Andrew Dion, Grace Simpson, Alex Cotton. Standing: Tori DiBenedetto, Christina Bebe, Carrie Munroe. Team member, Alex Turner, was not available for picture.*

and executing a marketing campaign, which was the “learning” part of the program. Students, however, were the “creative directors,” writing messages, preparing rough layouts, and suggesting visuals that O+P then transformed into eye-catching posters.

The UMW campaign kicked off as a “teaser campaign,” when THS students returned from their winter vacation on February 25. The full launch is scheduled for the week of March 4. The measurable goal: lower that “56%.”

### ***Around the Country: Top Shelf***

What are kids drinking? The [first national survey](#) examining brand preferences among underage youth revealed that a relatively small number of alcohol brands dominate underage youth alcohol consumption.

The researchers surveyed 1,032 youth ages 13-20 via an internet-based survey instrument. Respondents were asked about their past 30-day consumption of 898 brands

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## REBECCA'S notes

12 months of discussion have led us to this place. The Ocean State Prevention Alliance hosted its first event, a legislative briefing at the State House on February 26 to urge lawmakers to adopt a statewide strategy that can prevent or reduce the negative impact of marijuana legislation on youth. OSPA is a new coalition of prevention specialists and mental health professionals. They are my colleagues and my friends. I am drawn to them because we share a common vision.

Over the past two years Rhode Island has passed legislation that will make marijuana more accessible to youth. Statistics also show that the majority of RI youth do not think smoking marijuana is very risky or harmful, a trend that has occurred in other states where “medical” marijuana has been legalized. And we have not yet begun to feel the results of marijuana decriminalization, yet some of our legislations have already introduced a bill to legalize marijuana for recreational purposes.

I feel the time is critical to take action. I volunteered to serve on OSPA's executive committee because I believe that it is time for open-minded, sensible, science- and evidence-based discussion of marijuana issues in Rhode Island — a serious conversation among people who call RI home, not those who have a financial stake in the outcome.

At some point it became unpopular to voice an opinion against marijuana legalization and since that time marijuana use among youth has steadily increased. I am here to say that being against legalization does not make someone a “prohibitionist,” one of those political words that try to question our integrity. It just may be that we want to protect youth. This is what OSPA is about. I think supporting OSPA's initiatives puts me on the responsible side of the debate. [rebecca@tivertonprevention.org](mailto:rebecca@tivertonprevention.org).

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### *Around the Country* (continued from page 1)

of alcohol among 16 alcoholic beverage types. Nearly 30 percent reported drinking Bud Light; 17 percent had consumed Smirnoff malt beverages; and about 15 percent drank Budweiser. Of the top 25 consumed brands, 12 were spirits brands (including four vodkas), nine were beers, and four were flavored alcohol beverages.



“Importantly,” said study author David Jernigan, PhD, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, “this report paves the way for subsequent studies to explore the association between exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing efforts and drinking behavior in young people.”

### *Practicing Prevention: Tune In*

The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that the common thread among teens that do well academically and socially, and stay healthy and drug-free, is that they have close relationships with their parents.

These teens report that their parents are interested in them, in what they do and in who they know. They also say their parents are curious about their lives and their ideas. They feel connected, because their parents listen to them and take time to find out what's going on in their world

For other valuable prevention information from AAP, check out the source: [\*Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens\*](#).

**Comments? Questions? Interests?**  
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