



September 2022 Newsletter

The Opportunities to Change College Drinking By Pamela S. Erickson

In Texas, the Alcohol Beverage Control agency launched a statewide effort to check over 1,000 retailers' efforts to prevent sales to minors. The mission was targeted to coincide with the start of the college Fall semester. They found that 14% of those retailers failed the compliance check and are subject to sanctions. Additionally, the employees who sold to a minor could face misdemeanor charges. While compliance was not perfect, it did constitute a warning that Texas is serious about its efforts to reduce underage drinking.

Michigan also ran compliance checks to reduce underage drinking. In Ann Arbor (home of the University of Michigan), the Michigan Liquor Control Commission sponsored a "secret shopper program" that found all bars and restaurants complied, but only half of "off-premise" retailers did. According to MLCC Chair Pat Gagliardi, "Our goal is to make a measurable difference toward preventing the illegal sale and service of alcohol to minors and to curtail underage drinking in Ann Arbor. These inspections provide non-punitive 'teachable moments' for licensees to stay on top of making sure that their managers and staff are not selling or serving alcohol to minors, reminding them every day to check IDs every time."

This is great news--but underage drinking is not the only college drinking issue. Drunkenness and extreme intoxication have been constants on the college scene for years. Such drinking patterns are associated with violence, sexual assault and academic failure. So, any progress on that front is welcome.

But there is good news on college drinking patterns as surveys show strong evidence that youth and their parents have taken moderation message to heart. In fact, young people are now drinking at far lower rates than previous

generations of that age. And, they express concerns about health and safety.

How can we reinforce those positive outcomes? There is an example where positive actions achieved excellent results. It is a program from Iceland. In July 2018, I wrote about this program as follows:

"An intriguing approach to youth alcohol abuse can be found in the small country of Iceland. They have seen great success in lowering the drinking rate among children and teenagers. In the 1980's and 1990's, Icelandic teens drank at very high rates; today they are among the lowest. According to a local psychologist, "You couldn't walk the streets in downtown Reykjavik on a Friday night because it felt unsafe," and there were large groups of teens getting very drunk. Iceland instituted a number of policies that seem to be working. The approach is very positive and focuses on having a variety of activities to occupy and interest kids after school. The program choices are broad and include art, music, dance, sports, etc. But it also involves curfews at night and greater involvement of parents. In fact, parents are encouraged to spend a greater quantity of time with their kids, not just limited "quality time."

"Moderation and the Icelandic Model," Campaign for a Healthy Alcohol Marketplace Newsletter, July 2018

While all colleges and universities may not have the resources or desire to replicate such a program. Here are some ideas on how to get started:

1. Set a goal of positive action.
2. Work with students to develop a program of positive actions.
3. Learn about the Icelandic and other programs that used positive reinforcement. (Understand that no program works all the time anywhere.)

4. List college/community resources that could be part of the program.
5. Sponsor and/or suggest healthy activities such as sports, hiking, organized walks, community festivals, movies, etc.
6. Publicize any positive outcomes as well as opportunities for healthy activities.
7. Praise students for their accomplishments and emphasize that participation in healthy activities can lead to better grades and a higher graduation rate!
8. Collect data to determine results.
9. Praise all successes no matter how small!

Sources:

"Just half of Ann Arbor liquor stores checked ID, report says," By Jordyn Pair, Michigan Live, September 14, 2022

"Cheers, Boomer: How Alcohol is Becoming Has-been for Gen Z," News 18, July 30, 2022

"Younger people are drinking less alcohol than previous generations, study finds," by Kristen Dalli, Consumer Affairs, October 13, 2020

"Young Americans more likely to say no to alcohol, study finds," By Katie Hunt, CNN, October 12, 2020

"Iceland knows how to stop teen substance abuse but the rest of the world isn't listening," By Emma Young, Mosaic Science, January 17, 2017

"Moderation and the Icelandic Model," Campaign for a Healthy Alcohol Marketplace Newsletter, July 2018