

For Immediate Release
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Underage Drinking is the Leading Public Health Problem in U.S.—Marin joins national town hall series to create community solutions

Kentfield, CA- Youth Leadership Institute and the Redwood High School PTSA with support from the Marin County Friday Night Live Partnership and the County office of Alcohol Drug and Tobacco Programs organized a town hall meeting to alert Southern Marin parents, youth, educators, businesses and law enforcement of the country's leading public health problem: underage drinking. The Town Hall Meeting at the College of Marin Kentfield campus was part of 1,601 taking place in cities across the country in response to The Surgeon General's newly released report, "Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking." The Call to Action referenced findings from a recent study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which showed that people who begin drinking by age 15 are five times more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after age 20.

Organizers of the Southern Marin town hall meeting included youth and adults from the Youth Leadership Institute, Redwood High School PTSA, Redwood High School Peer Resource students, and the Larkspur City Council. This meeting will focus on clearly identifying the scope of the problem in Southern Marin, what people can do to take action and what can be done to sustain and support current and future efforts to prevent and reduce underage drinking in Southern Marin and the wider community. The national Town Hall campaign coincides with April Alcohol Awareness Month.

Currently 8 of 11 Marin municipalities have adopted a Social Host Accountability Ordinance (SHAO), and are among 47 cities and 7 counties across the state who have adopted this ordinance, most of them after 2006. These ordinances work to deter teen drinking at house parties, where a majority of Marin youth are getting alcohol and where much high-risk behavior is occurring. SHAO is one piece of the puzzle for preventing and reducing underage drinking.

The Surgeon General reported that on an average day in 2006, 7,970 teens drank alcohol for the first time, a much higher number than begin smoking or trying illicit drugs. "Underage drinking is a critical health and safety issue, with largely overlooked roots in environmental influences, such as social tolerance, access and marketing practices," said Maureen Sedonaen, CEO of Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which develops young people's skills around community problem solving. "Our youth surveys have shown that alcohol availability from parents and youth-targeted promotions is closely linked to when a young person begins drinking. This is a community level problem that needs a community level solution." According to the 2007 Marin Youth Health Advisory Council Access Survey, 62% of Marin youth say they most often consume alcohol at parties and others social events.

The Surgeon General's report calls for the community to work together to create public policies to support opportunities for positive growth and development of youth. Southern Marin communities are taking important steps in this direction, particularly with the adoption of SHAO's. Southern Marin has seen the most movement on the Social Host front in the past 6 months with the adoption of the ordinance in Mill Valley, Sausalito and Ross. Ordinances are being drafted in Larkspur, Corte Madera and Belvedere. Town Hall organizers asked attendees to sign pledges that they would take direct action to address underage drinking in their every day lives.

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About YLI

YLI builds communities where young people and adult allies come together to create positive social change. YLI has programs in Fresno, Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo Counties to create opportunities for young people to identify, change and influence issues that matter to them. YLI also trains groups around the country on engaging young people.

About Redwood High School PTSA

The mission of Redwood PTSA is to foster communication between the school and the home; present relevant parent education programs; encourage parents to become involved in school activities; and support projects or programs designed to improve the education, health, safety and well-being of students.

About Marin County Friday Night Live Partnership

The Marin County Friday Night Live Partnership, an affiliate of the California Friday Night Live Partnership is a collective of youth and adults representing 12 agencies across the county. The group, called the Youth Empowerment Alliance meets monthly at the Marin Youth Center for training, and networking to help youth build leadership skills and forge positive and meaningful relationships with their peers and other adults. YLI currently staffs Friday Night Live chapters in each of the four counties where our offices are located.