



March 30, 2004

Letter to the Editor Regarding Alcohol Awareness Month

Dear Editor:

April is national Alcohol Awareness Month, with a focus on underage drinking.

Alcohol is the drug most frequently used by high school seniors, and its use is increasing. Boys usually try alcohol for the first time at just 11 years old, while the average age for American girls' first drink is 13. Underage drinking is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile crashes and contributes to youth suicides, homicides and fatal injuries. Additionally, alcohol abuse is linked to as many as two-thirds of all sexual assaults and date rapes of teens and college students and is a major factor in unprotected sex among youth, increasing their risk of contracting HIV or other transmitted diseases.

Sadly, however, high school students lack essential knowledge about alcohol and its effects. Nationwide, an estimated 5.6 million junior and senior high school students are unsure of the legal age to purchase alcohol; one third do not understand the intoxicating effects of alcohol; and more than 2.6 million do not know a person can die from an overdose of alcohol.

While the issue of underage drinking is a complex problem, one that can only be solved through a sustained and cooperative effort between parents, schools, community leaders, and the children themselves, three areas have proven effective in prevention of underage drinking: curtailing the availability of alcohol; consistent enforcement of existing laws and regulations; and changing cultural misconceptions and behaviors through education.

Let's all wake up to this problem and get started on the solution. We can't afford to wait any longer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Brown", written in a cursive style.

Ben Brown

Deputy Commissioner for Substance Abuse Services
Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services