

## The Mesa Prevention Alliance Works to Decrease Substance Abuse Among Youth

Alcohol use among young people can have a damaging ripple effect on every aspect of a community—and, yet, youth are surrounded by mixed messages in advertising, movies, social media and, even from uninformed adults allowing them to use this “gateway drug.”

According to youth themselves, underage drinking is a trend among many Mesa teenagers and even preteens. The Mesa Prevention Alliance is working to reverse that trend and to address concerns of marijuana, prescription drugs and synthetic drug abuse as well.

The Alliance is a coalition made up of key stakeholders from various community sectors, and its mission is “to decrease youth substance abuse through community awareness.”

“Over the past two years, we have seen some decrease in underage alcohol use,” said Alliance Director, Karen Frias-Long.

Still, she admitted, the statistics are somewhat alarming.

According to the Arizona Youth Survey, “Eighth graders tell us they start to drink at an average age of 11.3 years old,” Frias-Long said.

Among high school students, in 2010, 55.3 percent said they had used alcohol in their lifetime; in 2012, that number dropped to 48 percent.

“We’re moving in the right direction in most areas,” Frias-Long said.

She credits the improvement to “collaboration throughout the city” and a strong “strategic plan” to raise awareness and affect change among adults who condone underage drinking.

“Unfortunately, 20 percent of high school seniors reported that they get their alcohol from a parent/guardian, an increase of 5 percent from 2010,” Frias-Long said.

To address this concern, the Alliance partners with the Mesa Police Department on two projects. “Shoulder

Tapping” involves volunteers from Mesa’s Police Explorer program and EVIT’s Law Enforcement class, who go out with officers and ask adults to buy them alcohol. If the adult agrees, officers educate them about the consequences of providing alcohol to a minor.

For the “Party Patrol,” Mesa police officers dedicate certain evenings to take all suspected underage drinking calls and to cite violators.

With these and other programs, The Mesa Prevention Alliance continues to educate Mesa residents, business owners and faith and community leaders. The Alliance also holds monthly meetings on the fourth Wednesday of each month for those who want to volunteer or to join as a “friend” or partner to help decrease substance use/abuse in Mesa.

“Building a community that is invested in youth, is building a better Mesa,” stated The Mesa Prevention Alliance Director, Karen Frias-Long.

**For information or to volunteer, visit [MesaPreventionAlliance.org](http://MesaPreventionAlliance.org) or call 480-768-6036.**



# protect. *don't* provide.

**THE mesa**  
**PREVENTION**  
**ALLIANCE**  
creating healthy futures  
[mesapreventionalliance.org](http://mesapreventionalliance.org)



**20% of Mesa  
12th graders report  
obtaining alcohol  
from an adult.**

**Mesa youth  
begin to drink  
alcohol at  
12 years old.**

(AYS, 2012)

**Text The Alliance at 480-341-0311 to Report Underage Drinking. Remain Anonymous - Protect Mesa's Youth.**