

Amistades, Inc.
Post Office Box 87361
Tucson, Arizona 85754-7361
520-576-3700
rmjasso@gmail.com

Youth Focus Group Report:
A Comparative Qualitative Evaluation Analysis

April 1, 2008

Submitted To:

Dr. Manuel Medina
Jeffrey Welch, M.A.L.A.S.
Adonis, M.S.W.

TERROS Behavioral Health Services
3003 N. Central, Suite 200
Phoenix, Arizona 85012

Prepared By:

Ricardo M. Jasso, M.Ed.
Cindy Corona, M.S.

Focus Group Report Overview

Amistades, Inc. was contracted to conduct a comparative analysis of the qualitative data collected from three focus groups by TERROS, Inc. Youth focus groups were conducted between January 2007 and January 2008. The youth focus groups were conducted with three distinct youth populations, urban youth, rural youth, and youth living in a mid-size metropolitan area. The focus groups centered around underage drinking and some other tobacco and drug use. The focus groups were held in Superior, Casa Grande, and Phoenix, Arizona. The youth for the focus groups were recruited by the following substance abuse prevention coalitions: Superior Substance Abuse Coalition, Casa Grande Alliance, and **xxxx (Phoenix)**.

Superior is the smallest community of the three, with a population under 4,000, Casa Grande has a mid-range population of approximately 48,000, and Phoenix is a large metropolitan area of over 1.5 million people. The youth were all asked the same questions, and were able to answer as they saw fit. Each focus group had one adult facilitator and one note taker. The following report will highlight the answers of the youth including differences and similarities among the populations and end with prevention programming recommendations.

Question 1: Is underage drinking a problem in your community? If so, Why?

The youth in Superior and Phoenix agreed that underage drinking is a problem in their communities. One respondent in Superior stated that there is a party about every week and there is always drinking in Superior. The youth in Phoenix stated that they hear that there is a problem on the news and that a lot of youth are drinking and driving. Both groups identified peer pressure as a reason why youth are drinking and that they do not care about the consequences. In Superior, one student said that parents are at the parties where youth are drinking.

In Casa Grande, the youth stated that there is not an underage drinking problem in their community, however anyone that does drink started at a young age. The youth stated that there is little to do in Casa Grande and that “teenagers think that getting drunk is the only thing to do to have a good time.” The Casa Grande youth also stated that underage drinking is or may be a rite of passage.

Question 2: What do you think about underage drinking?

The youth in Superior had more negative attitudes towards underage drinking than those in Casa Grande or Phoenix. For example, one youth in Superior stated “I just don’t think it’s right.” The respondents in Casa Grande and Phoenix seemed to have mixed attitudes regarding underage drinking, some thought it was okay if you know how to control it, while another felt that the youth should

not do it because they are hurting themselves. The youth in Phoenix identified other consequences of underage drinking including losing your job and messing up your life.

Question 3: How common is it for youth to drink?

The respondents in all three communities that underage drinking is happening all the time. The participants stated that teenagers are drinking at parties, school, and that it happens every day of the week. One respondent in Phoenix said youth drink on festive days such as Cinco de Mayo, Christmas, weddings and Quincineras. In Casa Grande youth are drinking primarily at night and on the weekends.

Question 4: Why do young people under 21 drink alcohol?

The youth in all groups identified several reasons for underage drinking, to be cool or popular, cope with their problems or because their parents do it and think it is okay.

Question 5: Are you expected to drink by older youth or adults?

The youth in Superior did not answer this question. However, the responses in Casa Grande and Phoenix ranged from yes, to not really. One participant in Phoenix stated that everyone has their mentality around it and a Casa Grande respondent stated that “when they refuse, some of their peers will respect their decision.”

Question 6: What messages does the community give young people (about underage drinking)?

All three focus groups identified beer commercials as where messages are coming regarding underage drinking. In Superior, one participant stated that the companies that sell alcohol portray to younger kids on television that it’s (drinking) a great way to have fun and it’s the cool thing to do.

In Casa Grande the youth stated that they observe adults around them drinking. The only negative messages discussed were in Phoenix. The youth stated that they hear that they should not drink and drive and that there are “stiff” penalties around driving under the influence.

Question 7: What should the community do about youth who drink?

The participants in Phoenix had the most strategies to deal with underage drinking including: house arrest, short-term juvenile hall, jail, probation, community service, inform parents, counsel parents to talk to kids. The youth in Casa Grande did not give any specific examples of what should be done, although it was stated that prevention is not a priority. In Superior, the only specific strategy named was community service, although it was agreed that there should be punishment.

Question 8: Where do youth drink?

The respondents in all three communities stated that youth drink primarily at parties. In Casa Grande and Superior, the youth stated that teenagers go into the desert to party. Likewise, the respondents in Phoenix stated that youth drink at parks. In Casa Grande and Phoenix youth stated that teens are drinking at school.

Question 9: When do you think youth are drinking alcohol?

The youth responded that drinking occurs on the weekends and at night. In Phoenix, holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and New Years were identified as times when youth drink. One youth in Phoenix stated that “it is a cultural thing during holidays.” In Superior and Phoenix respondents stated that teenagers drink when they are sad or when they are around certain people.

Question 10: Do you think kids would drink if they were supervised by their parents or someone over the age of 21??

The respondents in Superior stated that parents are usually at the parties when underage drinking occurs. One of the students stated that they went to a party and there were parents standing out in the road telling kids not to take beer out in the front because the party was in the back, so the parents were condoning the behavior. In Phoenix the participants stated that parents let teenager drink, and that adults feel its okay for youth to drink.

Question 11: How young do you think kids/teens start to drink alcohol?

The respondents in Phoenix stated that youth start to drink around 10-12. Some stated that youth start to drink as young as 4 or 5 because parents think that it’s funny. Most of the youth agreed that kids start to drink around middle school. In Superior, no specific ages were given how the students stated that a lot has to do with the parent’s decision. For example, one youth said that they have a friend that started drinking with her mother and now she gets drunk with her mother every weekend. Another student said it could be a cultural thing because “our community is mostly Hispanic and our culture its part of life for everyone to be drinking.”

Question 12: Do you think there are businesses that sell alcohol to minors? Why?

The youth in all communities stated that businesses are selling alcohol to minors. The respondents said that both convenience stores (Circle K) and bars and clubs sell to underage youth. The students also said that it is very easy to give an adult (like an older friend or relative) money to buy alcohol for them. In Superior, it is stated that teenagers go to a store their friend works at to buy alcohol. In Phoenix and in Superior youth said that they pay adults a few extra dollars or they can keep the change when they buy liquor for youth. It was also observed that cigarettes are also sold to youth in addition to alcohol.

Question 13: What type of drugs are young people using?

The participants in all three communities identified marijuana, cocaine, meth, and prescription drugs. In Superior, respondents stated that huffing and shrooms are also drugs that are being used. Phoenix youth stated ecstasy was another drug being used.

Question 14: Where are the young people using drugs?

Participants responded that youth are using drugs at parties and at school. The respondents stated that the youth are using drugs at school in classrooms. As with alcohol, teenagers in Superior are using drugs in the desert. Overall, drug and alcohol use seem to take place during the same times and at the same places in all of the communities.

Question 15: What do you think we can do to help young people who are using drugs?

Students in Superior suggested having forums where people who were addicted to drugs come and speak. One student said that the meth videos that show the effects it has on the body and what chemicals are in it are very effective. In Phoenix, one youth stated that parents should talk to their kids and that kids listen 1 out of 4 times when parents show kids effects of drugs. In Casa Grande students disagreed as to whether more school-based prevention was needed, with some stated “no-more is not needed,” and others saying more is needed “so the kids won’t do it.”

Focus Group Summary

Overall, the youth in all three sites had very similar responses regarding many of the focus questions asked. The youth were in agreement that teenagers are drinking and that these activities generally take place on the weekends and in the evenings. Participants also stated that youth are often drinking at school in all three areas. One difference between the smaller communities of Casa Grande and Superior and Phoenix is that the youth in the more rural areas drink in the desert, while the urban youth are drinking in parks. This is probably due to access; the desert is a very inconspicuous place for youth to drink in the rural areas.

Other similarities include the perception of adult attitudes towards drinking. In all three communities it was stated that adults allow the youth to drink, and in some cases purchase the alcohol for the teenagers. When asked if businesses are selling alcohol to youth, the response from all three sites was yes, however, the youth volunteered the information that oftentimes, they get an older “buyer” to purchase the alcohol for them. In some cases the adult buyer is paid to purchase alcohol for minors.

The differences in responses were mostly among the Casa Grande youth. Overall they had a more positive view of underage drinking and did not think it was a problem. This may have occurred because the youth in the focus group were part of the Underage Drinking Diversion Program. The youth in this program were ordered by the court because of some violation. The participants in Phoenix and Superior focus groups were not part of the same diversion programs and seemed to have more negative attitudes towards drinking.

Prevention Recommendations

Given the information collected during the youth focus groups, several recommendations towards underage drinking prevention can be made. The first is in regard to adult/parent participation in underage drinking. Youth in all communities stated that adults allow drinking and in some cases purchase alcohol for youth. Adult purchasing of alcohol seems to be a major contributor to youth drinking. One strategy could be an information dissemination campaign to inform adults that youth are gaining access to alcohol from their older family including parents and siblings. Additionally, an environmental measure can be to increase the punishment for adults purchasing alcohol for youth and more surveillance.

Another problem in the communities is that youth are drinking at school. It was stated in all of the focus groups that youth are able to drink at school. The youth stated that youth take alcohol

in water bottles and are able drink during class. More education and training may be done with teachers and administrators to reduce the underage drinking on school campuses.

Finally, one environmental strategy may be to increase adult and police surveillance of parks and in the rural areas the desert. The students stated that drinking often takes place in the desert and at parks, where there is little surveillance and supervision. To decrease the amount of underage drinking focus may be to increase police presence of these areas and to provide other places for youth to gather, alcohol free.