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Cobb Alcohol Taskforce Targets Adults, Recruits 100+ Teens

Written by [Chandra R. Thomas](#) on Sep 8, 2010

The Cobb County Alcohol Taskforce has a unique approach to curbing the number of young people who drink illegally – crack down on *adults*.

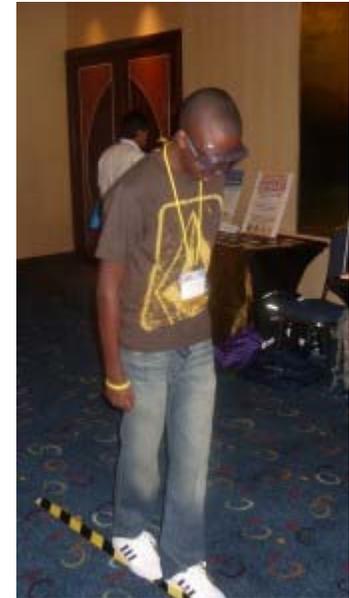
“It’s about rattling adults out of complacency and rubbing the sleep out of politician’s eyes to get them to wake up to the problem of underage and youth binge drinking that affects thousands of youth everyday,” says Youth Council Manager, Afiya King.

Unlike many organizations that tend to exclusively focus on discouraging youth from drinking alcohol, this one, formed in March of 2000 to address underage drinking conditions in Cobb, targets the actions or inaction of adults.

“We’re not about changing kids, we’re focused on the adults,” explains Taskforce Communications Manager Alisa Bennett-Hart. “Adults enable kids to have access to alcohol knowingly or unknowingly; through commission or through omission. Some adults consider it a rite of passage to drink. Some parents will provide alcohol on the grounds that they want to keep [teens] safe. We’re trying to break that social norm.”

The Council has its hands full too. Statistics have shown that 60 percent of the alcohol young people consume was obtained at home, notes Bennett-Hart. The research also highlights a correlation between alcohol and young people engaging in dangerous behaviors – everything from risky sexual activity to literally jumping off balconies.

“Our Cobb County students out drink the state of Georgia,” says Outreach Chairperson Pat Giuliani. “Forty nine percent of Cobb 10th graders say their friends use alcohol at home or at a friends house.”



Anthony Benton demonstrates drunk goggles

Adds community team leader Laura Searcy of the poll, “We’re not talking about some kid sipping a glass of champagne at their parent’s house on New Year’s Eve,” she says. “For the poll they mentioned consuming one or more alcoholic beverages. The numbers show that children are beginning to drink at a younger age; they’re doing it on the elementary and middle school levels. The research shows that children who begin drinking before the age of 15 are five time more likely to develop alcohol problems than those who start after 21.”



The taskforce is kicking off the current school year with a massive effort to recruit more than 100 middle and high school students to join the task force’s youth council.

“The youth council is a youth-led movement that’s part of the ‘take it back’ movement,” says King. “It’s about youth power, youth influence and youth brains multiplied. It’s about Cobb County youth coming together to make a difference in underage and youth binge drinking.”

Cobb Alcohol Taskforce teens at GA Teen Council Marietta High School student Natasha Walker says until she joined the council last year, she had no idea that alcohol was the most abused drug in the country. She's optimistic about the recruitment effort.

"I think we can do it," says Walker, 16. "There are so many young people out there who do positive things in the community."

To be considered for the group, applicants must be:

- Middle or high school students who are already a member of an existing Cobb County school or community youth group
- Personally motivated to reduce underage and youth binge drinking
- Demonstrate interest/willingness to share and learn specific skills
- Willing to serve as a member of the youth council for a minimum of two years.

Applications are due Oct. 4. Members participate in a vast array of alcohol prevention activities, including "reality parties," where youth act out for adults what happens at teen parties where alcohol is present. They also make community presentations, create public service announcements and join in weekend "sticker shock" exercises where they team up with Mothers Against Drunk Driving members in getting permission to place warning stickers on alcohol containers at stores. Most importantly, organization members say, is that members are encouraged to discourage their friends from drinking.

"I think it's important to get more students involved so that they can tell their friends why they should not drink," says Walker. "Through the council we've really gotten a better understanding of how to prevent underage and binge drinking. And we're in a better position to help out our friends and family members avoid it too."

Those selected for the council will receive leadership training and will get coached on how to map out a plan of action for their community during a summit slated for October 23.

The Cobb County Alcohol Youth Task Force application is available online at www.cobbat.org/youth_council.

Got a juvenile justice story idea? Contact JJIE.org staff writer Chandra R. Thomas at cthom141@kennesaw.edu. Thomas, a former Rosalynn Carter Mental Health Journalism Fellow and Kiplinger Public Affairs Journalism Fellow, is an award-winning multimedia journalist who has worked for Atlanta Magazine and Fox 5 News in Atlanta.



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