



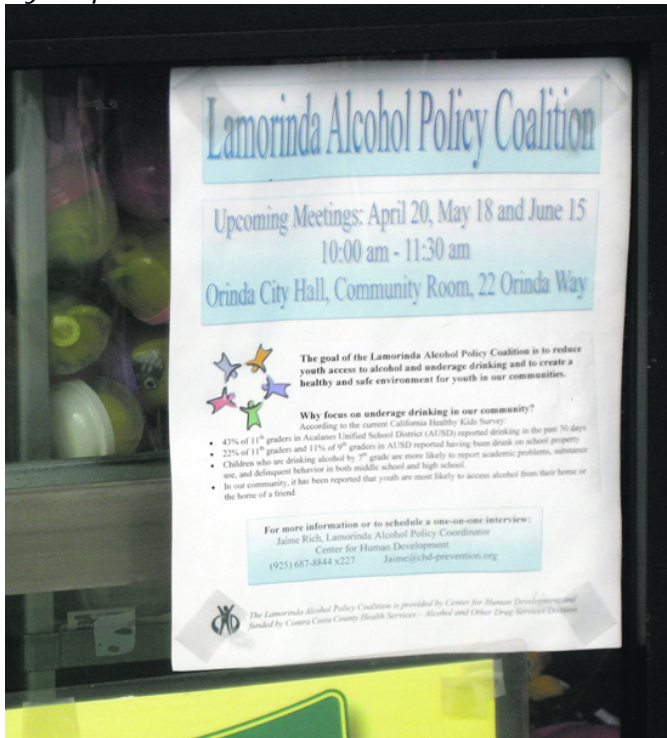
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Lamorinda Alcohol Policy Coalition Reaches Out

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga Safeway supports the Coalition and displays upcoming meeting dates Photo Sophie Braccini

Since last October Jaime Rich has covered a lot of territory. Hired by the Center for Human Development to start the Lamorinda Alcohol Policy Coalition, the Miramonte mom and clinical exercise physiologist has been holding regular meetings with a team of local stakeholders to define the Coalition's first objectives. "We have decided to start with identifying how our teens get access to alcohol and propose actions to limit this access," she said. At an April 20th meeting, actions items were listed and a global policy began to take shape.

Rich said that she contacted the different stores in Lamorinda that sell alcohol; using fake identification (ID) or stealing alcohol from stores is, according to the Coalition's research, the third most common way for teens to acquire it - after their parents' home and through older friends and siblings. According to Rich, the Safeway stores reported a sizeable number of incidents where youth were suspected of stealing alcohol from the premises. "The tactic seems to be to take a bottle to the bathroom and hide it in the backpacks," explained Rich, "but since the stores have a 'no chasing' policy some teens were not stopped." A proposal was made to have surveillance outside of the store. No store reported problems with fake IDs, may be because the bearers were never caught.

Orinda Chief of Police Jeffrey Jennings reported meeting one-on-one with students on this issue. According to his sources, students are getting alcohol with fake IDs, and parties continue to rage, often covered up by parents who either prefer to look the other way, or decide that they'd rather have their kids drink inside their homes than outside.

In a March 26 address to parents, Miramonte Principal Adam Clark wrote: "The Lamorinda Alcohol Policy Coalition found through their research that the number one place where teenagers obtain alcohol is from the home. Please speak to your students about attending parties where adults are allowing alcohol to be served to young people. These parties are continuing to occur where Miramonte students are present."

In the coming weeks, Rich plans to survey parents in order to better understand the behaviors and to inform parents of the legal implications of providing alcohol to minors. The Coalition participants agreed that the survey should be released to parents whose children attend middle school as well.

The meeting's guest speaker was clinical psychologist Dr. Tim Browne of Lafayette, who stated the average age at which children start drinking in Lamorinda is 13. He added that studies show that 40% of the children who started drinking before age 15 will become alcoholics at some point in their lives. "Things can be done," Browne added, "parents, schools and community can have a buffering influence. Parental involvement in the lives of teens is crucial and needs to be supported by good role modeling."

Coalition meetings are open to the public and are held once a month at Orinda City Hall in the Community Room from 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. For more information, contact Jaime Rich at (925) 687-8844 x227 or jaime@chd-prevention.org.

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