

Commentary | Marin Voice: Healthy adult modeling matters when it comes to substance-free youth events

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For 12 of the past 13 years, Marin ranked as the healthiest county in California in nearly every measurement.

The glaring exception is in areas related to adult alcohol use. According to data collected by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute for the [County Health Rankings and Roadmaps report](#), Marin's rates of adult excessive drinking and adult alcohol-impaired driving accidents are higher than most other California counties.

The youth data is also alarmingly high, with 44% of 11th graders reporting use of alcohol or drugs in the past 30 days –almost double the state average. This data indicates the importance of healthy modeling by adults since research shows that we have a significant impact on kids' decisions regarding alcohol and other substance use.

According to reporting by the National Institutes of Health, children's perceptions of parental drinking (both quantity and circumstances) appear to influence their own drinking frequency. It is due to these known facts, and the understanding that substance use culture can change in Marin County, that the Raising the Bar (RTB) initiative was developed in 2017.

The goal of RTB is to shift the norms around substance use and encourage modeling of healthy choices at youth sporting events and celebrations, kid-centered holidays like Halloween or pre-prom events with teens.

It is not focused on eliminating adult use of alcohol from our community; rather, adults are encouraged to be mindful of substance use and behavior at youth gatherings.

The campaign, which was developed and continues to grow under the umbrella of the Marin Healthy Youth Partnerships organization, has expanded its reach to 60 schools and organizations across the county.

Participating organizations include long-term partners such as the Sleepy Hollow Swim Team, Marin FC, San Anselmo Recreation Center, Mill Valley Community Center and Tamalpais Union High School District. Marin Catholic, Novato Unified School District, The Branson School, Mill Valley Middle School, Larkspur Corte Madera School District and San Rafael City Schools are among the newer schools and districts adopting the program. Youth organizations now sharing in our work include North Bay Basketball Academy, the Strawberry Seals Swim Team and Strawberry Recreation District.

Raising the Bar works in collaboration with Marin Prevention Network and Marin Health and Human Services, helping to fund field signs and banners throughout Marin County. The 248 field signs and banners (in both English and Spanish) for schools and youth organizations are meant to create dialogue about healthy modeling and to show unified support. The signs are seen on fields, in gyms, at swim meets and school campuses. The public signs show that there is an agreement to support policy that keeps alcohol, tobacco and other substances away from youth-centered activities.

Some Marin parents have shared their perspective of Raising the Bar's importance by posting on the initiative's website. In citing the importance of timely RTB emails about substance use by adults and kids, one compared it to the day (back in the early 1960s) when the parent's parent stopped smoking forever after seeing a commercial showing how kids naturally follow the path of their parents.

The parent noted the importance of the message for teens at perhaps "the most vulnerable time in their lives" and added that older teens and young adults are "not really kids any more but far from being grown up."

Raising the Bar is featured in a new documentary film titled, "Screenagers Under the Influence: Addressing Vaping, Drugs and Alcohol in the Digital Age." This third "screenagers" documentary shows how the tech revolution has reshaped adolescence and affected substance use.

You can watch a screening of the documentary at Smith Rafael Film Center in San Rafael on April 25. To learn more, email info@mhyp.org.

Lisa Klein, of Corte Madera, is a Project Coordinator for Marin Healthy Youth Partnerships. Please check out raisingthebarmarin.org or marinhealthyyouthpartnerships.org for more information.