

Roger Williams University Success Story

"Let's Prevent Underage Drinking Together"

April 29, 2014—Bristol, Rhode Island

INTRODUCTION

Roger Williams University (RWU), located in Bristol, R.I., is an independent, coeducational university with programs in the liberal arts and the professions. It enrolls 3,875 undergraduate students on a campus that sits on 43 acres overlooking Mount Hope Bay.

When Donna Darmody, director of health education and the alcohol/drug prevention coordinator at RWU, received information from SAMHSA about a grant to host a Town Hall Meeting (THM), she and Pamela Moffat-Limoges, RWU associate director of public safety, approached Gabrielle Abbate, executive director of the Rhode Island Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD), to facilitate the meeting. The three of them worked together to plan where and when it would take place and who needed to be there.

"We wanted constituents from Roger Williams, such as the Vice Preside of Student Affairs, and Vice President of Public Relations, as well as representatives from the Alcohol and Drug Task Force and community members," said Moffat-Limoges.

EVENT DESCRIPTION

Because the focus of the event was on preventing underage drinking, specific people in the surrounding communities where RWU students live were invited to the THM, including the Bristol Chief of Police, the Portsmouth Chief of Police, town administrators in charge of the civil penalty for underage drinking, the state police, and local coalition members representing the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), as well as local bar owners who might have to deal with students using false IDs.

"We asked people to RSVP and I am happy to say that almost everyone came, with the exception of the liquor store and bar owners that we invited from the towns of Bristol and Portsmouth, which is where our students live," said Darmody.

About 20 people participated in the event that went from 10 AM to 1 PM. After opening remarks by Abbate, the Dean of Students and Co-chair of Alcohol and Drug Task Force at RWU Kathleen McMahon presented information on what is taking place at the university in each of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's [tiers of evidence-based best prevention practices](#).

"We also presented data showing that student levels of drinking have been going down. Then we talked about barriers in the community as students are able to get alcohol from liquor stores by using false IDs. We pointed out that we can only control so much on campus and even though there is an ordinance against underage drinking, that lesson needs to be learned by the 1,200 new freshmen coming to campus every fall," said Moffat-Limoges.

Participants were invited to come prepared to make a presentation if they so wished. The state police gave a presentation on their efforts in preventing underage drinking along with some of the other organizations as well.

“It was really interactive and by 1PM, when the event ended, people were still chatting and talking openly about the issues. To us this was a really good sign because it seemed like people wanted to learn more and be able to do more in the community once they left the town hall meeting,” said Moffat-Limoges.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Participants were asked to complete evaluations forms provided by SAMHSA that were included in the event folders. All 22 participants completed the forms.

“I made copies before sending the forms to SAMHSA. The event got very good reviews and almost all the participants said that we should do it again, perhaps quarterly or a couple times a year. The topic itself also got very positive reviews and participants commented that Gabi did a great job keeping the discussions on point and getting everyone involved, even if they didn’t want to get up in front of the group to talk,” said Moffat-Limoges.

According to Darmody and Moffat-Limoges, the lesson that they learned from organizing this event is that there is a good network of people who are all on the same page regarding underage drinking prevention. But instead of working separately towards that goal, people want to work together and share resources.

NEXT STEPS

One outcome of the Town Hall Meeting is the desire of the participants to continue to share information and get together periodically to come up with some solutions to the problems related to underage drinking.

“The university’s Dean Kathleen McMahon, Vice President John King and Vice President Pete Wilbur, who attended the meeting, were very happy with the participation and outcome of the event. It was such a success that after looking at the evaluations and especially now that commencement is over Donna and I are working on a plan to have another meeting in the fall here at Roger Williams,” said Moffat-Limoges.

And, as a result of this event the Portsmouth Prevention Coalition decided to host a [Town Hall Meeting](#) on June 25, 2014. It followed the format of the RWU THM, with a community discussion on underage drinking that was led by six panelists and moderated by Abbate.

For more information, please contact
Pamela Moffatt-Limoges
pmoffatt-limoges@rwu.edu