



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 11-08-07

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Community leaders unite to address underage drinking

Stanton~ On November 2, over 150 community partners attended a county-wide summit to identify strategies to reduce underage drinking. The summit, sponsored by the Montcalm County Substance Abuse Advisory Council, was held “because underage drinking is truly a community issue”, stated Kimberly Singh, Chairperson for the Council and Health Officer for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). Participants included law enforcement, courts, health care, schools, students, churches, human services and a variety of other concerned citizens.

Regional needs assessment data provided at the summit indicated there was an increase in admissions to substance abuse treatment, with alcohol as the primary diagnosis by 133% from 2003 to 2006. In addition, within the six county region, Montcalm had the highest percentage of county-wide outpatient admissions for persons under age 18 (15.7%); an amount that nearly doubled over a two year period. Montcalm County also had the highest alcohol related juvenile arrest rates.

The summit identified six diverse, community- driven strategies aimed at reducing underage drinking. These strategies focus on increasing community awareness regarding the problem, building community commitment to address the issue, limiting access to alcohol, developing fun, healthy activities for youth, developing positive support systems and assuring consistent policies and enforcement. A meeting to review recommendations from the summit and begin the development of an action plan is planned for December 11 at the Montcalm Community College. For more information regarding the summit or meeting please contact John Kroneck, Montcalm Wellness and Prevention at 989-831-4591 or montcalmwp@cmsinter.net.

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