

SPF/SIG FINAL REPORT
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UNITING NEIGHBORS IN DRUG ABUSE DEFENSE COALITION



A coalition effort of the
RIO GRANDE VALLEY COUNCIL, INC.



Texas Strategic Prevention Framework – State Incentive Grant Final Report

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ABSTRACT

The Uniting Neighbors in Drug Abuse Defense (UNIDAD) Coalition membership have volunteered their time, homes, family, and images throughout our SPF/SIG journey. Their dedication to the UNIDAD Coalition transformed this coalition from a networking opportunity to a support system. With the mission in mind members worked together to incorporate UNIDAD Coalition objectives into their work and personal responsibilities with the added support of other members. Our UNIDAD Coalition mission

[Uniting Neighbors In Drug Abuse Defense Coalition aims to promote a drug free environment in our communities through coalition efforts that strengthen collaborations and engage individuals, families and community organizations to take an active role in responding to issues/trends related to underage / binge drinking, tobacco, and other drug use by youth and adults.]

continues to drive our membership as we look toward implementing efforts post SPF/SIG funding.

Strategies implemented during this project period were numerous and filled with teachable moments, awakenings, and inspiration. The project began with UNIDAD Coalition members learning about the Strategic Prevention Framework and how to take the information and apply it to the coalition goals. Members began by banning together to create a billboard to utilize with its first media campaign. In 2007, the *Underage/Binge Drinking Has Consequences* billboard was awarded a Gold Addy by the Valley Advertising Federation. Media campaigns continued to be developed by the UNIDAD Coalition with messages geared toward youth, young adults, and parents utilizing SPF to guide their efforts. Members and/or family members appeared in all public service announcements along with youth who took part in our focus groups. In some cases, to avoid location costs some members allowed production of the some of the PSAs to be filmed in their homes. Upon review of information gathered through needs assessments and focus groups with youth and adults the UNIDAD Coalition members began coordinating retreats in 2008. Youth and parent retreats were coordinated to provide participants with opportunities to learn more about facts/consequences of underage/binge drinking, brainstorm how they can change how youth perceive alcohol consumption and enhance coping skills. Feedback from the first retreat completed fueled members to continue their efforts and to date have coordinate three retreats with a fourth to be held next year. Other efforts include youth and young adult conferences, participation in community events such as TXDOT and UT-Pan American Spring Break events, information dissemination to retailers specifically on compliance with State liquor laws and education to DWI First Offenders -a collaborative effort with the Hidalgo County Probation Department.



Results of the bountiful efforts placed forth by members continue to be tracked. Some youth participating in retreats joined our efforts and began providing education to their peers and others volunteered their time to assist in completing PSAs. Outreach to media outlets to air PSAs resulted in free airtime and support by local channels and schools who continue to air UNIDAD Coalition PSAs. An important and valuable outcome to result from our SPF/SIG project is the increased involvement of professionals, community members, and youth. As our membership increased, our efforts strengthened and will continue to make an impact in our communities as our members continue to join us in our efforts.

ASSESSMENT

In the beginning of the project the needs assessment completed was broad. As SPF training and DSHS guidance was provided it began to take shape. Coalition members began to understand more about the process and purpose of a needs assessment. Furthermore, training and assistance provided by OZ White & Associates lightened the impact of surveying and compiling the data.

Throughout the years of conducting needs assessment the feedback provided included more details. As community members became informed their identification of needs was refined. Instead of simply writing down drug abuse prevention participants were noting alcohol use by youth. An overview of needs identified are as follows:

Intervention Needs

- For community members, the top five interventions in terms of need were
 - Drug education, after school programs, gang intervention, individual counseling and drug screening
- For agency personnel, the top intervention needs were
 - Individual counseling and drug screening (tied for first rank), peer support programs, neighborhood improvement, after school programs, adult education, and addiction treatment (tied for second rank)



Assets Ratings

- “Grading” the programs on a scale from A to F found the top five programs according to the community stakeholders to be
 - After school programs, group counseling, housing programs, individual counseling and family counseling (only after school programs averaged a grade of C)
- Agency personnel tended to give higher grades and the top five programs were
 - Healthy behaviors classes, drug education, individual counseling, drug screening and group counseling (all ratings were C or higher)

Individual Problems and Personal Needs Involving ATOD

- The top rated problems and needs according to the at-large community stakeholders were
 - Adult alcohol use, youth alcohol use, adult cigarette use, youth cigarette use and lack of drug knowledge on the part of adults.
- On the part of agency respondents, the top five rankings of problems and needs differed only slightly from those given by the at-large community group
 - Adult alcohol use, adult cigarette use, youth marijuana use, youth alcohol use and marijuana use by adults.

Other Problems

- The domains of peer, school and community presented these five top-ranked areas according to the at-large group of respondents
 - Lack of parent skills on the part of adults, lack of alternatives for youth, youth gang involvement, youth lack of interest in school, and youth lack of decision skills
- For agency respondents the top five problems in this set were

- Youth lack of interest in school, youth gang involvement, lack of alternatives for youth, lack of parent skills on the part of adults, and lack of alternatives for adults

UNIDAD Coalition members continue to work together to implement strategies representative of the needs identified by community members.

CAPACITY

Capacity built specific to resources

The UNIDAD Coalition began to highlight resources available through member organizations and members monthly providing time at the end of meetings for members to discuss projects or events being sponsored or offered through their organizations. As a result, awareness of community resources increased along with utilization by other agencies. UNIDAD Coalition and member events were also included in each others' listservs and calendar of events enhancing awareness efforts. Coalition members also encouraged schools, private businesses, and other organizations to provide information related to resources available and shared information with UNIDAD Coalition members.

Capacity built specific to community education

Community education efforts by UNIDAD Coalition members were limited in the beginning of the project in part due to members not being aware of the education opportunities, and partly due to coalition member availability. The UNIDAD Coalition Coordinator worked diligently to gather and disseminate information, notices, requests, and reminders which vastly improved coalition member involvement. Coalition members began sharing more information and asking for coalition member involvement. In an effort to prepare coalition members interested in providing education training specific to underage drinking and binge drinking were provided along with print and internet resources. UNIDAD Coalition members enjoyed partnering up to increase education efforts and soon began coordinating collaborative conferences geared toward youth, young adults, and parents. Throughout the life of the SPF/SIG project 10 conferences geared toward youth, young adults, or parents were provided in collaboration with UNIDAD Coalition members. To improve education efforts, coalition members documented and utilized recommendations/guidance provided by target population. Documentation was completed through satisfaction surveys, noting verbal feedback, and follow up emails with point of contact.



Capacity built specific to recruitment and membership procedures

A system for recruiting coalition members was established by the coalition members who began recruitment efforts by inviting colleagues and friends to participate. Coalition members also designated someone to go in their place whenever they were unavailable to attend monthly meetings. As a result of their efforts the UNIDAD Coalition membership has remained strong with continued support and recruitment. Procedures proposed and adopted by the UNIDAD Coalition include referring individuals to the Recruitment Committee for completion of membership agreement, review of coalition mission, strategic plan, calendar of events, and coalition governance.

Capacity built specific to sustainable outcomes

The training and guidance related to the Strategic Prevention Framework armed coalition members with the knowledge and aspiration to implement strategies sustainable post funding.

Through their efforts in identifying resources, building collaborations, and remaining active community education, media campaigns, and retreats will continue post funding. UNIDAD Coalition members came together and pinpointed strategies to continue that were less likely to fizzle and were strongly supported by the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN

In assessing community needs and resources lacking the UNIDAD Coalition focused their energy on the following strategies:

Strategic Goal 1

Community Awareness

Intervening Variable – Social Norms

The Challenge

Inconsistency; lack of networks, manpower, support, resources, community involvement; poor perception by community; and the language barrier are all challenges to be overcome.

Strategic Objectives

- *Increase the number of and provide presentations and alternative activities related to underage and binge drinking to youth, young*

adults, parents, and the community.

- Coalition members collaborated with community organizations including school districts and college campuses to increase education and alternative activities. Youth and young adults received training to assist in educating their peers about the facts and consequences of underage and binge drinking. Coalition members utilized media resources such as Youtube, emails, school channels, local city channels, radio, television, billboard ads, and newspaper articles to increase awareness of underage, binge-drinking facts and consequences highlighting media campaigns.
- *Develop and coordinate release of culturally appropriate and age specific media (billboard, commercials) related to the risks and/or consequences of underage drinking and binge drinking.*
 - Coalition members worked with youth, young adults, and parents incorporating recommendations specific to teen and young adult culture, language, and social norms.

Strategic Goal 2

Education Related to Facts and Consequences of Underage Drinking and Binge Drinking

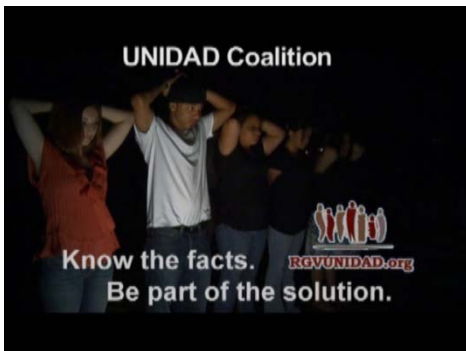
Intervening Variable – Low Perceived Risk

The Challenge

Reaching youth and young adults and changing perception of participation in underage and/or binge drinking. Many youth and young adults have role models (*peers, parents/family members, etc.*) who actively participate in underage drinking and/or binge drinking establishing such behavior as a norm.

Strategic Objectives

- *Coordinate conferences related to underage and binge drinking to youth, young adults, parents, and the community.*



- Coalition members collaborated to educate communities, including school districts and college campuses by providing education opportunities in an effort to change perceptions. Focus groups were held to assess current trends and perceptions. Education efforts placed forth incorporated information, examples, and references countering misconceptions related to underage/binge drinking.
- UNIDAD Coalition members also collaborated with the Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department to identify and provide education to first time DWI offenders.

Strategies implemented during this project period were numerous and filled with teachable moments, awakenings, and inspiration. The first strategy to be implemented was a media campaign geared toward youth. In 2007, the *Underage/Binge Drinking Has Consequences* billboard was awarded a Gold Addy by the Valley Advertising Federation. Media campaigns continued to be developed by the UNIDAD Coalition in collaboration with youth, parents, and community members with a total of 7 public service announcements completed through the SPF/SIG project. Members and/or family members appeared in all public service announcements along with youth who took part in our focus groups. In some cases, to avoid location costs some members allowed production of the some of the PSAs to be filmed in their homes. The public service announcements completed were titled *Underage Drinking, Social Hosting, Binge Drinking, Motor Vehicle Fatalities, Crunk Free, Alcohol & Kids, and Pablo's Interview*. Social norms were highlighted in some of the public service announcements while others increased awareness of legal consequences related to underage/binge drinking/social hosting, local trends and statistics. The SPF/SIG funding provided the UNIDAD Coalition with the means to learn and develop public service announcements and through this experience members can now continue working with youth, parents, and organizations to develop more.

Upon review of information gathered through needs assessments and focus groups with youth and adults the UNIDAD Coalition members began coordinating retreats in 2008. Information provided by youth and parents consistently included recommendations for more activities or opportunities to speak with peers. Youth and parent retreats were coordinated with topics selected based upon recommendations noted in evaluations, surveys, and focus groups. Experiential learning activities were implemented to further engage retreat participants. Feedback from the first retreat completed fueled members to continue their efforts and to date have coordinate three retreats with a fourth to be held next year. Participants noted that the retreats provided opportunities to learn different ways to spend time without consumption of alcohol or drugs; improved communication skills; broke stereotypes associated with student status; increased awareness of support and resources available; and clarified facts/consequences related to underage/binge drinking.

I am watching and enjoying everyone have fun taking this moment with me and realizing we can laugh together not at each other. (15yr old male)

Youth and young adult conferences also resulted from feedback gathered and some were held prior to retreats in order to increase awareness and reinforce information provided. Speakers for the conference were mainly coalition members with special guests invited to participate. The UNIDAD



Coalition members coordinated 3 youth, 2 young adult, 3 parent and 2 youth/parent conferences as part of the SPF/SIG project.

UNIDAD Coalition members also participated in community events such as TXDOT and UT-Pan American Spring Break events and coordinated other community events throughout the year collaborating with different member organizations, schools, and social service agencies. Community events served not only to increase awareness about underage/binge drinking but also assisted in increasing community involvement. In an effort to keep local retailers conscious of Texas State liquor laws information was disseminated monthly to retailers specifically on compliance with State liquor laws. Retailers were encouraged to contact TABC for support and packets sent out included assistance available through TABC. Another strategy implemented was education to DWI First Offenders -a collaborative effort with the Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department. This collaborative effort came about during a monthly coalition meeting and was well received by participants.

EVALUATION

Strategies implemented by the UNIDAD Coalition continue to show positive change within the target populations. Work completed during the SPF/SIG project paved the way and secured key stakeholders who will continue implementing community awareness and education strategies. Outcomes for SPF/SIG strategies are as follows:

Conferences/Retreats Strategic Outcomes

The UNIDAD Coalition members worked together to meet the need for education specific to underage/binge drinking by coordinating 10 conferences with South Texas College, PSJA ISD and Donna ISD. Feedback provided reinforced the need for education specific to facts, consequences, trends, and solutions related to underage/binge drinking. Youth consistently voiced their lack of knowledge related to the impact alcohol has on a developing brain.



I want to be somebody-had I known what drinking [alcohol] did to my brain I would never have tried it.
(Female-15yrs old)

Parents also responded to education efforts with a common response relating to their limited knowledge of social host laws. Most parent participants were unaware of consequences related to providing alcohol to friends of their children. As a result of increased awareness, when surveyed parent participants providing alcohol prior to attending the Parent or Parent/Youth conferences noted they would no longer be providing youth with alcohol and would begin talking to their children about the impact of underage/binge drinking. Also, parents stated having conferences twice per year helped them get involved with their youth and learn about the latest trends that their children are exposed to.

Retreats held for youth were in collaboration with Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) ISD. Representatives of PSJA ISD were involved throughout the planning of retreats and secured parent consents and transportation for participants. PSJA ISD counselors screened youth based upon criteria agreed upon by UNIDAD Coalition members. Participants represented leaders and at-risk youth from three schools within the PSJA ISD. Through this collaboration a strong support was formed resulting in action to continue providing retreats post funding. Additional outcomes observed and documented were breaking down of stereotypes association with student status- honor students saw value in contributions provided by their peers who were truant or known to 'get in trouble'. The retreat also helped some youth who did not see value in paying attention in school or 'making

good grades' identify their strengths and noted they would begin trying to do better. Over the course of the SPF/SIG project **610 youth, 326 Young Adults, and 260 Parents** participated in either conferences or retreats coordinated by UNIDAD Coalition members. Total participants reflect unduplicated numbers.

Community Events Strategic Outcomes

In order to reach out to target populations effectively and efficiently, coalition members became involved in identifying community events coordinated for youth, young adults, or parents. UNIDAD Coalition members participated in and collaborated with community organizations, schools, private businesses, and law enforcement in diverse communities ranging from colonias to professional settings. This resulted in an increase in requests for UNIDAD Coalition involvement. Events ranged from tying in fitness with the damaging effects of alcohol; drunken goggle obstacle course; media literacy activities; portable ropes activities; artistic representation of the impact of underage/binge drinking. As a result of the variety offered youth and young adults volunteered their time to assist in coordinating events. Another outcome was a youth group who participated in a coalition activity whereby participants were asked to create a play highlighting underage/binge drinking consequences entered their work in a competition and placed at the local and regional levels making it to nationals. Community events coordinated or collaborating with the UNIDAD Coalition reached **7,144 Adults** and **13,695 Youth**.

Retailer Education Strategic Outcomes

During this project period **510 alcohol retailers** received information on Texas State liquor laws. Retailers were contacted to follow up on information provided resulting in opening discussions related to their fears of being penalized by Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC). UNIDAD Coalition members worked closely with TABC representatives to improve retailers' perception of TABC and assisted in reinforcing to retailers the resources and support available through TABC. Their collaborative efforts resulted in an increase in retailers seeking assistance from TABC ranging from clarification of state laws to server training.

Education to DWI First Offenders Strategic Outcomes

In 2007, UNIDAD Coalition members focused education efforts targeting DWI first offenders residing in Hidalgo County. The Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections department was contacted and participated by screening offenders and providing space in their facility for members to conduct education efforts. Education provided dealt with assisting offenders in identifying positive ways to cope; recognizing self-destructive acts; identifying support systems; and learning about the health and legal consequences of underage/binge drinking. Since its inception education to DWI first offenders has reached **1,130 Adults**.

An unexpected outcome of education efforts to DWI first offenders was a request by the Judge Mario Ramirez Juvenile Detention Center to provide similar education to youth being detained for drug related offenses. Education efforts at the juvenile detention center began in 2009 and have reached **130 Youth** to date.

Media Campaigns Strategic Outcomes

204 Media contacts and awareness activities have been completed by UNIDAD Coalition members during the span of the SPF/SIG project. Over 70 adults and 150 youth participated in making public service announcements through their participation in focus groups, developing social norms messages, writing, selecting media outlets, acting, or providing support during filming. The support



provided by youth, parents, coalition members, and other organizations strengthened the UNIDAD Coalition's media and production skills resulting in a unanimous decision by members to continue producing public service announcements in collaboration with youth, parents, schools, and other organizations.



LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned were embraced as they assisted in strengthening our efforts and making the most of limited resources. One important lesson that was difficult to shake when this project was started was the perception of program staff having to complete project objectives. It was often thought it would be quicker to complete tasks and members would not feel burdened if staff took the responsibility of reaching the majority of project objectives. The amount of work needed to be completed in order to assess needs, plan and implement strategies is too much for one person. As the membership strengthened and talents surfaced the thinking process of staff changed. UNIDAD Coalition members took over meeting project objectives with staff serving as a guide and providing support. Follow up with coalition members became a key to reinforcing the need for their help and follow through.

Throughout the SPF/SIG project it was reinforced to our members how valuable their time was by providing them with different options to participate and applying different modes of communicating. We found that some members stated they preferred to be emailed but would not respond unless telephoned while most noted the best way to reach them. It is important to try other modes not selected by members as sometimes they are not sure what really works until implemented.

New coalition members were provided with packets and updated on coalition history and objectives by the UNIDAD Coalition Coordinator. This continues to be refined as time is constricted and members invite others to join monthly. It is important to develop a system early on focused on updating new members so that they do not feel lost and as a result stop participating.

Another important task is to take an interest in your members – remember topics of discussion they bring up and remember to follow up with them on personal points of interest as well as coalition work. Doing so will establish a strong relationship and a reciprocal sharing of resources and ideas. As their sense of support increases they will look for others to join and/or will speak more frequently about the benefits of volunteering for your coalition.

Working with diverse individuals with a variety of expertise and talents has been amazing. As we journeyed through learning the Strategic Prevention Framework to implementing and evaluating strategies UNIDAD Coalition members grew closer. The camaraderie created continues to fuel members and staff to take action and change perceptions, behaviors, and communities.