



Rationale for engaging youth

The youth-led implementation model of *Protecting You/Protecting Me*® (PY/PM®) has been designed for teenagers who want an opportunity for leadership development and a way to make a valuable contribution to their community. Teens can be a valuable resource to communities, and research shows that activities utilizing "peer modeling" strongly motivate youth to get involved in social service activities (NRC, 2002).

The project activities have been designed to educate community members, parents and children on the dangers of underage use of alcohol. Since we know young children have the tendency to look up to older youth as role models, the decision to engage teens to develop and implement these activities was based on the following:

- Research shows that teenagers can have a positive impact on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of children as well as their same-age peers (Meyer, et al. 2004).
- Social Learning Theory indicates that our attitudes and behaviors are reflective of the people we come into contact with on a regular basis (Bandura, 1977).
- Teens, as peer leaders, learn to be organized and become actively involved in and responsible for positive change in their communities (Hoover & Weisenbach, 1999).
- Not only do peer leaders develop leadership skills and learn to be positive role models for youth, they also start to "listen to their own advice." From their experiences as teachers, many teens begin to make more responsible choices (Marczak & Peterson, 1999).
- The research on youth-involved, community coalitions to deter underage alcohol use shows some positive results in reducing the number of youth using alcohol in local communities (Ellis & Lenczner, 2000).

This project affords teens a variety of innovative activities to educate parents, youth, and community members/leaders on the dangers of underage use of alcohol while providing an opportunity for them to make an impact on a real-life youth issue in their community. In order to develop and implement these activities, teens will incorporate two types of leadership roles. They will be:

- Change agents: initiating activities based on facts and data that can make a change in the community.
- Cross-age teachers: serving as teachers to pre-teens and/or younger children.

This project is an opportunity for teens that want an enjoyable, yet effective, way to become actively involved in a current youth issue in their community. Specifically, they can help parents, youth, and community members/leaders overcome a laissez-faire attitude about alcohol use by those under the age of 21, learn about the dangers of underage use of alcohol and become concerned enough to devote appropriate local resources to insure that underage use of alcohol is reduced in their community.