

**BENTON POLICE DEPARTMENT**



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*The 2007 Herman  
Goldstein Award  
Application Packet*

*The Every 15 Minutes  
Program*

*Sponsored By the Benton  
Police Department*

# **Underage Drinking and Driving in Benton, Arkansas**

## **I. Summary**

The Every 15 Minutes project was designed to, and did, essentially reduce underage drinking during prom night in Benton, Arkansas. The goal was to reduce the full range of harm associated with underage drinking. These harms included the usual crime and public safety concerns- violence, disorder, physical injury, and loss of life- but were also explicitly framed to include harms not usually seen by the community. These included, especially, the damage to family relations associated with the usual frameworks on alcohol issues, and the individual and community harms created by alcoholic consumption by individuals that choose to get behind the wheel of a vehicle after consuming alcohol. Distinctively, and probably uniquely, it explicitly recognized and addressed the norms and narratives around alcohol issues that are embedded in law enforcement, communities, and offenders. In doing so, it recognized implicit common ground among all parties and crafted a strategic response in which all parties could change their behavior for mutual benefit.

This strategy grew out of the familiar focused deterrence or “pulling levers” framework, but added transformational elements. An operational plan was developed that personally addressed individual affects of alcohol use within the student body of the school and engaged the students to help alleviate this problem in their own social group. Outside and additional resources were used to help provide a greater impact to this problem. The strategy has been successfully performed in various cities and

states throughout the United States helping educate high school students of the ramifications of driving while impaired.

## **II. Description**

### **A. Scanning**

Benton is a city of approximately 27,700 people in central Arkansas (it is approximately 15 minutes away from the city of Little Rock, AR) with a community type living atmosphere. The city is 90% white, 6.4% African-American, and 3.6% other; with 6.5% of families living below the poverty line. Benton experiences alcohol abuse even though we are a dry county. This is a county that does not sell alcohol within its boundaries. With neighboring counties near by that are not dry, you don't have to go very far to buy alcohol. We have several restaurants that have special permits that allow drinking if you are a member of their private club, adding to the rise of alcoholic incidents.

Benton, working with our neighboring city Bryant Police Department, was able to work together and bring the Every 15 Minutes program to the Benton High School student body and surrounding community. Also involved were our local Benton Fire Department, Baptist Hospital Med Flight, Saline Memorial Hospital; M.A.D.D. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, A.B.C. Alcohol Beverage Control; numerous city agencies, service providers, churches, and community groups. Alcohol related incidents on prom night have decreased compared to just a few years ago, when several students were sent home after being found to have had something to drink prior to their arrival to the prom.

When Chief Gary L. Sipes heard of this innovative program of approaching alcohol related incidents he immediately decided to implement the Every 15 Minutes program, which affects our city on a daily basis. Sipes first hand knowledge of the effects that drinking and driving can cause to a family and community strengthened his resolve, making him more determined to help minimize the occurrence at which we deal with drunk driving in our city. Alcohol abuse knows no social status or economic background. Chief Sipes pursued this problem even though several people in the community do not believe that there is a problem or that the problem is not big enough to waste anytime on. National statistics show that 70% of all crimes are committed by juveniles and when you add alcohol into the mix, you have a deadly combination.

### **B. Analysis**

One set of analysis was drawn from extensive field experience (all those who participated in this project have years of experience in alcohol related crimes and incidents.) Many of the incidents in the community associated with "the alcohol problem" are associated with the stigma that you need alcohol to have a good time and that it is a social status of being grown up among underage drinkers. The Every 15 Minutes project was thus framed not as doing something about underage drinking but rather trying to change the mindset of young people about the responsibility and danger of alcohol.

To identify underage drinking you do not have to look very far in our society. With the service calls that we as police officers take on a daily basis it is easy to see that there is a problem and something needs to be done to address it. Officers

continually patrol the streets on nights and weekends under current DWI grants to assist in curbing this problem. Too many times though someone under the age of twenty-one decides to consume an alcoholic beverage and get behind the wheel of a vehicle. One example of when this was especially true was on a prom night with one event a couple of years ago. Approximately eight students arrived at the Benton High School prom under the influence of alcohol. They said it was all in the name of fun and just wanting to have a good time. Luckily no one was hurt and everyone made it home safely. This is an incident that does not need to become a repetitive behavior for future students.

Students and young adults know there are many places they can illegally obtain alcohol. Some obtain alcohol from their parents, telling them that as long as they stay at their house then it is ok to drink. Other's turn to friends that are over the age of twenty-one and are willing to buy the alcohol for them. Once again, this sends a message to them that this type of behavior is acceptable. Many alcohol related arrests are made but this seems to have little impact on their drinking habits.

Individual's morality; the views of respected family, peers, and role models; and clear community standards are the most effective influences of good behavior. These influences are not aligned against individuals in troubled communities. Deeply racialized narratives identify underage drinking with the long history of deliberate oppression of the minority community, and label law enforcement as racist. Among networks of offenders, informal norms require individuals to act as if jail and prison are nothing to fear, early death is inevitable, disrespect requires violence, and the like.

There are strong community feelings against underage drinking, and offenders have a real interest in not being involved, but most tend to fall to peer pressure.

All parties involved misunderstand one another in many important ways. Law enforcement and other outsiders see no clear stand from communities against underage drinking and believe the moral strength of communities has been lost. Communities see law enforcement transparently ineffective, destructive strategies; infer corruption, and deliberate oppression. Offenders see their own communities and believe that their actions are excused, tolerated, and even celebrated. Offenders see each other and believe each is committed to deviance. Law enforcement sees offenders as irrational and even sociopathic. At work are classic social dynamics such as "attribution error", in which belief commitment is wrongly inferred from behavior, and "pluralistic ignorance", in which members of a group wrongly infer and they follow group norms. These norms, narratives, and dynamics are never explicitly addressed, misunderstandings are not revealed, and common ground is not apparent.

### **C. Response**

The operational plan that resulted from these considerations was designed to address the problems of underage drinking, with many other unsuccessful alternative programs designed to deal with this particular problem. There have been countless seminars and testimonies to influence this problem but none that made it much of a reality for those that engage in underage drinking.

The Every 15 Minutes program came about by the success of similar programs performed by different school districts within our state. Many challenges were faced with trying to implement this program. This type of program takes a lot of monetary

contributions from the community to make this possible. Approximately \$19,000 is required to make this a reality and if it had not been for the generosity and support of the community we would not have accomplished the goal that we set out for.

We also had to coordinate with the high school students and administration to make sure that the students that were selected to be involved knew what was going to be asked of them. With the program we intended to accomplish a greater understanding and awareness of the potential dangers of underage drinking. Making those individuals realize that they are not always the only ones affected by a careless decision. In helping shed a greater light and totality of what all happens in a drunk driving accident we enlisted the help of several area agencies. Several students were selected for the Every 15 Minutes program; the students that were chosen were hand picked by the counselors at the Benton High School. Those individuals were chosen in order to have the maximum impact on the rest of the student body.

The students were informed that a grim reaper would enter their classroom; announce that their life had been tragically taken from them in an alcohol related accident and that their time on earth was done. At this time an officer would step into the classroom and read their obituary, which their parents had prepared. From there the student would be sent to a designated area where they were transformed into the living dead, through the use of makeup, and sent back to class. The students were then no longer able to participate in daily activities or allowed to speak to anyone, including their friends and family.

Later that day the student body was taken to the high school stadium for a mock drunk driving accident. At the accident scene the students were able see first hand

what happens in a drunk driving accident with injuries. The students witnessed some of their fellow classmates being treated by the fire department, police department, rescue, and the Med. Flight Helicopter.

To add to the effect of the Every 15 Minutes dramatization, the students involved in the program were taken on a retreat, away from their friends and family. They were not allowed to have any outside communication and were asked to write a letter to their parents saying "If I died today what I would want you to know." The parents also wrote a letter to their child telling them what they would have wanted to say to them if this had been a reality. The letters were then exchanged the next day.

The next day is followed up with an assembly in the auditorium, with the entire student body present. They are shown film footage, which was filmed earlier, to help them see the circumstances that lead up to the accident involving their classmates. Special speakers are also brought in during the assembly to give first hand accounts of accidents they personally have been involved in and how it has changed their life.

Involved were our local Benton Fire Department, Baptist Hospital Med Flight, Saline Memorial Hospital; M.A.D.D. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, A.B.C. Alcohol Beverage Control; numerous city agencies, service providers, churches, and community groups.

Months of planning went into this program before it ever became a reality. A steering committee was formed months in advance, with many of the local and state agencies participating to help insure a successful program. The steering committee was in charge of overseeing that the program remained on track for completion and that every small detail was taken care of before the day of the event. They were also

in charge of overseeing that the appropriate funds were attained and all the appropriate supplies were ordered to ensure that the program had the maximum effect on the students.

Some of the difficulties encountered in this endeavor were very stressful. The steering committee did not always agree on everything that transpired at the meeting, but with patience and understanding we were able to work through these problems and come to a mutual agreement, which would benefit everyone in the process. The one thing that was kept in mind is that this program did not belong to us, but instead to the students of Benton High School.

#### **D. Assessment**

I believe there has been a major mindset change in the student body of the Benton High School regarding underage drinking and its consequences as a result of the Every 15 Minutes program. I think the Every 15 Minutes program has affected the parents and teachers just as much as it has affected the students. The Every 15 Minutes program has made several individuals stop and think of the impact of having a couple of drinks and getting behind the wheel of a vehicle can have on them and others. The Every 15 Minutes program has a way of making you realize that your actions have more than one consequence on just the individual behind the wheel, but it also affects their parents, teachers, friends, aunts, uncles, and other family members. The effectiveness of this program has a lasting effect as the students carry this experience with them through out life and are able to remember back on how one small decision to drink and drive can cause a life altering change to anyone who is

involved in an alcohol related incident. I have heard personnel testimony from individuals saying that because of this program that they were involved in during high school that they were forever changed. They did not want to be the cause of someone else's pain or misfortune due to the careless and selfish act of drinking and driving.

One does not need a survey to see the results of the effectiveness and impact that this program has already had on the students, because it was written on their faces. As the accident scene unfolded in front of them they were captivated and amazed at what was transpiring before them. To see police, fire, and rescue personnel work on their classmates in this mock accident scene captured everyone's attention, making them realize that this could be them.

By playing on simple human emotions and making this program a very emotional and heart-wrenching event that illustrates to students the potentially dangerous consequences of their use of alcohol, regardless of how casual they believe their use may be. It was our goal to utilize the strengths, talents, and resources of our community, business, and industries to prevent future drunk driving incidents. In order to make sure this program and its message of drunk driving is not forgotten, we plan to undertake this program every three years so that when a ninth grader reaches his senior year in high school they will also be educated by this program. Through the Every 15 Minutes program we hope to insure that every student that passes through the Benton High School has had a chance to experience this life changing program first hand.

### **III. Agency and Officer Information**

In preparation for this initiative the Benton Police Department worked with the steering committee over several months to insure a successful program, through sound ideas and good planning. Those ideas were cascaded to all operational personnel in the department that participated. These set the basic frame for the operation, with the details worked out by the department, its agency partners, and key community members.

All levels of the Benton Police Department were involved with the implementation of this program. The chief and captain went to several of the preliminary meetings and ensured that every member of the department understood the strategy, could provide input and was committed. Everyone was asked the same two questions, "Is this worth doing? Is this something you will support?" The overwhelming answer was yes. The implementation team involved all ranks and divisions.

For the officers "making a difference" became its own incentive. They were able to see the importance of the program and the potential impact of such an event. Several patrol officers took a personal interest and volunteered their time to insure the success of the program. Within the community the public praised the implementation of this program, which is all the incentive our officers needed. There is really no true way to measure this: the incentives were intrinsic not material.

Implementation of this program is cost effective in the sense that if it has saved one life or changed one mind set on the dangers of underage drinking and driving then it has all been worth it. I know that every parent that had a child attending prom was thankful that their child returned home safely that night.

this program to be a success. Benton Police Department believes in this way of doing things, pragmatically and philosophically, and has several officers that continue to think of new and inventive ways of solving problems in our community, that we live and work in. We think that this is the way we- and others- should approach police work. Due to the overwhelming monetary contributions made from our community I am enclosing a DVD of the event that we produced, along with a photograph slide show of the program.

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May 22, 2007

Dr. Rob T. Guerette  
School of Policy and Management  
University Park, PCA 366B  
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11200 S. W. 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Miami, Florida 33199

Re: 2007 Herman Goldstein Award

Dear Dr. Guerette,

Enclosed is the Benton, Arkansas Police Department's, submission for the 2007 Herman Goldstein Award. I am honored to submit this nomination on behalf of the men and women who represent the Benton Police Department. The personnel within this department have conducted, what I think is, one of the most exciting, innovative, and effective programs related to Problem Oriented Policing.

Working with Robbie Rutherford, Assistant Principal of the Benton High School, and a number of other local agencies and partners, the Benton Police Department implemented the Every 15 Minutes program to reduce the number of drunk driving accidents in Benton, AR. The strategy dramatically improved the awareness to the Benton High School student body of the consequences of getting behind the wheel of a vehicle and driving impaired. Most important, I think, it did so in such a way the students realized that their decisions do not just affect them but everyone that surrounds them and cares about them. As a result they start thinking about the right things to do at the right time and if we can change one student then this has all been worth while.

Law enforcement helped organize the effort and played an important role in carrying this program out, but because of the strength and dedication of the larger partnership, the need for actual enforcement was minimal. As we recognize the devastating damage that impaired driving does to individuals, communities, and their families, this is a crucial development in awareness.

The core ideas of this program are simple. The most powerful step that could be taken to address impaired driving in our city would be for the communities to set a clear

understanding that such a crime is unacceptable. Due to some animosity between law enforcement and outsiders, getting communities to come together does not typically happen. We found that working through our differences it is possible to open doors to simple but very powerful community oriented relationship, so that we can open the eyes of individuals to the dangers of driving while impaired.

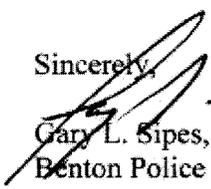
This program is a two-day event involving and affecting approximately 1200 students, teachers, administrators, various civic groups, businesses, and area residents. The final feature of this program is the student body assembly that stresses that the decision to consume alcohol can affect many more people than just the one who drinks.

Members of the Benton Police Department, at all levels, are involved in this program; they have taken ownership and responsibility for the implementation and management of the program. This model has been implemented and used in several other cities around the country. They also have had great success in similar implementation of this program. I think this program completely incorporates the concept of Problem Oriented Policing. By depending heavily on the input and generous participation of the community we were able to influence the student body at Benton High School. This program has changed the relationship between the community and law enforcement significantly.

In summary officers of the Benton Police Department feel it has implemented an outstanding program that benefits the entire community of Benton, AR, enabling our community to be a safer place to live, work, and play.

I am honored to represent the Benton Police Department in the submission of this application for the 2007 Herman Goldstein Award.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Sipes, Chief  
Benton Police Department