



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING  
FOR THE PREVENTION OF PROBLEMS RELATED TO  
ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

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## PREFACE

In 1985, a nonprofit agency in Marin County was striving to stimulate local community action for the prevention of problems related to alcohol and other drugs. The Bothin Foundation, a San Francisco-based charitable organization, demonstrated real courage by supporting this fledgling project whose program directions and goals would be set by community members, not an agency. It was an unusual role for a philanthropic organization to play. At the time Bothin made its initial investment, no one could predetermine or predict the actions, activities, or even the means of implementation; in this process community programs would evolve organically as community members discussed problems and set priorities.

Another exceptional feature of the grant was that Bothin provided continual support for the organizing process over a six-year period. Too often, seed funding for new programs is terminated after the first or second year of operation, thereby dooming the effort before it has a chance to mature. The presumption is that a worthwhile, effective project will be able to generate a stable and diverse funding base once it is up and running. Unfortunately, in times of budget reductions and cut-backs, nonprofit and community organizations encounter great difficulty maintaining their basic services, much less expanding their programs and testing new approaches of addressing social ills. The Bothin Foundation did express concern that a relatively small foundation could have only limited impact on the complex arena of alcohol and other drug related problems, but the Board came to understand that if such an innovative approach could be translated into real change, the process might easily be adopted in other neighborhoods and cities throughout the country.

## INTRODUCTION

Grassroots citizens groups across the country are forming to address the problems related to alcohol and other drugs facing their neighborhoods and cities. Pastors and congregations are whitewashing billboards that advertise alcohol products and target their communities. Alcohol policy networks are being established to regulate local alcohol availability. Neighborhood residents are taking absentee landlords to small claims court to rid areas of crack houses. Parents of high school seniors are working to host sober graduation parties. These efforts, and others, demonstrate a growing trend of citizen action for the prevention of problems associated with alcohol and other drugs.

As more and more grassroots groups emerge to address alcohol and other drug related problems, professionals in the prevention field are recognizing the effectiveness of these efforts. A new wave of community-based prevention programs is focusing on environmental prevention issues. Proactive in nature, environmental prevention seeks to address the physical, social, political, and economic factors that contribute to alcohol and other drug problems. Environmental prevention means a change in the way alcohol is advertised, packaged, sold, and promoted in society; it also means changes in health care, education, housing, and employment opportunities and practices. None of these goals can be accomplished without broad-based citizen participation and action that challenges the social, political, and economic institutions in our communities, towns, and cities.

If government services and social agencies are to promote community action, we will need to examine citizen initiatives to discover the broader principles governing their operation. Who becomes involved in such groups? Why do they fail or succeed? How do they alter the power relationships in a community? What roles can and should professional nonprofit organizations play in relation to these groups? The answers to these questions lie

in analyzing both the tangibles of projects and activities, as well as the more elusive factors of group process, group formation, and group dynamics. Effective organizing gives a voice to those who have felt powerless to take action on their own. Individuals discover shared experiences and values, and gain the courage to voice their concerns, hopes, and fears. Together, group members brainstorm actions and build strategies, they become invested in each other, in their communities, and in the solutions.

Many existing prevention programs, while claiming to be community based, are designed in isolation from the very communities which they are meant to serve. Coalitions of planners are largely comprised of professionals without broad based-participation from the residents affected by the problem. Programs are typically generated and directed by agencies; a few token residents serve on committees but they often feel overwhelmed by the experts and frequently drop out.

Although some drug and alcohol prevention programs can boast of impressive track records and great successes, most cannot. The assumption that the agency knows what is best for the community—that the agency has the best understanding of community problems and the best understanding of the solutions—blocks communication and success. Agencies undertake needs assessments to prioritize social and health problems, they develop "innovative," "cutting edge" programs and then bestow their expertise on the community. Community residents, however, have seen these model projects come and go, usually dependent on shifting funding fads and trends. When funding is terminated or other vital resources are withdrawn, the project ends because it was never truly owned by the community to begin with.

Largely as a result of the institutional attitudes described above, many community residents have withdrawn from civic participation and public life. Suffering from a

growing sense of political impotence, citizens today often describe themselves as politically uninvolved. Individuals are convinced that their efforts will not make a difference so they refrain from taking action. The average person often feels that the political system is oblivious to his or her needs. Frustration gives way to cynicism and cynicism breeds political inaction. A recent study prepared for the Kettering Foundation, "Citizens and Politics, A View From Main Street America," documents the rift between citizens and political life and describes a number of contradictory but prevalent themes: 1) citizens feel disconnected from political activity; 2) the political structure is unresponsive to the every day concerns and problems of people; 3) the average citizen believes that nothing can be done to ameliorate the problems of the current political system; 4) the average person still cares deeply about public life; and 5) people will engage in civic action if they believe that it will make a difference. In the context of such contradictory beliefs, growing citizen frustration and anger with politics, and a social service system which perpetuates dependent relationships, citizen-inspired efforts to address social problems and create social change are remarkable and worth examination.

Agencies, too, face difficult challenges when organizing for social change. Agency staff are accountable to boards of directors and to funding sources that have the power to dictate mission, direction, and methodology; their power can easily undermine community organizing, which requires that accountability rest with the community itself. Agencies are also reluctant to support controversy for fear of jeopardizing their funding base.

Throughout the country, prevention professionals are discovering the limitations of advocating for progressive prevention policies in the absence of grassroots support and are turning to the field of community organizing for guidance. Only by understanding the essential principals of community organizing and the daily experiences of citizen groups

can prevention professionals better advocate for stronger community control, and thus support true community-based programs.

This narrative has been developed as a guide for prevention professionals and activists who want to work for environmental prevention of problems related to drugs and alcohol through a community organizing model. Part I is concerned with the ways and means of establishing an effective community organization and reviews the essential principals of community organizing. Part II details three case studies of community groups that have grappled with alcohol and other drug problems in their communities for several years. These case studies illustrate many of the community organizing principles presented in Part I, and they also explore diverse community-based actions for prevention from which other groups may benefit. Despite their involvement in organizing for social change through agency-based activities, social service professionals can also benefit from learning more about community-based action and change.

PART I  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PREVENTION OF PROBLEMS  
RELATED TO ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS



Grassroots organizing is based upon the premise that people can join together to improve the quality of life in their communities, cities, and counties. In a "bottom-up" process, citizens identify and define issues and problems that affect their communities. They plan and implement campaigns to address these problems, and together they take action. As people join forces to solve problems, they strengthen relationships within their community and acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques which are useful in all areas of their lives.

A basic assumption of community organizing is that those who have direct experience with a problem understand it best and are in the best position to determine effective solutions. The challenge for an organizer is to respect the community's knowledge and skills and at the same time encourage community members to risk taking new roles, form new organizations, and act in new and powerful ways. Experience has shown that several basic principles, when applied on a daily basis, will help an organizer to maintain this crucial balance. The principles are defined below under three separate headings: First Steps, which includes *listening, building trust, and recruiting members*; Forming an Organization, which includes *group structure, funding, challenge, leadership development, and actions & campaigns*; and, Maintaining an Active Organization, including *evaluation and celebration*. It is important, however, to remember that all of the principles are relevant at all stages of the organizing process.

## First Steps

### Listening

In the early phase of the organizing process, the most important task for an organizer is to listen. This sounds simple, but in practice *listening* is a difficult skill to develop because we each carry our own personal beliefs and opinions about the social problems facing our neighborhoods and communities. We have our personal analyses of the causes and cures for alcohol and other drug problems, and we are eager to share these analyses.

For those with extensive experience in the study of problems related to alcohol and other drugs, listening may be more difficult. We have witnessed good programs and bad programs. We think we know what works and what does not. Some of us spent years in universities gaining knowledge and skills so that we might be useful. Our degrees and diplomas indicate a certain expertise and we want to share our training and help improve the human condition. But no matter how well we understand the issues, *listening* is important for several reasons. First, we want to understand the world view of those most directly affected by the problems. Second, we need to comprehend the social, political, and economic forces shaping the life of a particular community. And, third, we want to discover the interests and needs of the people who live in the community. Only by listening can an organizer begin to understand these factors, and through these learn what will move residents from a point of inaction regarding drug and alcohol problems to a point of action.

The organizer begins work by initiating an interview process with key community leaders, informal neighborhood leaders, and with their friends. The organizer might

interview the same person once, twice, or several times. Questions that need to be covered during this process include:

- What is it like to live (or work) in this community?
- What are the drug and alcohol problems that concern you?
- How do drug and alcohol problems touch your life on a day-to-day basis?
- How do you think the drug and alcohol problems in this neighborhood might be prevented?
- What prior efforts have you been engaged in for the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems? Were they successful? Why or why not?
- What prior efforts have been made in this community to prevent drug and alcohol problems? What has worked and what has not worked?
- Would you be willing to come to (or host) a meeting to share your concerns and ideas with others?

To organize you must begin where people are. You begin with their history, their beliefs, their traditions, their experiences, their motivations, and their concerns. Communities in need are accustomed to social service professionals who arrive on the scene having already conducted a needs

"The organizer paid a call on me. She came over and it actually seemed right. A little bit of my history is that I have alcoholics in my family, and had been somewhat active in alcohol-related stuff for about 15 years. So when the organizer came in I actually had been looking for a niche in the community. I believe that's part of what I do as a minister of a local church is to find more ways to get involved in the local community. This seemed to be a project to make this a better place, and all that, and I had a fair amount of energy around the issue."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council

assessment and developed an "innovative" program to fix the problem. Too often such programs make little difference and fail to attract the support of those they were intended to serve because they are not grounded in the real day-to-day experiences of the people.

## Building Trust and Hope

The listening and interview process allows the organizer to gain a deeper understanding of community life, to discover people's values and interests, and to build trusting relationships with community members. Only within the context of a trusting relationship can the organizer start to push boundaries and challenge community members to act on their values and visions and work to prevent drug and alcohol problems.

In the early stages, the organizer is also introducing the notion that ordinary citizens acting collectively can effectively prevent problems in their communities. What one person may be reluctant to try alone becomes feasible for a group; together people can experience the strength that numbers bring. For example, one person, upset by a local store selling alcohol to minors, may find it difficult to change the practice, but fifty people, whose lives are affected, can succeed and change the store's selling and marketing practices.

"I was sent to a training where I realized that we could have a significant impact on the community. I have always been very interested in social change movements, and social justice movements and how to actually make them happen. How to do something more than just keep up a lot of noise. I'm fascinated with the idea that a smallish group of people can really make a difference, and make changes happen."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

## Recruiting Members

The emphasis of this narrative is on recruiting ordinary community residents to serve as members of grassroots prevention groups. The organizer wants to enlist members beyond his or her own professional circles, and build a broad-based, diverse organization representing the entire community, not just one small segment of the population. The organizer works to help residents to make links between their shared issues, problems and concerns. Let people know that they are not alone in the problems they face and they will

join together to take action.

While recruiting, the organizer also talks to potential members about the importance of the organization itself. Rather than simply mobilizing as many people as possible to attend a City Council meeting on a one-time basis, the organizer attempts to form an organization which will last over time and will grow in its strength and power. Organizing to move people from a position of powerlessness to a position of powerfulness, to work together and bring about social change, requires a long-term commitment on the part of both the organizer and the residents.

### **Building A Prevention Group**

Up to this point, the organizer has spent most of his or her time conducting interviews and forming one-on-one relationships with community members. At a critical point the organizer must suggest that people join forces to discuss conditions and possible solutions; that they form a prevention group. If residents have grown to respect and trust the organizer, if they trust that the organizer respects them, if they feel some ownership of the formation process and experience hope in acting together, they will be willing to join in and be part of the organizing effort.

### **Group Structure**

Community residents who make the commitment to work together will need to decide on an organizational structure early on. Structure provides members with a sense of stability; they know when meetings will take place, who has which roles, and where the responsibility and authority lie. A good structure also allows for a rotation of roles and responsibilities.

There is no one perfect and correct model for structure. However, experience suggests that certain elements are critical. A mission statement, developed by the founding *group members*, helps to clarify vision and direction. Membership guidelines, also determined by founding group members, as well as a structure by which members communicate with one another and hold each other accountable are also important.

The three community groups described later in this narrative all rely on a direct membership structure. People join the group as individuals rather than as agency, organizational, political, or business representatives or leaders. The direct membership structure corresponds to the organizational goal of encouraging citizen participation as opposed to providing yet another forum for agency staff to do their work.

The group's members create a structure for decision making, electing officers, and forming committees. They set meeting times, dates, and agendas. People are inclined to attend meetings when they have been responsible for planning them. They more readily attend meetings when they and not some outsider who has no experience of their world will set the agenda. And, they attend meetings when they know that the programs and actions proposed will be meaningful to their life circumstances.

## **Funding**

Decisions about the group's funding base have tremendous consequences for the prospective program. Some groups operate on a small budget easily generated through membership dues and fundraising events. There are no strings attached to money generated in this fashion, so group members maintain autonomy and control over the money and the program.

Some groups receive funding from outside foundations and state or federal sources.

These funds are generally concomitant with product development or program outcomes as established by the funder, which can compromise the group's authority as well as their ability to engage in conflict or controversial social actions. Careful consideration must therefore be given to the sources of outside funding. In particular, a new group must clearly establish that its own goals and priorities will be preserved and protected. (Many grassroots groups have been torn apart by funding agendas that conflict with the group's original goals and priorities.)

### **Challenge**

The organizing principle of *challenge* is integral to the growth of an effective organization, to the growth and development of the organization's members, and to the evolution of a skilled and competent community organizer. From the beginning, potential community group members are being challenged to act on their vision of a community free of problems related to alcohol and other drugs. Many people claim to be dissatisfied with politicians, institutional leaders, the alcohol industry, the advertising industry, and others, but social change does not arise from complaints in the absence of action.

Community members are challenged to act on issues of concern, and they are also challenged to act collectively with others who share their concerns. This organizing approach is designed to alter relations of power by forming an organization of people who regularly interact with one another. They reflect on their shared values and visions, develop collective strategies, support one another, and challenge community status quo. Adding new members to the group and ensuring attendance to meetings are key challenges for group leaders.

An important challenge facing all the community group members is that of learning

to deal with conflict. If the group engages in campaigns designed to change or establish new public policies, conflict is inevitable and often desirable. People somewhere are benefiting from the status quo and they can be expected to fight for their self-interests. Change does not come easily, conflict predictably arises, and group members need to be prepared.

The organizer is also in a position to be continually challenged by the community, the organization members, and by new situations that may not fit old assumptions. There are numerous questions that a good organizer must regularly face and ask himself or herself:

- Am I truly listening to the interests and concerns of the group or am I pushing my own agenda?
- Do I have credibility in this community?
- Do group members trust me?
- Am I challenging group members to act on their visions?
- Do I adequately follow up with people?
- Am I challenging members to develop their leadership skills?
- Am I doing for group members what they could do for themselves?

If the organizer is not facing his/her own challenges, community members will not accept the difficult challenges thrown their way by the organizer.

### **Leadership Development**

Until recently, leaders in the prevention field have been paid professionals who rely on agencies and government organizations for their support. The organizing approach presented in this document seeks to develop ordinary citizens as competent and self-



confident leaders whose support lies in the members of their community. In the world of community organizing, leaders are people who have a following. They are respected and trusted by other community members, and they are in touch with the pulse of community life.

Effective leaders encourage and recruit others to attend meetings, actions, and events. An individual may be "likable" or exhibit any number of positive personality traits, but if he or she has no followers and cannot recruit others to the effort, the individual will not be considered a leader from an organizing perspective. He or she will still be a valued group member for other reasons, however, and additional leadership skills may be developed.

Organizing provides many opportunities for all group members to develop new talents and skills such as meeting facilitation, public speaking, working with the press, conducting research, and team cooperation. An organization that relies on one or two people to serve the leadership functions and that neglects the leadership development of other members will eventually find itself in trouble. If leadership becomes entrenched in the hands of a few, the group will cease to grow and be unable to expand its base of support.

Despite its importance, organizers often neglect leadership development for several reasons: members feel overwhelmed by the tasks and resist leadership roles; organizers lack time; existing leaders appear more capable than the potential leaders; and new leaders might bring new agendas and ideas that will not correspond with organizers' priorities or funding requirements. Despite these barriers, leadership development is a continual challenge that organizers and existing leaders must face if the group is to flourish and be effective.

## Actions and Campaigns

The underlying principle of all community-based prevention campaigns is that of self-determination; the community itself must design the campaign and set the objectives. The organizer can only pose critical questions about strategy and share information or resources. The final decision about what is to be done belongs to the community, which will live with the consequences long after the organizer is gone. The organizer wants to avoid any dependent relationships between him/herself and the community group. The group may engage in a campaign that does not win, meet its goals, or build the organization, but as long as the campaign belongs to the group, members will learn from whatever they do. The organizer's challenge in these circumstances is to help the group understand the lessons learned and apply these lessons to their next campaign.

The organizer helps the community group consider the criteria by which members will select their prevention project. Criteria will vary according to the size of the group and their history together. The identified problem should be one about which participants feel deeply and whose objectives should be achievable within a reasonable time frame. Organizational power is enhanced if the selected project is "winnable" or "do-able," if it has broad-based support and people care passionately about it, and if the project can be completed in a timely fashion. Ideally, the first endeavor should result in a victory. As the organization builds power, it will be able to take on larger and more complex issues and community concerns as well as build a larger and more committed membership.

The groups we are concerned with here are seeking to reduce alcohol problems and other drug problems in their communities. Campaigns designed to *improve community awareness* or *educate the community* are too vague and virtually impossible to evaluate. On the other hand, a campaign to remove an offensive billboard near a school playground

is tangible, and a community group can describe its victory in concrete terms. Through community-based actions and campaigns, people learn about their own power to change the environment in their communities, not the power of agency staff, politicians, or other alcohol/drug professionals and experts.

People join organizations that have a record of accomplishment. When a group takes action and experiences initial success, the community knows that it is credible, that it acts on its own vision, and that it can get things done. More members will be attracted to the organization as its reputation for creating real and meaningful change grows. Then, as the group grows in size, its capacity to tackle more difficult problems is enhanced.

## Maintaining An Active Group

### Evaluation

Application of all of the key principles of organizing should be evaluated and reconsidered on a regular basis. Through evaluation, the organizer emphasizes that all of the key organizing principles, from listening and building trust through taking action, are applicable at all times. Evaluation also gives the group a chance to revisit structural considerations and decide such basic issues as whether to maintain the current structure or add new committees, to raise more money or cut back on fundraising activities. Periodically, the group leadership will have to set time aside to reconsider these and other essential questions.

Evaluation, on a different level, must also be an integral part of each community meeting and activity. Four essential evaluation topics to be addressed at regular meetings are listed below, together with key questions to help the group in the evaluation process. The topics include: the *meetings* themselves, *membership*, *leadership*, and *actions*.

#### *Meetings*

- Does the group conduct effective meetings?
- Do the meetings start on time?
- Is there an agenda?
- Does the Chair of the group successfully move the members through the agenda?
- Are critical decisions made which move the group forward?
- Is the Chair of the group capable of handling disruptions?
- How does the group deal with conflict?

#### *Membership*

- Is the group able to recruit new members?
- Do organizational members feel central to the group and involved in the day-to-day life of the group?
- Does the membership reflect the diversity of the community?

- Are members in regular contact with one another, discussing problems, ideas and decisions with one another?
- Do group members hold one another accountable to agreements and commitments?

### *Leadership*

- Does new leadership constantly emerge from the group?
- Is the leadership of the group entrenched in the hands of a few?
- Do the members of the group have ongoing opportunities to learn and practice new skills?
- Who speaks for the group?
- Are the leaders of the group respected by other members of the group?
- Are the leaders of the group held accountable by the membership?

### *Actions*

- Did group members properly determine the power relationships?
- Did group members clearly define their targets?
- Did group members get what they asked for?
- Did group members properly estimate their strength and resources?
- Did group members have fun?
- What was the turnout?
- Did members get an opportunity to experience their power?
- Did the group clearly define demands and goals?
- Did the group meet organizational goals?
- Did the group receive desired media coverage?

### **Celebration**

Celebration serves many important functions in the life of an active community organization. It is an act of affirmation which acknowledges progress, recognizes accomplishments, honors individuals, makes notice of milestones, and highlights special days. Celebration raises members' spirits, connects members to one another, and renews the group's sense of energy and commitment. Community groups that do not take time for thoughtful and deliberate celebration lose an opportunity to strengthen their organization.

Opportunities for celebration are numerous. A campaign victory, a successful activity, an anniversary of an important event, the development of new skills or new roles, and even members' birthdays are all occasions worthy of celebration. People are attracted to join organizations in which they will feel affirmed for their participation and contributions to the effort. It is especially important to acknowledge achievements when members are trying new and difficult roles. And remembering to have fun is always important for the well-being of all who participate, for the strength of relationships, and for the vitality of the group.

PART II  
A CASE STUDY OF THREE COMMUNITIES

This section describes three citizen movements organized to address problems related to alcohol and other drugs within three diverse and distinct communities. The descriptions of the development of these popular undertakings are intended to underscore the importance of citizen involvement as an effective force in addressing drug and alcohol problems, and to help guide those initiating similar projects by emphasizing the organizing principles discussed in the previous section.

Technical support for all three groups was provided first through the California Health Research Foundation and later by the Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems. The provision of a community organizer, who still works to support and build these grassroots organizations, has been by far the most important support. As described in Part I, the organizer develops relationships, challenges people to act collectively, assists groups to analyze problems, conducts research, and supports campaigns. The organizer's purpose is to assist ordinary citizens in building an organization capable of developing and implementing effective, community-based strategies.

In 1986, the first two community action groups were formed in the neighboring towns of Mill Valley and Marin City. Mill Valley is an affluent, predominantly white town of 14,000, while Marin City is a predominantly African-American community of approximately 2,500 residents. The Mill Valley organization came to be known as the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council while Marin City chose the name of the Marin City Drug Task Force (DTF). The Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council serving Novato (also in Marin County) was organized a year later.

In the seven years since the groups' inception several lessons have been learned through a nonlinear process; there was progress and there were mistakes. Years of occasionally frustrating, sometimes exhilarating, experience in these disparate settings has



yielded a rich body of knowledge which can be used to provide guidance to others working for prevention on the community level. The recounting of each community's group organization includes the setbacks as well as the victories because the lessons gained from mistakes have proven just as valuable as those learned from the successes.

### **Novato, California**

In a town forum in 1987, the youth of Novato (a suburban city of 44,000 residents) spoke up and expressed their anger. Many were recovering from drug and alcohol addictions and all had friends who regularly used drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and other drugs were readily available and affordable, and all the young people claimed that although school administrators were fully aware of the problems, they were reluctant to acknowledge or deal with them.

"The public meeting did turn up a fair amount of kids talking about using alcohol and drugs and saying that they've been using since they were five or six under their parents' noses, without their parents knowing about it. Basically picking up on their parents, alcohol and drug use. We heard testimony from young kids, 14-15-16, already in recovery, sounding very elderly... Out of that came the Prevention Council."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

### **Formation of the Group**

Town meetings rarely lead to further social action. Citizens express frustration and anger, then they sigh and go home. In this case, however, the town meeting gave birth to a group of concerned citizens who organized to take further action. Three months after the initial town forum, with the assistance of a community organizer, Novato citizens formed the Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council.

The Community Organizer was (and still is) provided by a local nonprofit

organization whose board and staff support community organizing as a vehicle for policy change and the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems. The organizer spent her first three months in Novato applying the organizing principles of listening and relationship building. She acquired the sign-in list from the town meeting and began conducting a series of one-on-one interviews with those who attended. In the interviews, the organizer posed some critical questions:

- Why did you attend a town meeting on alcohol and other drug problems?
- Have alcohol and other drug problems affected your life, your family, your friends' lives?
- How do alcohol and other drug problems affect the Novato community?
- How has Novato responded to alcohol and other drug problems?
- Why do you think these problems exist?
- What do you think would help prevent alcohol and other drug problems in Novato?
- Would you be interested in working with others who share your concerns, to prevent alcohol and other drug problems in this community?

Each interview session lasted thirty minutes to an hour, and in many cases the organizer visited interested individuals two to four times. As an initial organizing step, "listening" is time consuming. Agencies, boards, and funders need to recognize and affirm the importance of this key organizing principle, for "listening" is the foundation for the relationships which are the heart of organizing.

In Novato, one-on-one interviews were conducted with approximately 45 individuals. Of these 45, 24 agreed to form the nucleus of what became the Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council. Two individuals agreed to co-chair the group, and a twice-monthly meeting schedule was established. Novato Prevention Council members decided to write a long-range prevention

"It does make a difference to sort of engage in an actual project. It is real important to sink your teeth into something right away. To stop talking and do something. At some point you have to kick up a little noise in the community, and get noticed."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

plan for their city. The Novato plan took two years to write and in 1990 the City Council and the Novato School Board (both formal Council sponsors) officially endorsed it.

### **Action Campaigns**

Members began implementing activities and action campaigns. Actions included a campaign to ban alcohol in city parks; a campaign to implement a Conditional Use Permit for the City; a project to interview and endorse candidates for the Novato City Council; a campaign to ban cigarette vending machines in the City; and a project to honor and recognize prevention activists in Novato. All of these projects are described in detail below.

#### *Alcohol in the Parks*

As its first project, the Prevention Council proposed a city ordinance to prohibit alcohol consumption in the city's parks. The Council recognized that many adults habitually congregated in the parks on weekday afternoons, six-packs in hand, to bring an end to the work day. Would-be park users complained that beer drinkers were responsible for the littering, vandalism, and harassment that was keeping many residents from using the parks. Parents with small children stayed away from the playgrounds, which in the late afternoons were often empty.

"Our big success, I think, was getting alcohol out of the city parks. It was so painless and made such a huge difference. The atmosphere was changed overnight. The law was passed and the people disappeared. Every afternoon in our downtown city park the parking lot was full of pick-up trucks with guys drinking beer. When I took my little girl there we'd have to run the gauntlet between all these people. She'd ask, 'Daddy, what are all these people doing here?' And I'd say 'Well...'"

- Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

They proposed an ordinance, modeled after similar bans in other Marin County

cities, forbidding alcohol in the parks except for special events requiring a specific city permit. Even with the permit, the ordinance limited consumption of alcohol to the park's picnic areas. The Police Department and the Parks and Recreation Department favored the ordinance, there was no organized opposition, and it was passed unanimously. In many ways, the ban on alcohol in the parks was the perfect campaign. It met the criteria of "immediate, winnable, and do-able," discussed in Part I. The Novato group secured good media coverage as a result of the ordinance and began to make their presence in the community known.

### *Conditional Use Permit*

The Novato Prevention Council's longest and most difficult campaign was the passing of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Ordinance to regulate the sales and service of alcohol in Novato. Conditional Use Permits are essentially zoning permits that allow cities and counties in California to regulate the availability of alcohol on a local level. Cities with CUP ordinances can evaluate permit applications on an individual basis or they can establish criteria that must be met by the applicant before the permit will be granted. Through the CUP process, cities can control the density of alcohol outlets and mandate restrictions on the sale and service of alcoholic beverages.

Members of the Novato Prevention Council spent the early days of the campaign conducting research. A model CUP was secured so that Novato residents could discover the range of restrictions possible for implementation in their community. Next, members contacted nearby towns that had passed CUPs to learn about their experiences. Prevention Council members reviewed potential regulations one by one and developed a set of recommendations for the Novato CUP. Minimum conditions agreed upon by the group

included the following:

1. No alcohol-on-sale establishment should be maintained within 500 feet of any other establishment where alcohol beverages are sold or served, or from any residences, schools, established churches, hospitals, playgrounds, and other areas of similar uses.
2. Masonry walls should be constructed around the parking area of alcohol-on-sale establishments when this area is adjacent to residences, churches, hospitals, etc.
3. Restrictions on noise levels generated from on-sale establishments were established.
4. Levels of exterior lighting on parking lots were established.
5. Server training was mandated.
6. No beer or wine should be displayed within five feet of a cash register (off-sale premise) or the front door unless it is in a permanently installed cooler.
7. No advertisements of alcoholic beverages should be displayed from motor fuel islands.
8. No display or sale of beer or wine should be made from an ice-filled barrel.
9. No self-illuminated advertising for beer or wine should be located on buildings or windows.
10. Employees on duty between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. must be at least 21 years of age to sell beer and wine.

For over two years members of the Novato Prevention Council struggled with the City Council, restaurant owners, and alcohol distributorships over the proposed wording of the CUP and the conditions listed above. Opposition came from four primary sources: the local distributor of Coors beer, the parent corporation for the local distributor, the owner of a popular Novato restaurant, and the owner of a small liquor store. Representatives from these establishments voiced outrage over the first paragraph of the proposed CUP (see top sidebar on page 29).

Opponents of the CUP wrote members of the City Council stressing their objections to the paragraph. One letter stated "I would like to express my disgust with the verbiage used in this ordinance... A small special interest group is being allowed to portray a reputable and legal industry as a second class citizen." With the first paragraph of the CUP, the battle lines had been drawn. The City Council responded to the controversy by mandating that members of the Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council meet with representatives of the alcohol industry to review and rewrite the CUP.

"The (Novato City) Council finds and declares as follows: Establishments engaged in the sale of alcoholic beverages may present problems that are encountered by residents, businesses, property owners, visitors, and/or workers of Novato including, but not limited to, littering, loitering, obstruction of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, parking congestion, crime, interference with children on their way to school, interference with shoppers using the streets, defacement and damaging of structures, discouragement of more desirable and needed commercial uses, and other similar problems connected primarily with the operation of establishments engaged in the sale of alcoholic beverages for consumption on or off the premises."

After two years of negotiations and meetings, a number of key items were stripped from the ordinance. The eliminated conditions were mandatory server training, establishing a minimum age (21 years) for store clerks selling alcohol between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., restricting alcohol advertising at gas stations, and requiring a form to be completed with the purchase of beer kegs stating that the alcohol would not be available to minors. Finally, in early 1991, a weaker and milder version of the original CUP was passed by the City Council.

"One of the good-sized employers here in town is the local alcohol distributing company. That group successfully lobbied for the defeat of the C.U.P. the first two times around. They brought in a lawyer from out of town and they successfully killed it two times. I think just the fact that we kept coming back wore them out. Or, maybe they just thought, 'we'll just get it passed, and maybe they'll forget about it.' Its going to be up to us not to forget about it."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

Some members of the Prevention Council considered the CUP to be too weak to be effective, and the Council still discusses possible amendments to strengthen the ordinance.

Others feel more positively about the new ordinance, arguing that given the prevailing political climate, getting any regulation passed at all, even just a "bare bones" CUP, was a tremendous victory. Either way, it provides a vehicle for citizen debate and community influence on sales and service of alcohol.

From an organizing perspective, the group may have taken on the CUP campaign too early in its development. Several factors combined to work against them: the members' lack of experience with the language and process of city ordinances, their small community base, the CUP's legal complexity, and the pro-business orientation of the city council. While one member of the Novato city council expressed support of the CUP, little was done to bring the others on board. Because of fatigue among group members, advance work to assure community attendance at the City Council CUP hearing was neglected, and as a result attendance was extraordinarily poor.

While the CUP campaign was a difficult one, it attained many victories. Prevention Council members are now regularly notified by the City whenever an application for a liquor license is filed. Most of members are very familiar with the language of the CUP and they are in an excellent position to monitor the retail establishments in Novato for compliance. The most important victory won in the process is that the Prevention Council established itself as a group to be reckoned with. The city council was faced with a community group whose members had deliberated at length on their position, repeatedly articulated their demands, and were backed with community support.

As a result of the CUP campaign, members of the Prevention Council also learned about their city council. They came to understand how the council operates and how it can be influenced, and they became familiar with council members and their positions on alcohol issues. When time came for City Council elections and three seats were vacated by

incumbents, the Prevention Council took an active role in their city's political process. A questionnaire was developed asking each candidate to declare her/his positions on the alcohol and other drug related issues facing the community. Three areas were pursued in depth: first, the candidate's stance on a proposed ordinance banning cigarette vending machines from Novato; second, the candidate's position on the sale and service of alcohol at city- sponsored events; and third, the candidate's support for securing a fellowship hall in Novato for Twelve Step activities. Appointments were made for Prevention Council members to interview candidates for the vacant City Council seats and, following the interviews, Prevention Council members shared the information with the community. As a result of the interview process, the Prevention Council members became even better known to the Novato City Council.

Since the CUP was enacted in Novato, three of the City Council members who originally objected to the strong CUP restrictions have left office and the new city council is more receptive to public health measures like CUPs. The Novato Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Council is currently approaching the city council again in an effort to strengthen the CUP and reintroduce the items which were stripped from the original ordinance. This second effort will greatly benefit from the earlier lessons.

### *Cigarette Vending Machines*

The Prevention Council's most recent action was a campaign to ban cigarette vending machines in Novato. In December of 1990, the Council members conducted an informal survey in the local high schools to determine the ease with which youth could purchase tobacco products in Novato. Results indicated that 94% of the students under the age of 18 felt that they could secure tobacco easily. A community forum was held in January of



1991 to discuss and publicize the survey, and later two young people, aged 11 and 14, with adult supervision, visited all the city's vending machines and attempted to purchase cigarettes. The only thing that got in their way was one broken machine.

During this same time period, a separate Marin County coalition formed and began work to pass a package of Clean Indoor Air and Youth Health Protection Ordinances for the County. A representative of this group began attending the Novato Prevention Council meetings, and Prevention Council members decided to include their vending machine ban as a piece of the proposed "Clean Indoor Air..." Ordinance. The ordinance sought to prohibit smoking in public places and in places of employment. Additionally, it was designed to prevent illegal sales of tobacco to minors.

As with the CUP regarding alcohol, opposition to the ordinance was well organized. Restaurant owners who feared a loss of business if the ordinance passed and liquor store owners who are paid to display cigarettes on their counters began to earnestly protest the ordinance. The City Council sponsored a "town workshop" to solicit community input on the ordinance. City Council chambers were packed to capacity the night of the workshop, with both sides well represented. Rumors were circulated reporting that the tobacco industry was contacting merchants and business owners in an attempt to frighten and organize them. Novato's newspaper received a large volume of letters to the editor speaking to both sides of the issue.

Although the battleground was familiar to the Novato Prevention Council, several things had changed since the similar battle for the CUP. First, one member of the City Council (a new member since the CUP) felt a great deal of responsibility for the ordinance and her support was instrumental throughout the negotiations. Secondly, the coalition of residents and organizations favoring the ordinance was broader and better prepared. Third,

members of the Prevention Council had learned a great deal from their prior campaign and were better able to plan, strategize, and confront politicians than they had been before. The earlier learning had paid off, and in 1992, the clean air ordinance was passed.

### *Golden Heart Awards*

The Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council holds an annual "Golden Heart Award Ceremony" to honor and recognize individuals and organizations that have made a special effort to prevent drug and alcohol problems. Over 100 community residents receive certificates of appreciation, and each recipient who wishes is given an opportunity to address the audience with his or her personal prevention message.

A unique feature of these awards is the recognition of organizations and businesses that have established prevention policies on an institutional level. Although it is not uncommon for businesses and civic organizations to provide financial support for community drug and alcohol programs or to conduct educational seminars and workshops on drug and alcohol problems, it is unusual for these groups to examine their own internal policies regarding the service or provision of alcohol in the workplace and at community events. The Novato Prevention Council recognized that such rare but important efforts must be acknowledged, so it developed special award categories for them.

"In February we run the awards ceremony, we call it The Golden Heart Awards, for people who work in prevention... we just sort of came up with this. We've done that for two years now and it's a labor intensive thing. We've received some of the highest compliments about the awards. The Police Chief was in contact and wanted to know why the police didn't get more of the awards - I thought "oh my god, they take this thing seriously!" They were really concerned about our little awards ceremony. That got a half page in the newspaper. It's gaining momentum as a real visibility thing. Also we want people to take part in that, and feel like they're doing important prevention work."

-Phil Rountree, Novato Prevention Council

The Golden Heart awards represent an excellent example of a *celebration* which

serves to strengthen and energize the group's members and the community. The Golden Heart Awards Ceremony helps renew the energies of those who have dedicated so much of themselves to prevention efforts. Witnessing the long list of award recipients helps each participant to feel part of something larger, thus diminishing the perception of isolation.

### *A Local Newspaper Column*

The Prevention Council also developed a relationship with the editor of the local newspaper and, subsequently, the Council was given space each week to write a column. The feature has covered a variety of prevention topics, and has played a significant role in making the community aware of the Council's work and positions on important issues.

After six years of experience, Novato Prevention Council members continue to work together for social change in their community. They know that their leadership will change, that they will embark on some successful campaigns, and that some that will fail. Above all they know that with each experience they learn more about themselves, their community, and the power of organizing.

### **Marin City, California**

Marin City is a predominantly African-American community of approximately 2,500 residents, located in Marin County, a predominantly white county and one of the richest counties in the United States. Compounded by economic hardship and oppression, alcohol and other drug related problems take a disproportionate toll on the people of Marin City, who have the fewest

"Taking back the night, we are taking back the night. Breaking through with light, we are taking back the night. No more shall we stand, for the wrong but for the right. We are strong, we are united, and we're taking back the night."

-Song lyrics by Ann Jefferson, member of the Marin City Drug Task Force

available resources to fight back. Drug dealing can provide economic opportunity and security to young people who have little hope for the future. Funding for educational and social programs has been slashed in the past year. Students at the local high school don't feel "part of it" in contrast to their affluent white peers. Affordable, culturally sensitive treatment services do not exist within the Marin City community. And yet, as the Marin City Drug Task Force demonstrates, the spirit of survival is strong. Singing, members of the Marin City Drug Task Force march through their community. This late night choir hopes to invite community participation and to annoy street corner drug pushers just long enough to disrupt the evening's operations.

"We wanted to keep a visual presence in the community so that kids would know who we are and what we stood for. The marches helped get us recognized in the community. We called it 'Taking Back The Night'. People do know that you're there and I think even the drug dealers in a way had a respect for what we were doing. Enough to go underground. They knew that we weren't police and that we weren't going to be arresting anyone, and that it wasn't going to be a confrontative thing. We were concerned about all people, they had to do this as a means of living. We used to pass out information and words to the songs, so that people could look them over and digest what we were really saying. When we did the last one I realized, 'gee I've really missed this.'"

-Connie Page, Marin City Drug Task Force

Though the impact of the march is largely symbolic, the marchers experience the strength and hope of unity, and the commitment to work for the prevention of alcohol and drug problems is renewed.

### **Formation of the Group**

The Marin City Drug Task Force has its roots in a community meeting held in 1986 to examine the role of the County Sheriff's Department in responding to complaints about drug dealing. This meeting allowed community members to voice their frustrations and fears to one another and to their service agencies. A series of smaller, more *solution oriented*, meetings were subsequently conducted, and a core group of 12 individuals

emerged as founding members of the Drug Task Force (DTF).

### **Action Campaigns**

While the Drug Task Force (DTF) has embarked on many campaigns since that time, five of the projects illustrate the range of prevention activities that the group has sponsored and that other community groups might consider. These five projects, described in full in this section, are as follows:

1. Secure non-alcohol industry sponsorship for the annual jazz festival;
2. Recognize sober, drug-free individuals from the community;
3. Secure school bus transportation for youth;
4. Form a support group for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren;
5. Expose alcohol industry practices that target African-American youth, specifically, those by St. Ides Malt Liquor.

### *Alternative Sponsorship*

The annual Marin City Jazz Festival has always featured impressive lists of musicians who entertain large crowds late into the evening hours. Almost the entire community attends, and until 1991, beer was plentiful. The festival was long supported by Miller Beer, not an uncommon promotional strategy used by the alcohol industry to target the African-American population. The Miller Beer booth, overhead banner, and plastic cups were constant commercials for a product some believe to be a major cause of disease and death within the community.

Members of the DTF, concerned about the damaging effects of alcohol-related problems in their community, realized that the contribution of Miller Beer to the festival

was a device to sell and promote their beer. They asked themselves a series of questions and analyzed the issue: Was it healthy for the festival to be so heavily dependent upon the Miller Beer contribution? Was it worth the price that the African-American community was paying? Would the group be able to secure alternative sponsorship? After reviewing these questions themselves, the DTF met with representatives from the Festival Sponsor Committee to further discuss their concerns. DTF members offered their assistance to the Festival

"The Task Force was asking the Festival Committee if they could find an alternative sponsor to the festival other than Miller. We felt it was a double message, because the sponsoring agency (the Boys & Girls Club) who sponsored the festival was also the agency that did alcohol and drug counseling, so we have to be clear on the messages that we're giving to the community people. We wrote them (the Festival Sponsor Committee) a letter ... nothing happened. We wrote a letter the second year, and asked, 'if we could find alternative sponsorship would you at least consider it?' So they did say yes, that they would consider it."

- Connie Page, Marin City Drug Task Force

Committee to search for alternative, "healthier" underwriters. Although reluctant at first, the Festival Committee eventually agreed to explore the possibility of seeking sponsorship from companies which marketed more wholesome products.

In 1990, short staffed and handicapped by a reduction in resources, the nonprofit agencies who traditionally backed the Marin City Jazz Festival could not undertake such a major project. In 1991, a new festival committee was formed, with the Chair of the Marin City Drug Task Force, Connie Page, among its members. With Connie's encouragement, the planning committee decided to conduct the festival without the support of Miller Beer, and for the first time, on August 3, 1991, the Marin City Jazz Festival occurred without the accompanying Miller Beer booth, banners and logos. To the surprise of some, it was no less successful than it had been in years past.

For members of the Marin City Drug Task Force, the victory extended beyond the obvious "win" of hosting an alcohol-free festival, as other goals were met in the process.

First, residents of the community began talking about alcohol as a drug. When referring to drug problems, this community has historically focused on illegal drugs and has excluded alcohol from the dialogue. Second, DTF members began identifying alcohol industry tactics of philanthropy and sponsorship which serve to buy community silence. Third, members of the DTF experienced their own power to determine health-related policy on a local level.

"This year (1991) it's the Boys and Girls Club that's doing the Jazz Festival. I'm on their board. We have not contacted Miller, we have contacted other people...

(A couple of years ago) The Drug Task Force had asked organizations to take a position (on serving alcohol at their events). Well, one of the organizations that did take a position was the Boys and Girls Club. What they did was to say, 'We won't have any alcohol at our events.' So in that way the Task Force was instrumental in the Boys and Girls Club looking for alternative sponsorship for the Jazz Festival ... the policy was already in place."

- Connie Page, Marin City Drug Task Force

### *Sobriety Awards*

Like the Marin City Jazz Festival, the Marin City Sobriety Awards are an annual event that illustrates the community organizing principle of *celebration*. Each spring, a large number of residents who have been troubled by drug and alcohol problems receive an award for staying sober and drug-free. The program for the annual awards and celebration incorporates recognition of each recipient by name whether they have been clean and sober for three months or 18 years. To honor those who are in recovery, the Task Force presents each one with a medal and a certificate accompanied by lots of applause. This happens every year, and fortunately every year, the list of recipients grows. This positive community acknowledgment has played a critical role in helping many residents maintain their sobriety. The recipients' faces glow with pride; the evening is clearly special for them, their families, their friends, and the community as a whole.

In the best of circumstances, getting into recovery and maintaining sobriety is no easy

task. For people with limited resources (financial and social) it is even more difficult.

Treatment programs can be expensive and waiting lists for affordable programs are long. Services are not always culturally sensitive or appropriate. So, recovery is a

"I'd have to say that The Sobriety Awards are the thing that I am most proud of. It is so important for the community to get together in this positive way."

-Connie Page, Marin City Drug Task Force

major accomplishment in this community that deserves to be publicly acknowledged and rewarded. The Sobriety Awards have filled that need.

The Sobriety Awards also present an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the DTF and the positive aspects of community life. Relationships between community residents are strengthened and a positive image is restored. The Sobriety Awards counter the negative images perpetuated by local media coverage of the "bad news" with positive accounts and testimony of the strength and courage of community members. The Awards celebration, because it is positive and uplifting, also serves the important function of "energizing" the group to renew their prevention efforts.

### *The School Bus*

From a prevention perspective, community groups need to consider alcohol and other drug issues in the broadest possible context. Decisions that impact the educational system, the health care system, jobs and economic opportunity, affordable housing and other social concerns, all have telling consequences on the type and level of drug and alcohol problems faced by the community. In 1989, members of the Marin City Drug Task Force broadened their definition of prevention when they learned that funding from a local foundation for a school bus had been terminated.

Without a bus, the town's elementary school-aged children would have difficulty



getting to and from their school. DTF members knew this was more than a simple transportation problem and easily made the connection between the elimination of bus rides and drug and alcohol problems. Children who could not get to school would undoubtedly be at higher risk for absenteeism and tardiness and in turn might find drugs and alcohol an all too available alternative to classroom education.

Task Force members, together with other concerned parents, met to discuss possible solutions to the dilemma. The group made a proposal to the School District: Marin City would lease an unused school bus from the District at \$1.00 per year. The School District would be responsible for maintenance of the bus and carrying adequate insurance for the vehicle. In return, Marin City's Community Development Corporation would initiate a program to train residents as bus drivers. Even with the almost-free provision of the school bus, the cost of the training program and other expenses, such as gas, amounted to \$30,000. Ongoing fundraising efforts fell short of this goal, and unfortunately the plan was dropped.

Despite the apparent defeat of this project, it was an important experience and the resulting benefits and lessons still serve the DTF well. The group now takes more time to assess the size and scope of a project, and to determine the resources needed to win a victory before deciding on an action. Although there have been no efforts to revive the project, members of the DTF continue to examine other social problems to discover their link to alcohol and other drug related problems in Marin City. Unemployment, lack of affordable housing, inadequate health care, and lack of child care all set the stage for the promotion and exacerbation of alcohol- and drug-related problems. In order to be effective in preventing drug and alcohol problems, it is critical for groups to make those links.

## *Grandparents Support Group*

Self-help programs or support groups often evolve in tandem with community prevention projects and campaigns. Members of prevention groups discover they share common problems, and they subsequently turn to one another for assistance and support. The Marin City grandparents support group is a result of such a process.

On November 11, 1990, the Marin Independent Journal ran a front page cover story under the headline, "Saving the Next Generation, Marin City's Grandmas Strive

to Heal Wounds." Among others, the story described the life of Josephine Bennett, who is raising her three small grandsons in a small one-bedroom apartment.

Josephine Bennett is a remarkable woman, and she has company. Many Marin City grandparents have sole responsibility for their grandchildren because of their children's alcohol and drug problems. As a member of the Marin City Drug Task Force,

Josephine turned to the DTF for assistance in forming a grandparents support group.

The grandparents now have a forum for sharing their problems and frustrations, as

well as their coping strategies. Given that there are few institutional supports (economic aid or social services) available to these grandparents, the community support group plays a critical role in filling the gaps.

"I thought I was done raising younguns, that's all," Josephine Bennett of Marin City says wearily as she follows her three active grandsons down the aisles of a Mill Valley supermarket. The day before she dropped exhausted onto her bed after a day of shopping for school clothes. Still ahead is cooking for dinner, homework, and bedding down her grandsons—ages 5, 8, and 10—on couches and folding cots set up each night in the living room of her small one-bedroom apartment. "Don't get me wrong. I love my grandsons. And they will stay with me as long as they need to," Bennett says.

- Marin Independent Journal

"The grandmothers, they're working on other issues, but they still come to our meetings. It's kind of another spin-off group, but at the same time they still consider themselves part of the Task Force...I was just thinking: when it's time to do something, who will pitch in and help? My grandmothers, yes of course."

-Connie Page, Marin City Drug Task Force

The DTF provides organizational support to Josephine in her efforts to bring the grandparents together. The Task Force supplies occasional staff assistance, help with mailings, access to phone lists, and publicity. Josephine, acting as a liaison between the grandparents and the DTF, helps ensure that the issues and concerns of the grandparents are heard by the broader community.

#### *Alcohol Industry Advertising—St. Ides Malt Liquor*

Members of the Marin City Drug Task Force are well aware that the alcohol industry spends millions of dollars to increase alcohol consumption by African-Americans. In 1991, a new marketing campaign by St. Ides deeply offended and alarmed members of the DTF. St. Ides' aggressive tactics targeted African-American youth by associating malt liquor with rap stars, gangs, sexual prowess, and a potent high. Advertisements suggested that the St. Ides 40-ounce bottle be consumed as a single serving, which, with an alcohol content of 8% (double that of other beers), is the equivalent of drinking a six pack. Promotional items including posters and rap tapes were given to Marin City's small grocery store by the local St. Ides distributor. (The grocery store, with a large amount of shelf space dedicated to alcohol, is Marin City's sole commercial business.) The promotional items targeted the community's youth in an attempt to attract a new generation of customers to the malt liquor.

The Task Force approached the store owner and requested that she withdraw the promotional items. Members developed a brochure with descriptions of the offensive marketing practices and an outline of suggested actions to protest the product and its advertising. The brochure was widely distributed throughout the community, and the community newspaper, The Marin City Times, carried a feature story on St. Ides. The

store owner agreed to remove the promotional items but refused to yield to community appeals and stop selling the malt liquor. The campaign ended in partial victory, but St. Ides is still being sold in the community store.

Today, the DTF is growing in numbers and credibility, and is increasingly able to shape and influence public policy for the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems. Current challenges facing the group include a large-scale commercial development in Marin City that will incorporate some alcohol beverage retailers such as grocery stores and restaurants. The DTF has both the knowledge and skills to advocate for responsible policies governing the sales and service of alcohol in the new development prior to its construction. The DTF has a rare and unique opportunity to proactively set safe community standards before problems arise.

## **Mill Valley, California**

### **Forming the Group**

During 1986, two Mill Valley City Council members concerned about the impact of drugs and alcohol sat down with an organizer and decided to form an organization that would design and test prevention strategies. Together, they created a list of 25 citizens who might be interested in serving as founding members of the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council (Prevention Council).

Throughout the summer of 1986, the community organizer interviewed each of the 25 proposed candidates. As in Novato, the interview process served a dual purpose for the organizer. In the course of the discussions she explored how each individual perceived and experienced the alcohol and other drug related problems of Mill Valley, and at the same time, she took the first essential step of building trusting relationships with potential

Prevention Council members. In the context of the relationship she could challenge residents to work collectively to change the conditions promoting drug and alcohol problems. Upon the completion of the interviews, the organizer identified 16 Mill Valley residents who were ready to meet the challenges of the Prevention Council. Additionally, the two City Council members who were instrumental in the Prevention Council's formation signed on as active members of the founding group.

### **Developing a Prevention Plan**

From 1986 to 1988, the Prevention Council met twice a month. Group members conducted research in the community, received training in the prevention field, prioritized problems, and evaluated action strategies. They developed a questionnaire that they used as a guide for in-depth personal interviews with key community citizens. Using the results of their research, the Prevention Council wrote a 38-page plan making recommendations for action on ten leading issues. The ten issues were as follows:

1. lack of community awareness of the problems
2. high availability of alcohol and drugs
3. role modeling of negative practices
4. lack of recreational alternatives
5. lack of coordination and availability of treatment and prevention resources
6. abuse of over-the-counter medications
7. lack of positive community values
8. prevalence of driving under the influence
9. high incidence of drugs and alcohol in the workplace
10. low self-image among community residents.

The Prevention Council hosted two town meetings to allow for citizen review and input, then submitted the completed Prevention Plan for formal acceptance by the City Council. The City Council not only ratified the plan as a formal guide for Mill Valley prevention policy, but also agreed to allot \$5,000 for Prevention Council activities.

Throughout 1988, while the Prevention Plan was being completed and passed, 12 of the original 16 Prevention Council members resigned. The departure of so many members was not entirely unexpected. For two years they had worked diligently to generate a viable plan for their city. They felt that they had made a significant contribution to Mill Valley, and many voiced a need to move on to other commitments and projects. Mill Valley now owned a blueprint for the prevention of problems related to alcohol and other drugs but lacked the person power needed for implementation.

The founding members of the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council had embarked on a planning process that lasted far too long and left them without energy for implementation and action. Their plan was excellent and comprehensive, yet all of the original enthusiasm was expended, and no tangible actions had been taken. This experience of the Mill Valley group contrasts sharply with the Novato group, which also wrote a long-range plan but implemented actions and campaigns along the way. Today, the Novato group rarely refers back to their plan, focusing instead on more immediate and daily alcohol and other drug problems as experienced by Novato residents.

### **Activities and Projects**

Groups need to experience victories early on. If early projects meet the criteria of immediate, specific, and winnable, the group can experience a series of small victories, and thus gain a reputation for being able to get things done. Such a reputation will energize the

membership, attract new people, and create credibility for the group in the long run. As the organization grows and members experience the ups and downs of community action, they will learn new skills and build working relationships amongst themselves. Over time, they will be able to tackle larger issues and problems in the community.

### *DUI Laws Strictly Enforced*

As a consequence of the large decline in the Mill Valley membership a new set of appointments were made in 1989. The new Prevention Council, determined to set an agenda of its own, decided to dedicate its initial efforts to reducing the incidence of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) in Mill Valley. One of the members who was also a City Council member and the city's official liaison to the Prevention Council, suggested that the Prevention Council erect road signs warning incoming motorists that Mill Valley would not tolerate driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It was decided that this would be an excellent first project since it was considered to be do-able. The signs would not be expensive, and if they were placed in heavily traveled locations, the prevention message would receive good exposure. Additionally, publicity in the local newspaper regarding the signs could help educate the community about the dangers of impaired driving and about the Prevention Council. After a lengthy debate the council agreed that the signs would read, "For Everyone's Safety: DUI Laws Strictly Enforced." Within six months the group had its first victory and there were signs posted in several Mill Valley locations.

A front page story in the town's newspaper helped spread the word about the existence and work of the Prevention Council, but the project did little to attract new members. There were no tangible ways to measure the impact or results of the signs, and therefore no avenue for generating community enthusiasm. In retrospect, it is clear that

while securing the signs was an easy victory, the project was not "deeply felt" by community members, meaning that it was not a project that evoked strong passion or sentiment from residents.

### *Responsible Beverage Service*

Of major concern to all council members were the practices of serving and selling alcoholic beverages in local bars, restaurants, and liquor stores. To analyze the issue they asked themselves several questions: Were waiters and waitresses serving alcohol to minors and to persons who were already intoxicated? Did local establishments conduct promotions, such as happy hours, which increased drinking and related problems? Did local establishments display advertising targeting a youth audience? Would the management of bars, restaurants, and stores be willing to set policies designed to ensure the safe sale and service of alcohol?

The Prevention Council decided to hold a town forum to discuss the issue of responsible beverage service (RBS) in more depth. A letter of invitation was mailed to every retail establishment in the city that possessed a license to sell alcohol. Follow-up phone calls were made to personally invite the alcohol retailers to attend the forum. The program included a panel presentation by the manager of a local restaurant and nightclub who agreed to speak about the policies in his establishment, the owner of a restaurant and bar who was to share her experience of setting policies for safe alcohol service, and a responsible beverage service trainer who was to explain the evolution of RBS training programs.

The night of the forum, several critical community concerns were addressed by the panel members, but they were preaching to the converted. The turnout for the event was



poor, and despite the mass mailing and the follow-up phone calls, not a single alcohol retailer was in the small audience. In the absence of public controversy, and in the absence of any personal relationships between the retailers and Prevention Council members, there was no incentive on the part of the retailers to attend. There were no visible threats to the retailers' self-interest; no proposed city ordinance that would affect the retailer's pocketbook or business operations, no particular bar or liquor store under scrutiny for unsafe selling and serving practices, and no publicized catastrophe or human tragedy to generate popular concern and involvement. Quite simply, there was nothing at stake. Unlike the Novato Prevention Council's experience obtaining a Conditional Use Permit ordinance, there was nothing in Mill Valley that significantly disturbed the alcohol retailers and forced them to negotiate with concerned community residents.

"We tried to have something on responsible beverage service. I was very disappointed with this because it was so well organized. We went out and tried to have a little forum on it. It really flopped. It was educational for those of us on the council, because we had such good speakers. But, in terms of the community turning out, they didn't. I think that lack of publicity was probably one thing. And the fact that it was mainly about the service of alcohol in the restaurants and bars, and maybe people weren't particularly interested. If you're coming home from work, and you're sitting down, and you have a lot of things to go to, and you're interested in alcohol issues, I don't know that you would particularly think of going to a little talk on how alcohol is served in bars and restaurants."

-Judy Gerard, Mill Valley Prevention Council

### *Youth Forum*

The Prevention Council held a second town forum that featured extraordinary speakers on a pressing social issue, but which was also poorly attended. A panel of four recovering teenagers spoke about their experiences with drugs and alcohol and the resulting problems in their lives. The youths shared valuable insights based upon their efforts to maintain sobriety despite environmental pressures to do otherwise, and they had policy

recommendations for the Prevention Council and for the City of Mill Valley. For a second time, the Prevention Council found itself sponsoring an important community event with little community response. Again, the experience of Mill Valley contrasted strikingly to a similar but well-attended meeting in Novato which followed several, well-publicized, alcohol-related tragedies.

### *Winterfest*

At this juncture some members of the second Mill Valley Prevention Council became discouraged and either resigned or stopped attending meetings on a regular basis. Nevertheless, a core group of six continued meeting in the fall of 1990 to consider and select the next activity. The group decided to sponsor an alcohol-free New Year's Eve celebration, which they called *Winterfest*.

After much effort, on December 31, 1990, more than 250 people gathered in the Mill Valley high school gym to ring in the New Year with organic juices, mineral water, and dancing. Alcoholic beverages were the only unwelcome guests at this function, and no one seemed to notice or mind.

Winterfest was by far the Council's most ambitious high-risk project. For many weeks the council members worried: Would the town's residents want to celebrate the New Year without the customary champagne and liquor? Would the program be exciting and attractive to a broad audience including both youth and adults? Could enough tickets be sold to cover expenses?

The day before Winterfest only six advance tickets had been sold, but despite all fears Winterfest was a remarkable success. The decorating committee stayed up until 2 a.m. transforming the high school gym into a winter wonderland. Pine trees covered with tiny

blinking lights hid the bare gym walls. Banners boldly painted in purple and black fell from the ceilings lending a festive backdrop to the dance floor. A child's play area was created in one corner with a spot designated for a puppet show. Two bands were scheduled to appear.

The event was a success because hundreds came and were able to celebrate in an alcohol-free atmosphere. The Prevention Council received media

coverage that helped publicize its efforts in the community, and a number of volunteers who were recruited to help with Winterfest could now be counted on to help with other prevention projects, thus expanding the Council's membership base.

On December 31, 1991, the second annual Winterfest celebration was held featuring two dances, a fun run, and other activities designed for youth. The local newspaper reported that, "Judging from participation and interest, Mill Valley's second annual alcohol-free New Year's celebration has secured a strong foothold in the community." Today, plans are being discussed to host a future county-wide Winterfest celebration as a joint effort of all the community groups.

Despite the success of the 1990 and 1991 Winterfest program, the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council ceased meeting formally in 1992, and the group did not host a Winterfest celebration that year. The membership of the group had not expanded over the years, and the work was falling on the shoulders of just a few community

"The thing that I'm most proud that we did, was the Winterfest last year, the alcohol free New Year's event. That put us on the map in Mill Valley. It gave us a lot of credibility, it was a positive event so that it wasn't preaching about the evils of alcohol. What it did was offer an alternative. That's the thing that we did as a council, together, that had the biggest (impact), that I'm the most proud of. The people who put Winterfest together, they did it, they created it. They created it because they wanted to have something to do on New Year's that didn't have alcohol. It wasn't all just the Prevention Council. We sponsored it, and of course worked hard on it, and got some money together, but the community came together with that. There are a lot of people in Mill Valley who want alternative things for themselves and their families to do, so they turned out to do it. I think that it was successful because it was community based."

-Judy Gerard, Mill Valley Prevention Council

residents. Also during 1992, the Chair of the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council worked to successfully secure funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety for a Marin County responsible hospitality service project, and subsequently, she was hired as Project Director to oversee the program development and implementation. Her new position as a paid professional in the prevention field is very different in nature from her role as an unpaid leader of a volunteer community association. To her credit, she continues to convene Mill Valley residents on a more informal, project-specific basis to deal with local prevention issues in Mill Valley, and so the Mill Valley Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council gave way to a loose coalition of residents who convene "as needed" to deal with specific problems and issues.

Of the three groups described in this study, only two, the Novato Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council and the Marin City Drug Task Force, continue to act as powerful forces shaping prevention policy in their communities. The explanations for Mill Valley's failure to achieve a similar status are complex, but critical differences between the Mill Valley group and the two others stand out.

The principles of listening and relationship building proved to be most problematic with the Mill Valley group. In Mill Valley, the primary suggestions for prospective members came from the City Council and other City officials, which limited the pool of potential members and served as a political screen. Also, the participation of the City Council members on the original Mill Valley Prevention Council had both its pluses and minuses. On the positive side, their presence brought the group legitimacy and credibility. However, their attendance also shaped group discussions away from the more controversial debates and topics. Group members often deferred to the ideas of City Council members, not wishing to confront the elected officials of their town.

The Mill Valley Council had the largest budget of all three groups. When the group was formed, the City "granted" \$5,000 to cover program expenses. Compared with Novato, who raises their funds from community events, and Marin City, who passes the hat at the end of each meeting, Mill Valley's budget seems very generous. But as mentioned earlier, funding of this type can be problematic, since the City has the power to approve or disapprove spending decisions by the group.

As mentioned, several community residents continue to work together to advocate for prevention policies in Mill Valley on a more informal basis. Recently, this group has worked to pass a Parental Responsibility Ordinance and plans are underway once again to sponsor a third Winterfest celebration.

## CONCLUSION

The collective experiences of the three Marin County prevention groups highlight the importance of citizen action in the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems. Several prominent lessons were learned by participants and observers as the prevention groups worked to gain power and change community policies to prevent alcohol and other drug problems.

- As stressed in the Kettering report, referred to in the Introduction, we learned that people will take action on pressing social concerns if they believe that their actions will make a difference.
- The agenda for citizen action must be owned and directed by community residents rather than by agency interests or funding sources. The issues arise from the community residents and not from the organizer.
- People are capable, talented, and resourceful—the organizer must constantly work to draw upon and develop the leadership capabilities and the skills of group members.
- Local institutions establish policies that either promote problems or serve to prevent alcohol and other drug problems. These local institutions can be challenged to develop prevention policies by large numbers of residents who act collectively to make their desires known.

Our experience over the years has underscored the importance of the organizing principles of listening, relationship building, challenge, action, evaluation, and celebration. If any of these principles are neglected or minimized, the group's power and effectiveness will be compromised. The work of the organization must be grounded in the relationships

among its members. None of the groups described is a one-shot effort to mobilize around a predetermined "problem" or "community need." Rather, group members engage in ongoing dialogue, reflection, debate, and analysis, which are only possible in the context of trusting relationships. These relationships take time and require opportunities for regular exchange and interaction among community members.

In summary, the experience of these groups is increasingly relevant given the growing burden of problems associated with alcohol and other drugs. Experts and agencies cannot solve these problems, and we must develop our capacity to work for prevention on the grassroots level. Effective citizen action for the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems offers a viable alternative, far different from conventional approaches, that is full of promise and possibility.