

Article for 3-7-07 from Cindy Schaider, Coordinator, Casa Grande Alliance

Last week in Phoenix, fourteen year-old Brenda Nguyen overdosed on alcohol and died. There were allegedly four adults present, two of whom responded to her medical emergency by dumping her frail young body in an alley. There are now criminal charges against those adults, as there should be.

Somewhere in Casa Grande, or another small town, a mom or dad saw this story on the news and said to themselves, "Thank God we don't live in the city... such awful things happen to kids up there." Unfortunately, these incidents are not limited to 'the city'. They could easily happen right here at home.

Underage drinking has been a practice since, well, seemingly forever. However, the type and frequency of drinking by teenagers has become more of a concern in the past several years. Consider these facts from the 2006 Arizona Youth Survey:

- In a 2006 survey in Casa Grande, 76.2 % of high school seniors surveyed report having drunk alcohol in their lifetime. That is higher than the state rate of 74.5%. That means 3 out of 4 kids have had a drink by the time they reach 12th grade.
- 50% of seniors reported having a drink of alcohol in the past 30 days. That is higher than the state rate of 47%. It is also an increase over the 2004 survey, where 46% reported drinking in the past 30 days. So half of our seniors may be drinking, many on at least a monthly basis.
- 29% of twelfth graders admitted to binge drinking – that is more than five drinks in a row during the two weeks before the survey. THAT is a big deal.

Binge drinking is drinking to get drunk. It is not socializing. It is not wine with dinner or a beer with pizza on a Sunday afternoon. It is purposely drinking a lot of alcohol for the express purpose of getting drunk. Most adults don't do this, but many teen drinkers do.

Binge drinking is what killed Brenda Nguyen, or at least it looks that way. She drank a massive amount of vodka in just 30 minutes; not unlike teenagers chugging beers, or bonging beers, or having drinking contests of one sort or another. Binge drinking is binge drinking, regardless of the type of alcohol consumed. Binge drinking kills, and here is why:

The body can only process alcohol at a certain rate. It can process (clean, clear and eliminate) about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an ounce of alcohol an hour. That is one beer, or one mixed drink, or one glass of wine for a 150 lb. healthy man. Women and smaller people metabolize alcohol at a different rate, and one's health can affect the rate as well. When someone drinks a massive amount of alcohol in a short period of time, the body cannot speed up the processing of it. In short, the person overdoses on alcohol, just like you can on any other drug. Overdosing is a life-threatening event.

Binge drinking kills. It looks like it killed Brenda Nguyen; a 14 year old girl who ran away from home for a little while, and ended up dead in an alley. Tell your kids this

story. Tell them not to drink. Tell them about binge drinking. Tell them it kills. Tell every teenager you know. I bet Brenda Nguyen wishes someone had told her.