

MORE BARS THAN STREETLIGHTS:

STEPPING UP CHANGES BOTH STREETScape AND MINDSCAPE

CASE HISTORY AT A GLANCE:

**University of Iowa
and Iowa City**

Sixty-two bars and nightclubs clustered in the compact Iowa City downtown sit within one mile of the University of Iowa Memorial Union. This abundance of drinking establishments does more than allow for a choice of where to drink on Saturday night. It contributes to a drinking culture and changes the character of downtown. The Stepping Up Coalition unites community and campus leadership to alter both the physical and cultural environment through alcohol-free leisure activities and enhanced enforcement of alcohol sales and service practices; through the enlistment of parents, local businesses, student organizations and police; through strategic use of the media; and through help from the state alcoholic beverage control authorities.

University of Iowa and Iowa City

- 1996** University of Iowa receives A Matter of Degree five-year grant, engaging Julie Phye as first project director. Phye, with leads from university and Iowa City principals, invites others from campus and community to serve in the Stepping Up Coalition.
- 1997** University introduces a number of on-campus initiatives to promote alcohol-free, leisure-time options and reduce availability and consumption of alcohol.
- 1998** Community survey reveals little understanding of or support for environmental prevention measures. Iowa City Council enacts a noise- and nuisance-abatement ordinance with Stepping Up's support.
- 2000** Advocacy Initiative begins in the fall. City council takes up proposed ordinance to limit bar patronage to those 21 years old and above.
- 2001** Stepping Up advances two policy goals:
 1. Enact a city ordinance that will restrict drink specials, such as two-for-one drinks and all-you-can-drink for one price.
 2. Institute civil penalties to hold bars responsible for their customers by bringing them for a hearing before the city council if the bar sells to underage or intoxicated people; penalties would range from fines to license revocation.

City council adopts compromise ordinance by banning certain drink specials and giving the city broader authority to revoke or suspend alcohol licenses. Subsequent court tests question the legality of the ordinance.
- 2002** Police step up enforcement of underage possession and service laws in the downtown area, combining citations with consultation to owners regarding improved practices. Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division issues white paper on college and university alcohol issues. Advocacy Initiative concludes in August.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The University of Iowa grew up around the historic, 162-year-old Iowa State Capitol building, anchoring the southeastern edge of campus right where it adjoins downtown Iowa City. When the capital of Iowa relocated to Des Moines in 1857, the old Capitol building became the first permanent structure for the new university.

The campus and the downtown have coexisted since then. More recently, however, economic forces common in many U.S. cities have led to retailer flight to suburban malls and an in-filling by businesses able to operate on a lower margin.

In downtown Iowa City, many of those businesses have been bars. In Iowa the minimum legal drinking age is 21. However, it's up to cities to say whether 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds can enter the premises. Iowa City permits patrons between 18 and 21 to frequent its licensed premises. Even though they can enter the bars, the law expects those under 21 to abstain from consuming alcoholic beverages.

Iowa City bars not only permit under-21-year-old patronage, they market for it. Ads from downtown bars and restaurants that may also serve alcohol appear with frequency in the University of Iowa's student newspaper, *The Daily Iowan*, touting low prices and other attractions.

"There are more bars on East College Street in Iowa City than streetlights," Stepping Up newsletter reporter Amy Riekema wrote in 2002.

New bars coming into the downtown area mean more outlets competing for customers. The result is price discounting. Lynn Walding, administrator of the state Alcoholic Beverages Division (ABD), said: "What was happening in Iowa City was a lot of new bars. When they open and try to attract clientele, they market cheap alcohol to students. Once they build a base, they can go from there. But established licensees were having to match those lower prices in order to compete, setting off a market war with consequences adverse to the public interest."

Advertising for drink specials doesn't discriminate on the basis of age. Students over and under 21 years of age read *The Daily Iowan* and are exposed to such ads. If police reports are any indication, under-21-year-olds managed to obtain and consume alcohol in many downtown premises, whether due to crowded conditions, dim lighting or owner

attitudes that it's not the bar's responsibility to monitor what happens to alcohol that has been sold to legal drinkers.

As one third-year student told *The Daily Iowan* (June 21, 2000), "It's a problem. It's extremely easy to get alcohol. Bartenders and people who check IDs aren't that strict."

Replicating national studies, Iowa faculty member Peter Nathan and students in his psychology classes have conducted surveys of student drinking and its consequences. As reported nationally by the Associated Press in 2000, Nathan found that three out of five Iowa students who consumed high levels of alcohol (five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women) in a single occasion said that the episode led them to engage in behaviors they subsequently regretted, such as having unplanned sexual relations or fighting.

Students aren't the only victims of excessive drinking. The entire community is affected. The local daily, the *Press-Citizen*, said in a September 23, 2002, editorial, evidence mounts for the 21 law: "Our multi-million dollar pedestrian mall is routinely disfigured with vomit, urine and waste by people who choose to drink to the point that they disrespect other people's property—public and private."

The police have long recognized the problems created by large crowds of young adults concentrated late at night and early in the morning with plenty of alcohol on hand. Michael Brotherton, the Iowa City Police Department's public information officer and a 24-year veteran, said: "Most people in town probably don't realize what goes on downtown after midnight. There is quite a bit of fighting and public mayhem. If we were not down there to control things, it would be pretty wild and crazy."

"The clear, cold reality is that Iowa City downtown is in trouble because it's nothing but one bar after another after another. Businesses are closing. The only ones thriving downtown are the bars. Downtown has been declining anyway because we have this huge mall outside of the adjacent city of Coralville, which has attracted a lot of business," Iowa's Student Health Services director Mary Khowassah said.



20,500 undergraduates and 6,000 on-campus residents—to do?

Nor are downtown bars the only sources of alcohol for the University of Iowa student body. Students can find plenty to drink at parties hosted by social fraternities, at tailgate parties on football game days and at private parties on and off campus. Iowa students rank high in national studies of alcohol consumption and adverse consequences.

Leaders were concerned. So when The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) invitation came in, it was well received. Iowa City’s mayor, in 1995, agreed to enter into a coalition with the University of Iowa to examine ways of addressing problems associated with drinking. That year also marked the university’s appointment of Mary Sue Coleman as president.

Phillip Jones, vice president for student services, who was instrumental in securing the RWJF grant, said: “We were very concerned about the problems we were seeing in our student justice system related to alcohol prior to the surveys [by the Harvard University School of Public Health and Iowa’s own Student Health Services]. The surveys, of course, gave us hard data. We were clearly aware of the number of bars we have within a mile of our residence halls. It all came to a confluence because about the time we

got word for applying for the grant we had a death on campus. A student in a fraternity situation died of asphyxiation resulting from alcohol. He passed out and vomited in his sleep and died.”

Setting the Stage for Community Change

Stepping Up proceeded, from 1997, to develop campus-community relationships and pursue a comprehensive mission consisting of multiple objectives and strategies.

Secondary effects became the principal argument advanced for changing the environment. Stepping Up used survey data from Harvard University and Iowa faculty to emphasize high-risk drinking consequences for others, even nondrinkers. The coalition used media to build support for an Iowa City noise and nuisance ordinance.

“We know what it used to be like and what it could be like again. It doesn’t have to be bar, bar, bar,” said Sarah Hansen, also with the campus health services.

Any talk of changing the law runs into criticism. Students say there’s nothing else to do and near-campus bars provide convenient venues for socialization, music and dancing and are safer settings than private parties without any supervision that are located farther away from campus.

Civil libertarians say that the government already overregulates too much of people’s lives. What’s a city—60,000 in Iowa City and another 40,000 in the adjacent Johnson County suburbs—with a large university population of nearly 30,000 students—

Hansen outlined the challenge in adjacent residential neighborhoods: “People in this community were not making the connection that why every Sunday morning they had to pick up trash off their lawn or why Saturday nights were never restful was not just because they lived by students per se, but because those students were using alcohol in a high-risk manner.”

Meanwhile the university, for its part, adopted measures to make the campus environment less tolerant of problematic drinking, as detailed at the Stepping Up Website (www.uiowa.edu/~stepping/):

- Funding of late-night social events. The *Press-Citizen* cited the university for enhancing student leisure-time options on campus in an April 20, 2002, editorial calling for action from the city council on the 21-and-over law. “There are and will be things for those students to do besides drink, but they won’t do them so long as alcohol is so readily available.”
- Mini-grants to student groups to assist them in producing their own alcohol-free social events.
- Stepped-up enforcement of the policy against underage drinking for students, especially during orientation.
- Outreach to parents. Stepping Up is now a regular feature of orientation and finds that parents (many of whom accompany their first-year students) are quite interested in potential restrictions at Iowa City bars to limit patronage to those 21 years of age and older.

Community Attitudes About Alcohol Policy

Early on, Stepping Up Coalition members determined to get a sense of how the community perceived both the extent of alcohol-related problems and the types of environmental measures to which they were committed. The results were mixed, according to the summary released in 1999, and underscored the uphill battle facing Stepping Up in pursuit of its policy objectives. Among the findings were the following:

- Relatively few respondents attributed student drinking to the leniency of bar owners toward underage drinking, the number of bars or convenience stores selling alcohol, or low-priced promotions of alcoholic beverages by bars.

- Potential policies that received support from a minority of the respondents were registration of beer kegs, police “sting” operations, creating alcohol-free areas near the university’s football stadium, lowering the blood alcohol standard for drunk driving, and prohibiting underage patrons from remaining after 10 p.m. in establishments serving alcohol.
- There was little public support for policies aimed at restricting alcohol-related advertising or price breaks such as all-you-can-drink specials, happy hours and two-for-one specials.

Steve Parrott, the university director of community relations, described how these survey results prompted the group to seek media attention to help educate the public and policy-makers on secondary effects: “Alcohol use by college students was recognized by a lot of people as a problem in Iowa City. However, there was no majority of support for actually taking action. It was the classic case of ‘alcohol use is a matter of personal responsibility.’ We tried a number of different things—speaking to civic groups, writing editorials, pushing these ordinances—that got the whole issue into the news. I think we were successful in showing people that it truly is a problem that affects not only those who drink but those who don’t. We also said that people who drink too much shouldn’t be given free rein to do whatever they want to the rest of us.”

Undeterred by prevailing community perceptions and buoyed by on-campus policy and enforcement successes, Stepping Up also focused its early efforts on supporting an anti-nuisance ordinance favored by neighborhood groups. This victory became the impetus for further efforts.

Stepping Up representatives spoke in favor of a city council ordinance to allow police to intervene in loud parties without having to identify the neighbor who called in the complaint. Before the ordinance, neighbors, fearful of retaliation, were often reluctant to contact the police about large and bothersome gatherings often featuring copious amounts of alcohol. Each fall, Stepping Up also conducts a door hanger campaign. Stepping Up staff and volunteers place complimentary information packets

about alcohol laws on doorknobs in areas where students live.

Environmental Assessment at the Beginning of the Advocacy Initiative—Fall 2000

When Pan American Services (PAS) began providing technical assistance to the University of Iowa in November 2000, the Stepping Up project was already involved in policy-based environmental prevention. The project had published a story about its work and underage drinking in Iowa City in the April edition of *Parent Times*, a UI publication, which mentioned that minors were allowed in bars in Iowa City. When concerned parents began calling the Stepping Up office, they were encouraged to express their concerns to city council members and through letters to the editor in the local papers.

Parents proved to be strong advocates, once mobilized. Downtown business owner and, since 2002, co-program coordinator Jim Clayton described the results of parents taking note of the easy bar access. “We had a very strong campaign on the part of parents writing to the city council saying, what are you idiots doing down there? ‘I send my kid to school. I send thousands of dollars along with him and you let him go in the bar. But he is only 19 years old so don’t let him in. It’s the law; he can’t drink until he is 21. He doesn’t have a fake ID, he just goes up to the door, pays his money and goes inside and his friend buys him a drink. You can’t do that to me.’ The city council listened to that.”

City administrators and city council members considered measures that would address these problems, such as banning minors from bars, banning drink price specials and penalizing bars for serving underage people. But because there was neither the political will nor perceived public support for prohibiting minors in bars, the Iowa City Council decided to consider an ordinance that would ban drink price specials and impose civil penalties on bars because there were no effective penalties on bars for selling to underage or intoxicated drinkers. The project adopted these measures as its policy goals.

Up until then, for some students, “part of orientation was going out and getting drunk. No

longer,” Clayton said, as the university communicated clear expectations that such conduct would not be tolerated.

However, the coalition of campus and community representatives was still limited at the time. The project had a 16-member executive committee made up of city and university officials, students, law enforcement and business owners, which acted in an advisory capacity to the project. Four task forces—accessibility, enforcement, outreach, and social activities—also advised the project on policies and activities. But little effort had been made to expand the coalition into the community, and executive committee members acted as spokespeople for the project.

Applied Data

In addition to the 1999 community survey, the coalition also used data collection to support policy efforts. The police department widely publicized the number of citations for underage possession of alcohol, particularly in bars, which supported the notion that the city needed to do something about underage drinking. This information contributed to the debate about whether minors should be permitted in bars and led to proposed measures to restrict drink specials and penalize bars for serving underage patrons.

Progress During the Advocacy Initiative

The policy objectives were now well defined and the issues were vigorously debated in the community. PAS also helped the project identify potential coalition and community members who would take an active role in newsmaking.

Stepping Up’s project director at the time, Julie Phye, described the results of PAS’s technical assistance. “They were great in helping us write opinion pieces for the newspapers and helping us define what we want to focus on toward reaching our policy goals. They helped us do background work on zoning as well as alcohol and crime and the interplay between the two.”

From November 2000 through May 2001 PAS staff helped identify media advocacy opportunities for framing the issues of underage and binge drinking and the need for policy solutions and worked with the project director to place related media advocacy pieces. The project developed a plan of action that included an op-ed and letter to the editor focusing on

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downtown economics (written by PAS staff). The plan also included generating other letters to the editor, testifying at the state ABD hearing, holding a news event on the public health costs of underage and binge drinking, creating a radio call-in show, and pitching a TV news story on activity downtown at midnight on a weekend.

During this period progress on the proposed polices moved forward. The Iowa City attorney provided a draft ordinance to the city council that was reviewed at a work session in January 2001. Although there was no public testimony at the meeting, it did generate some news coverage that focused primarily on the content of the ordinance, which would prohibit

- selling two or more drinks for the price of one,
- selling unlimited servings for a fixed price,
- pouring alcohol directly into a person's mouth,
- increasing the quantity of alcohol in a serving without proportionately increasing the price,
- holding any contests in which alcohol is a prize, and
- selling more than one serving—including pitchers—of alcohol to one person at one time unless an employee verifies that the people drinking are of legal age.

The ordinance also, for the first time, authorized the city to enforce the state law that penalized bars for selling to underage and intoxicated patrons.

In early February 2001 the city council scheduled the first public hearing on the proposed ordinance, and a second hearing was scheduled for later that month. Representatives from the university and community provided testimony. Stepping Up project staff members were quoted in articles about the hearing in the local press.

As a result of these discussions in Iowa City, the Iowa ABD began debating the need for a state law to limit drink specials so that there would be uniformity in the state. In mid-February, the ABD conducted a public forum in Iowa City to hear comments on the scope of underage alcohol consumption and public intoxication on college campuses and on the merits of local ordinances versus the need for a state statute to regulate drink price specials.

To prepare for the forum and city council hearing, staff developed a plan of action that included op-eds, letters to the editor, press advisories, message development for framing the underage and high-risk drinking issue, a radio call-in show, and strategic planning assistance for these efforts. Assisted by PAS staff, project staff and volunteers from the university and community testified at both the hearings and forum, along with representatives from Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa.

The testimony focused on the number of states with laws regulating drink specials, the kinds and numbers of drink specials offered in college towns, the outlet density in Iowa City, and the need for a state law to restrict bar entry to those over age 21. Opposition testimony came from two local bar owners and a representative from the Miller Brewing Company. The forum was widely covered by local media. At that meeting, University of Iowa President Mary Sue Coleman also testified that she supported requiring people who enter bars to be age 21 or above, as did one bar owner. The local Iowa City newspaper also weighed in with an editorial supporting a local city ordinance as the preferred option.

The City Council Acts

In early April the city council conducted the first reading on the proposed ordinance. The council amended the ordinance during a previous work session to allow the purchase of two drinks rather than one drink at any one time by any one person. In the final vote the city council approved it on the first reading by a vote of seven to zero. The second reading on the ordinance was scheduled for mid-April.

Responding to concerns raised after the first hearing about the impact of drink specials on drinkers of legal age, the city council removed from the ordinance happy hours and reduced drink prices as regulated price specials. The city attorney also recommended that the city council take no further action on the ordinance until it was in its final form.

As a result, the city council voted four to three to postpone further action on the ordinance until new language could be drafted. At the same time, two city councilors said that they would no longer support the

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ordinance because they believed that an ordinance banning minors from bars was needed. The ordinance was rewritten, and, on May 1, the city council considered the revised ordinance at a second hearing.

The third reading of the ordinance was held June 12 and it was approved by a vote of four to three. The drink special ordinance without a ban on minors entering bars took effect August 1, 2001.

Another Local Opportunity Suddenly Arises—Saving Pearson's

A large corporation, the Hy-Vee grocery chain, announced plans to turn Pearson's Drug Store, which is located just off campus, into a Regal Liquor store. Stepping Up formed an alliance with the Northside Neighborhood Association to protest the plan, and President Coleman issued a personal plea asking Hy-Vee to abandon its plans. Protest letters to Hy-Vee officials caused the corporation to rethink its options. Hy-Vee spokesperson Ruth Mitchell told *The Daily Iowan* (August 27, 2001), "After receiving 70 letters and e-mails, in particular the one from Mary Sue Coleman, we decided to take a step back and revisit the whole situation." A local businessperson subsequently took over Pearson's, preserving its deli and fountain service, and the coalition notched a victory.

New Policy Concerns

With the success of the drink specials ordinance and saving Pearson's, in mid-2001 the project shifted its focus to eliminating neighborhood problems related to high-risk drinking and restricting the growth of alcohol outlets downtown. The project director developed a broader strategic communication plan that included objectives to reduce access to alcohol by minors and related secondhand effects, to increase social activities for students, and to increase knowledge about the project and support for its work. The executive committee adopted this plan. At this point it was agreed that technical assistance would be used to help develop a timeline, specific strategies and media advocacy opportunities and to identify responsible persons to carry out the plan.

In February 2002 project director Julie Pbye moved to a different position within the university. The coalition executive committee chair, Carolyn Cavitt, assumed the role of interim director. From February

through May the political climate in Iowa City seemed to be changing in favor of a measure to restrict minors from entering bars. Although bars had been cited for violations of the drink specials ordinance, questions were being raised about the effectiveness of the ordinance in reducing underage and high-risk drinking. Moreover, several minors were injured in a downtown bar fire related to an alcohol stunt.

Stepping Up was becoming more vocal in its support of a policy to raise the age for admittance to bars to 21 and made outreach efforts to neighborhood associations to garner their support. The project was also interested in supporting city efforts to limit the number of bars downtown through zoning. During spring and summer 2002 the project engaged in discussions with neighborhood associations about their concerns related to high-risk drinking and how they could collaborate with Stepping Up to resolve these problems. There was also discussion about how local data could be used to support limiting outlet density downtown and restricting minors in bars. Some opinion pieces supporting these two policies were developed for local newspapers.

This use of media advocacy and data to support proposed policies and collaboration with neighborhood residents signaled a change in focus by Stepping Up. The new focus would help the project advance these policies and increase public support for use of environmental prevention strategies in Iowa City.

Project Assessment at the End of the Advocacy Initiative—August 2002

Increased community awareness leads to community mobilization. One of the key successes resulting from the technical assistance provided through the advocacy project was the groundwork laid in the community by Stepping Up about the problems of high-risk drinking and potential solutions. Because of this work groups like the Northside Neighborhood Association were able to mobilize around the Hy-Vee liquor store proposal and elevate it in the eyes of both the public and policy-makers to make positive changes in their community.

"We've seen a general raising of community awareness about the problem of binge drinking and high-risk drinking. More and more people are aware

of it through all levels of the community. I belong to two or three organizations. Some of them are recreational. Some of them are social service obligations. People want to talk about it. That wasn't the case even a year ago," said Jim Clayton.

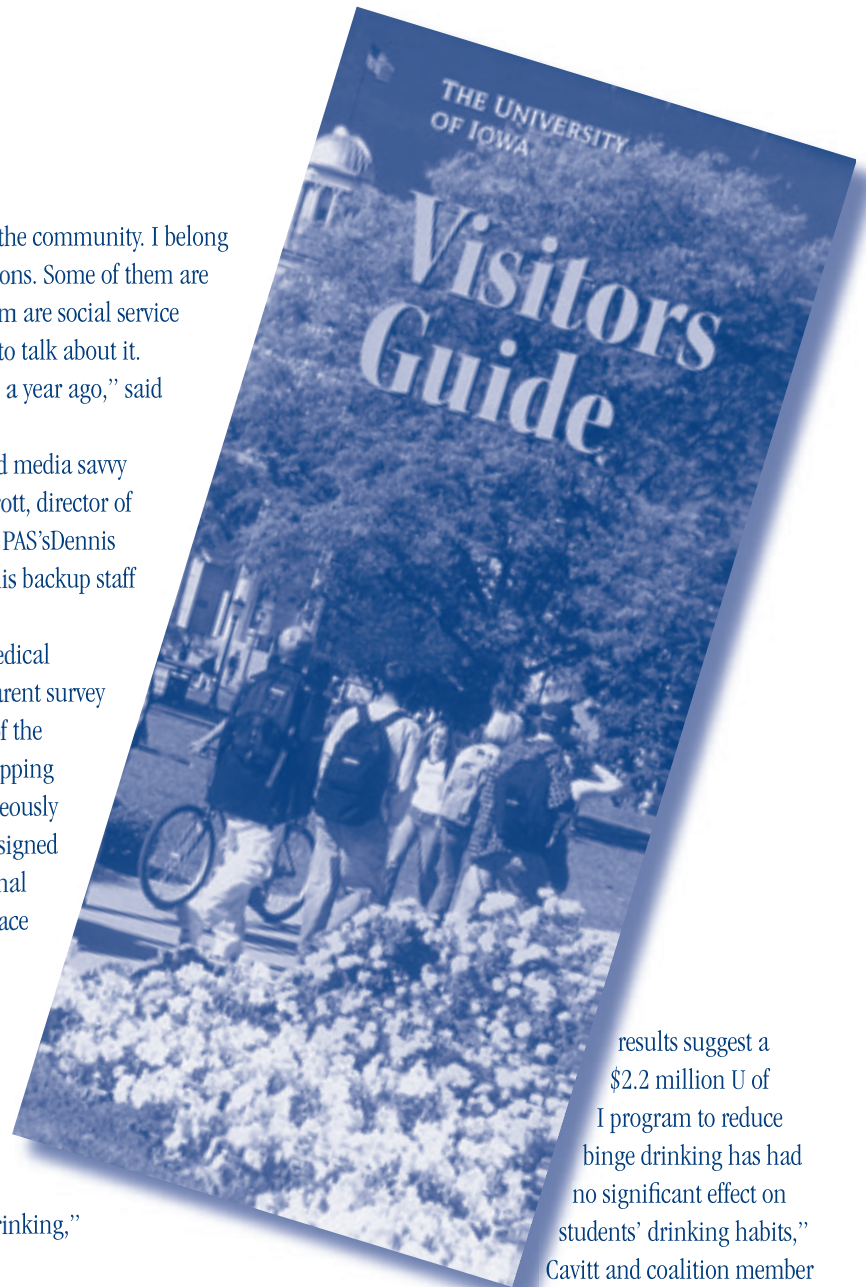
Stepping Up has gained media savvy with help from Steve Parrott, director of University Relations, and PAS's Dennis Alexander, supported by his backup staff in Bozeman, Montana.

When the American Medical Association released its parent survey results at the beginning of the fall 2001 school term, Stepping Up was ready. It simultaneously issued a media release designed to capitalize on the national media coverage and to place the Stepping Up project in the broader context of a problem affecting other universities. The release, titled "National Poll Supports Local Efforts to Reduce Harms From Excessive Drinking," began as follows:

"IOWA CITY, Iowa—National poll results released today by the A Matter of Degree (AMOD) program of the American Medical Association (AMA) support actions taken by the Stepping Up project, a community and campus coalition to reduce the harmful effects of excessive drinking in Iowa City and on the University of Iowa campus."

Carolyn Cavitt said: "When I became interim director, Dennis Alexander was an invaluable resource to me. We talked frequently. He did a lot of background research for me. When we had a bar fire we were on the phone the next day figuring out strategies. He helped the coalition write opinion pieces and letters to the editor."

When the *Des Moines Register* carried a major article ("Binge Drinking Alive and Well at U of I," November 23, 2002) on Iowa's efforts, saying, "The



results suggest a \$2.2 million U of I program to reduce binge drinking has had no significant effect on students' drinking habits," Cavitt and coalition member Jim Clayton penned a letter

to the editor to set the record straight. Although not published, the Stepping Up response pointed out the multiple ways in which the campus and city were altering the environment to offer leisure options for students and reduce underage service by Iowa City bars.

Media attention, prompted by a steady flow of letters from parents, op-ed contributions from Stepping Up Coalition members and media releases from the campus, has altered the community's mindscape about the problems associated with high-risk drinking. Media coverage has led not just to small triumphs, such as the preservation of Pearson's fountain in lieu of a liquor store, but also to readiness for larger achievements, such as the growing interest by the Iowa

City Council to transform downtown's environment into a more attractive landscape, perhaps with fewer bars than streetlights.

Parent power can help move a policy agenda.

Stepping Up quickly recognized parents as allies in supporting policy change, in part because of President Coleman's communication with them, which was backed up further by what parents learned during orientations. The coalition produced the winter 1999–2000 *Parent Times* quarterly newsletter with an overview of the downtown bar scene and secondary drinking effects and advice for parents. The university's Website continues to provide alcohol-related tips for parents.

The university now communicates about alcohol concerns with parents of incoming students during the summer between high school graduation and first-year fall semester. A Stepping Up leader bluntly described that first letter in summer 2000: "Mary Sue Coleman wrote a letter to the incoming students and their parents in June or July after they've graduated from high school. The message was if you are planning to come here and drink, don't bother. That's not what we are about."

In fall 2002 the university started sending out letters to notify parents of students who violated alcohol rules. "The reason we chose to use that method of communication is that we are beginning to get complaints from parents about the safety of the youngsters in bars. We want to let them know that the university does not have the ability to enforce laws in those situations, and they need to talk to their youngsters ahead of time," Vice President Jones said.

Local media coverage of the new policy was favorable. "Parents of more than 100 University of Iowa students had received letters stating their child had been cited for underage drinking on campus. Let's see, classes started about a month ago. The university better start saving up for more postage" (*Press-Citizen*, opinion, September 23, 2002).

Policy changes can take time, and economic interests can create resistance.

Stepping Up has not lost sight of the proposed 21-year-old minimum entry requirement for bars. Its members see a shift on the city council, favorable media coverage, and the results of heightened police enforcement as encouraging. Two of the councilors who voted against the 2001 compromise drink specials ordinance as not strong enough were handily re-elected that year. The city council has asked for a report in 2003 on the need for possible additional city regulation of bars. Stepping Up's board approved another community survey during its September meeting, with findings to be available in 2003.

Stepping Up has met with suspicion and outright hostility from local bar owners, although the lack of a cohesive trade group has dampened some of the opposition. One bar owner publicly threatened to take any proposed 21-year-old admission ordinance to a public vote via referendum and to lead recalls against consenting council members. Privately, however, many owners express support for restricting drink specials and reducing downtown bar density since the current proliferation hurts their profits.

"Some bar owners wouldn't mind seeing that kind of ordinance passed because it would level the playing field for them. They've said many times that if it is voluntary it will never work because there will always be somebody who is willing to let in the underage people to make the money," said Parrott.

"Most bar owners actually favor certain bar restrictions like outlawing all-you-can-drink specials. But given the free market economy we have, if a competitor does it, they have to do it. So they were all asking us for a level playing field. Just as long as everyone plays by the same set of rules they didn't have a problem," said Walding.

Will downtown broaden its appeal and provide for a wider variety of social and recreation venues for all ages? Twenty-year downtown business proprietor and Stepping Up Coalition member Jim Clayton sees a gradual effort to reduce outlet density, building upon city and owners' interest in

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downtown renewal by imposing minimal distances between bars and the library, churches and schools.

“We can’t limit the number of licenses, but we can limit the use of the land and say that we are going to allow 11 [bars] per acre, and if you close your business it is reduced to ten per acre, nine per acre, whatever. If you sell your business to somebody else, nothing happens. The buyer gets to operate as long as it’s a continuous use. But if you abandon it for a year and the license is lifted, we reduce the number by one until we get down to our goal of a limited number of alcohol licenses,” Clayton forecasts.

When the downtown Englert Theatre had been proposed for conversion into another downtown bar before the council, with the urging of Stepping Up, an arts group stepped in. Dale Helling, assistant city manager, recounted that the city supported restoration of the theater for live musical and theatrical performances and had invested \$18 million in downtown library expansion. The city is experiencing a growing market for downtown residential spaces and recently approved plans for a 14-story hotel and convention center. Helling said: “If we can change the identity from one of a place where students go to drink, to one of where you can take your family, you can find entertainment, you can find good restaurants, that will bring people downtown.”

After a policy is passed, enforcement is the next problem.

Local enforcement of state alcohol regulations is virtually the only enforcement now taking place. A state official noted that recent fiscal challenges precluded the Iowa ABD from enforcing anything other than underage tobacco laws, for which special federal funding exists.

“We used to do actual enforcement. But with the [state’s] budget crisis, we got rid of our alcohol agents. And so at this point in time we don’t have it. But that’s a function we may restore at some point, if the economy ever turns.”

A one-time federal grant did permit the state’s Department of Public Safety, encompassing state policy, narcotics and gambling enforcement, and criminal investigations, to carry out compliance checks—bar checks and underage access—at alcohol retailers for three months in 2002.

“They were finding that roughly 50 percent of retailers were selling [to underage youths],” said the same official.

ABD administrator Walding is now seeking additional external funds to make statewide enforcement possible. “I am a big believer that enforcement equates to compliance,” he said.

Walding’s division also provides administrative support to the state’s ABC. As Stepping Up became more visible and began regular communication with Walding, the commission became interested in university communities across the state. The commission convened a series of public hearings, took testimony and released a report with recommendations in early 2002. A number of these recommendations incorporated the ideas generated by Stepping Up.

One of the six recommendations is that some of the state monies that already go to local governments (\$12.9 million annually, or 20 percent of revenue derived from ABD operations) and the profits the state makes from alcohol sales should be used toward enforcing alcohol laws. “We are generating a lot of money off this business. I think that it’s not good public policy to not divert some of that money toward regulating that business. The consequences of ignoring regulation are too important,” said Walding.

Meanwhile, in Iowa City the local police department is the only agency looking at bar compliance with underage drinking laws. Stepping Up’s pressure, multiple-year consideration of regulatory ordinances by the city council, significant media coverage and the involvement of the parents of Iowa students have led the police department to embrace this role.

In April 2002 Iowa City police stepped up underage drinking enforcement, citing both minors in possession and licensees who sell to underage decoys. Arrests for minors in possession went up by 70 percent during the first half of 2002 compared with the prior year. “For the same six-month period, vehicle accidents involving underage youth who had been drinking has dropped 42.5 percent, from 120 to 69, records show,” the *Press-Citizen* reported (July 22, 2002).

Bars are getting the message and fewer are selling to decoys, although there is a great disparity between



in the *Press-Citizen*: “The truth is that Iowa City bars now are paying more attention to the age of their customers because police have begun enforcing a law that they could have been enforcing—or enforcing more aggressively—several years ago.”

The police department credits Stepping Up for its support in the current enhanced enforcement, according to Sergeant Kelsay: “We get support for our efforts from the rest of the coalition and the individual people that make up that coalition. It’s been positive for us.”

Perhaps more important, what is what is the status now? Has that lack of political will now turned around? Will the council take steps recommended by Stepping Up and the *Press-Citizen*? State ABD administrator Walding credits Stepping Up for changing the political climate in Iowa City. “I think Stepping Up has done a great job of getting the council to recognize that there is political support in that community for enforcing it [the minimum drinking age law].”

In May 2003 the city council voted to require a minimum age of 19 to enter the bars to see if such a restriction would work or whether further measures would be necessary.

Did the Advocacy Initiative Make a Difference?

The coalition demonstrated its vitality in the policy and enforcement changes being sustained on campus and in the growing political support for city council action on downtown bar density and for restricting bar entry for all under age 21.

Iowa City Police Department’s Michael Brotherton describes the difference: “I went to the university here and graduated. And over the years, particularly since the Stepping Up Coalition was established, I have

establishments. Sergeant Troy Kelsay, the officer in charge of the downtown bar beat, ticked off a list of good operators, some of whom pay bonuses to staff if police decoy operations come up empty-handed, while other bars continue to account for a disproportionate share of violations. Police communicate in writing with bar owners and conduct follow-up decoy visits to give feedback to owners about improving procedures.

Further evidence of change comes from the police department, as indicated in an October 2002 editorial

seen better collaboration, better communication, an establishing partnership and more attention drawn to the problem. It has gained momentum. All the agencies are involved and are making a more conscious effort to do their part. We are doing more enforcement to make the bars more accountable.”

But the most telling testimonials come from the two top leaders, the Iowa City mayor and the university’s outgoing president, whose comments also reflect the progressive nature of these efforts. Neither claims that a final outcome is at hand or even feasible. Changing the landscape, just as the mindscape, is always a work in progress.

Mayor Ernie Lehman told the *Press-Citizen* (February 1, 2002) that a University of Iowa student recently said students under 21 are finding it “a little tougher to get a drink than it had been,” and that “judging from some of the calls I’ve had from some of the bars, I don’t think there’s any question there’s a level of caution that is significantly greater. Overall, I think we’ve gotten the attention of the bar owners.”

Interviewed at the time of her mid-2002 appointment to preside over the University of Michigan system, Mary Sue Coleman was asked about her role in alcohol problem prevention at Iowa. She responded: “Have we had success? Well, I think we’ve changed the public perception. People view it as a much more serious issue than before. This is a national problem and it has to be viewed as systemic. And we’re going to have to keep working at it” (*Christian Science Monitor*, July 23, 2002).

Components of Technical Assistance Provided During the Advocacy Initiative

PAS provided the coalition with the following:

- Assistance in developing a strategic plan to support policy objectives
- Recommendation on strengthening project linkage to the community to identify and increase support for policy objectives
- Training and workshops on media advocacy, working within a political system and spokesperson training
- Identification of media opportunities and the drafting of media materials such as op-eds and letters to the editor

- Development of a strategic plan, talking points, spokesperson preparation and other details in support of coalition participation in state and local hearings
- Fulfillment of requests to provide research to support policy passage on the following topics: relationship between outlet density and crime, zoning and alcohol outlets, economic impact of 21-plus service restriction, and impact of price specials

Key Learnings

- Raising public awareness of alcohol issues enables community members to speak out and act on problems (such as a liquor store location) and encourages policy-makers to consider policy solutions.
- Effective community organizing helps build relationships with community members and broadens public support for changing public policy.
- Supplying policy-makers with information and data about the problem helps to support their decision making and sustain long-term policy solutions.
- Parent power can help move a policy agenda.