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Op Ed: Community Fund of Darien's Teen Binge Drinking Campaign Gets National Recognition

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This opinion piece/announcement is by Carrie Bernier, executive director of the Community Fund of Darien:

The Community Fund's Thriving Youth Task Force has set its sights on reducing teenage binge drinking in Darien.

When they launched the "Our Darien 06820" campaign last winter, they hoped to hit a nerve locally with parents and teens. They didn't suspect that it would strike a chord nationally, too.

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Emily Larkin, The Community Fund of Darien's Thriving Youth director, recently returned from California after presenting Darien's innovative "06820" campaign to a national audience of substance abuse professionals.

Darien's binge drinking prevention campaign is the product of a collaboration between The Community Fund of Darien, the Thriving Youth Task Force and the creative team at Colangelo Synergy Marketing.

In February 2017, the Community Fund's Thriving Youth Task Force released a provocative social marketing campaign aimed at the culture of acceptance for heavy drinking in our community. Task Force member Dr. Frank Bartolomeo, of the Southfield Center, called this campaign, "an audacious step in the right direction."

The campaign featured images referencing teen binge drinking and parent permissiveness and overlaid Darien's Zip code: 06820. It was impossible not to pay attention when these images showed up in students' and parents' Facebook and Instagram newsfeeds, posters in liquor store windows and popular local shops.

The campaign materials all directed viewers to OurDarien.com — a website providing resources for teens and parents on the impact of alcohol on the teen brain, the consequences of breaking the social hosting law and the important preventive benefits of an ongoing parent-child conversation about underage drinking.

Students shared: "Everyone at school is talking about this." Parents commented: "This has totally changed the way I think about the risks of teen drinking."

After the campaign's release, Emily Larkin, the Thriving Youth Program director was asked to speak at a state-wide training on best practices for social media prevention campaigns.

Later in the spring, she was asked to present the campaign at a Connecticut's Annual Prevention Conference in Hartford. Prevention specialists statewide remarked that this was the most compelling social marketing campaign they had seen. This summer, she was invited to speak at the 30th Annual National Prevention Network Conference.

Over 1,000 prevention professionals from around the country gathered in Anaheim, Calif. this September to learn about prevention best practices, emerging trends, and the latest data around substance use and mental health in our nation.

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Larkin presented a break-out session titled “Provocative Social Marketing to Reduce Underage Drinking in Affluent Communities.” A total of 150 prevention professionals attended the session and were blown away by Darien’s work to address the issue of teen binge drinking and parent permissiveness.

During the Q&A time, prevention specialists from Silicon Valley, the North Shore of Boston and Alaska said that learning from Darien’s story was instructive for the prevention work they are undertaking in their own communities.

Larkin’s presentation highlighted how Darien’s survey data positioned them to receive this competitive grant, as well as Darien’s efforts to secure a world-class marketing firm to produce the campaign, their efforts to create community consensus and buy-in and the importance of professional expertise of the Thriving Youth Task Force members.

The Community Fund’s Thriving Youth Task Force will administer a student and parent survey in November 2017 to continue to track data and assess our impact. For more information, please visit the [Thriving Youth](#) Web page at the Community Fund's website.