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## Fighting Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Lamorinda Teens

By Sora O'Doherty



Jaime Rich is director of ADAPT, the local agency that is fighting alcohol and drug abuse in Lamorinda teens. Photo Sora O'Doherty

(ADAPT), funded by Contra Costa County for the past seven years since the alcohol-related death of Orinda student Joe Loudon, which caused the county to fund a prevention program in Lamorinda.

Rich has been the person in charge from the beginning. At first she was solely responsible for the program, but now she has been promoted to director and coordinates the ADAPT Lamorinda, an east county coalition, and also Friday Night Live, a statewide youth development program. When fully staffed, Friday Night Live will have teen age volunteers who, with the aid of two employees, will go into three high school and one middle school to work on alcohol and drug issues.

Before the end of the school year, Rich met with every senior at Miramonte to talk about the challenges facing them over the summer and then moving on to college. When she meets with students, she gives them information, but, she points out, she also gets information from them. Will they be drinking over the summer? Yeah! Anytime, anywhere, particularly outdoors. At parties, in the homes of their friends.

Will parents be at home? Rich notes that parents are usually not home, but might be, perhaps upstairs. She talks about some norms that she is trying to break, including the myth that it is safer if teens drink at a party at home, where a parent is in charge. Among other reasons for objecting to this norm, it is just not good role modeling, she says.

Rich admits that we are never going to get to a goal of no teen drinking, but explains that her goal is to delay the start of drinking and to prevent binge drinking. The earlier drinking begins, the greater risk of addiction and greater potential harm is to brain development. The human brain is not fully developed until around age 25. The amount of alcohol consumed has been shown to rise nationwide from the time a person starts drinking, to peak at around age 25, and then to decline. For brain development, this is the exact opposite to what should happen.

The average age nationwide for consuming a first drink is 12 years old. Furthermore, teens are

drinking to great excesses, but they believe that it is normal. Even more so, adults think it is normal for kids to drink: kids will be kids!

Teens were unable to define binge drinking, and were shocked when they heard the official definition. According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, binge drinking is defined as 4 or more drinks within two hours for girls and five or more drinks in two hours for boys. A survey of 11th graders in the Acalanes Union High School District revealed that 35 percent admitted to binge drinking in the past 30 days. Bear in mind, Rich points out, that this means that 65 percent have not been binge drinking.

### Other Drugs a Problem

In fact, she says, alcohol and marijuana use has leveled off, while the abuse of prescription drugs is going up a bit, according to the latest California Health Kids Survey. Teens may abuse drugs that have been prescribed to them, for example Oxycontin for sports injuries, or prescribed to others. The most abused drugs are stimulants prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. These drugs are perceived as benign, and kids take them thinking that they'll perform better on a test. Rich is quick to point out that one pill can kill, especially when combined with alcohol. In addition, most teens are unaware of the legal consequences of taking someone else's prescription drugs or of selling yours, which could lead to arrest, prosecution and a criminal record.

Rich is particularly concerned about the dangers of marijuana, especially because a measure to legalize marijuana is scheduled to be on the November ballot in California. While she acknowledges that the consequences of excessive alcohol can be more catastrophic, she believes that early and frequent use of marijuana is worse for brain development, causing kids to check out from activities that they used to enjoy, such as hiking or listening to music, and to become bored with normal activities when they are not high. Moreover, it is so easy to obtain, and, if legalized, it will only get easier. Rich says that most people do not realize that the ballot measure would prohibit marijuana use under the age of 21.

In the autumn Rich wants to connect with athletic coaches, who are often the first adult teens will talk to. She wants to provide them with more information on the misuse of prescription drugs and supply handouts they can pass along to students. Another of her top goals is the get at least one city in the Lamorinda area to expand their social host ordinance to include marijuana and controlled substances. Moraga recently strengthened their social host ordinance Rich said, while Lafayette relies on the prohibition in the California Business and Professions Code on furnishing alcohol to a minor.

Rich also seeks to make teens aware of the 911 Amnesty Law, adopted following the death of Orinda teen Joe Loudon, that enables people to call 911 for assistance for another person without fear of being prosecuted for underage drinking. The law, says Rich, isn't intended as a free pass, but is meant to encourage teens who have been drinking to make a call if a friend appears to be in need of medical help, rather than putting the friend in a bedroom hoping they'll sleep it off.

### What Parents Can Do

There is no lack of things for teens to do, Rich says, but there is always time to drink. She urges parents to be alert to what their kids are doing, where they are going, and to be sure that they will not be served alcohol at parties or events. "No one wants to be the odd man out," she notes, the norm is that that is not what we do. But we need to change the norm, because we all want everybody's kids to be happy, healthy and safe.

ADAPT Lamorinda will not meet in July, but usually meets every second Wednesday of the month at the Orinda City Hall. The next meeting will be Aug. 10, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Everyone is welcome and parents are encouraged to attend.

At any time that you have questions or concerns, Rich says to contact her at [Jaime@chd-prevention.org](mailto:Jaime@chd-prevention.org) or call her at (925) 349-7338. She is a resource that is there for the community.

Reach the reporter at: [sora@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sora@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

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