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Coalition receives six-figure grant

By Gregory Andersen

The San Rafael Alcohol and Drug Coalition was awarded a federal grant to the tune of \$125,000 per year to engage the community about the dangers of substance abuse among the youth population.

Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, announced last week the San Rafael-based organization is one 147 grant recipients in the \$19.8 million new Drug-Free Communities Support Program.

“For too many young people, this future is clouded by drug use, which inhibits their ability to remain healthy and safe and to achieve their full potential,” Kerlikowske said in a press release.

“We congratulate this coalition on its work to raise a generation of young people equipped to remain drug free and ready to meet the challenges and successfully compete in the 21st century.”



Teen activists with Youth Justice, an offshoot of Alcohol Justice, rally for an “alcopop-free zone” in the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael earlier this year. Marinscope file photo

The grant, which is renewable for five years on a performance basis, will be managed by Alcohol Justice, a local advocacy group that opposes the targeting of youth by the alcohol industry.

Jorge Castillo, Advocacy Director at Alcohol Justice and Program Director of the San Rafael Alcohol and Drug Coalition, said he is grateful for the grant, as it will enable the organizations to initiate preventative efforts.

“This funding is welcomed because it will allow us to address ongoing issues,” Castillo said. “More than anything, it means the community will get the needed support to address the harms that alcohol and marijuana cause in our community.”

Castillo said one of the first efforts will be the creation of an “alcopop-free zone” in San Rafael’s Canal neighborhood. Alcopops are flavored alcoholic beverages that many argue target underage drinkers.

“There is clear evidence that if you reduce the availability [of alcopops], it will reduce consumption,” Castillo said. “So if we can get them out of the store, the local youth wont have access.”

Serving a community of 12,000 residents in the Canal District, Castillo said the coalition has already engaged retailers and requested they stop selling the drinks. He also said the group will be doing preventative work for marijuana use among teenagers.

The DFC program provides grants of up to \$625,000 over five years to community coalitions that facilitate citizen participation in local drug-prevention efforts.

The SRDAC is a community-based coalition comprised of different sectors in the community, including schools, businesses, healthcare and law enforcement. Alcohol Justice is a member of the SRDAC.

“We have the power to challenge alcohol and drug use among young people here in our own backyard,” Castillo said. “This new funding will allow our community coalition to help place more Canal kids on the path toward success and enable them to live healthier and safer lives.”

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