



## PROJECT ALCOPOP HIGHLIGHTS HARMS OF UNDERAGE DRINKING

HICKORY, NC – Thirty-seven teens visited Hickory convenience stores Saturday, December 10, to share their concern about underage drinking and its harmful effects. The teens came together for Project Alcopop under Catawba County Health Partners' A.S.A.P. (Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention) of Catawba County coalition, which works to reduce underage drinking in Catawba County.

The event kicked off Saturday morning with an orientation at Catawba County Public Health (CCPH). The group, including teens from Young People of Integrity, 4-H, and Catawba County Youth Council, learned about some of the dangers of a new alcoholic product called "alcopops." The presentation, given by A.S.A.P. Chairperson Michelle Roseman, indicated that "alcopops" have a high alcoholic content and are designed to look like an energy drink and taste like soda. The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) refers to the product as "binge drinking in a can" because drinking one may equal drinking up to five beers. Advocates say these fruity, sugary malt beverages, with upwards of 10% alcohol, are actively marketed to youth.



**(L-R): Alex Mull, Thomas Hill, Sophie Sharp, Leigha Williamson, Jacqlyn Lo and Mia Gore. working on "Project Alcopop", an initiative designed to help prevent the provision of sweetly flavored, high alcohol content beverages to youth.**

"We observed a lot of surprised looks on faces of the students and youth leaders as we gave the facts about alcopops," said Roseman. "We were pleased with the turnout and interest in the project, and everyone learned something they didn't know."

Following the orientation, teams of youth wearing A.S.A.P. t-shirts visited 10 Hickory convenience stores, including Cubbard Express stores, Q Express, Fast and Fresh, and 3-Star Cool Mart. Each team had 800 bright red stickers designed to alert the public about the potential danger of "alcopops" and caution adults who may purchase the product for underage drinkers. The stickers were placed on "alcopop" beverages, such as Four Loco, Tilt, and Blast.

"Our group had a great experience on Saturday with Project Alcopop," said North Carolina Cooperative Extension's Donna Mull, an A.S.A.P. member and coordinator of the Catawba County Youth Council and 4-H programs. "We had no trouble at either store we visited and

they were expecting us. We used all the stickers, and they even let us go in the walk-in coolers to label the products that were not yet on the shelves.”

“At one of the stores, the clerk was very impressed that the teens would care enough about the issue to get involved in such a direct way,” Mull added. “The clerk shared with them that she was only 23 years old and knew of kids in her high school class that had died as a result of alcohol and drug use. She was almost in tears as she thanked the teens.”

A.S.A.P.’s Merchant Action Team Chair Carleen Crawford and Charlie Fuller, region 3 ABC information and education specialist, work to build positive relationships with local merchants. Each month, the Merchant Action Team surveys local businesses to check compliance and encourage training for staff. The team was also responsible for inviting the Hickory convenience stores to be a part of Project Alcopop.

“Through Project Alcopop, A.S.A.P. was able not only to inform youth about the dangers of these beverages, but also to create awareness in the community and reinforce compliance by our local merchants,” said Amy McCauley, Catawba County Health Partners’ community outreach manager.

“Perhaps most exciting is the fact that our efforts have gained significant attention from our North Carolina Preventing Underage Drinking grant managers, to the degree that they are considering making our approach to merchant relations a statewide model for their program,” McCauley added. “Catawba County Health Partners is extremely appreciative of the A.S.A.P. coalition’s outstanding efforts to help prevent underage drinking in our community.”

#### **About A.S.A.P. (Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention) of Catawba County:**

A.S.A.P. of Catawba County is a coalition of volunteers working to reduce underage drinking in Catawba County through a comprehensive plan aimed at impacting the causes of the problem: easy availability of alcohol to minors and permissive community attitudes toward youth alcohol use. Funding is provided from various sources, including the North Carolina Prevention of Underage Drinking (NC PUD) grant program. A.S.A.P. is managed by Catawba County Health Partners.

#### **About Catawba County Health Partners:**

Catawba County Health Partners (CCHP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with more than 120 members representing 54 community partners dedicated to generating broad, sustainable impact on the county’s health priorities. The organization coordinates four community coalitions: Access to Care, A.S.A.P. (Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention) of Catawba County (underage drinking), Cancer Task Force, and Eat Smart Move More Catawba County (childhood obesity). Supporting partners include Catawba County Public Health and Catawba Valley Medical Center. For more information, please visit

[www.catawbacountyhealthpartners.org](http://www.catawbacountyhealthpartners.org)