



## Responsible Beverage Server Training offered locally

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Staff intern

The Pine River-Backus Family Center is now hosting a course to educate bar and restaurant servers on the legal dangers of serving alcohol to minors as well as over-serving alcohol to intoxicated patrons.

The Responsible Beverage Server Training is sponsored by the Working Together Coalition.

The Working Together Coalition started the Responsible Beverage Server Training in 2006 with a grant from the Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services. The class is offered free of charge, and is often taken by newly-hired servers of restaurants and bars.

Kelly Felton, substance abuse prevention specialist, and LeeAnn Sampson, prevention coordinator, have been teaching the course for five years.

Felton and Sampson incorporate trivia, statistics and facts about the growth of alcohol abuse in Cass County.

They successfully break the ice by letting class participants wear intoxicated-vision goggles and attempt to walk a straight line.

The course has grown in popularity. Most restaurants in the area now require all servers to take the course before they can be hired. Responsible Beverage Server Training is now offered in the Walker-Hackensack-Akeley area.

Felton, a former probation officer, has seen first hand what happens to alcohol abusers. Starting the Responsible Beverage Server Training has given Felton and Sampson a look at both sides of the coin of alcohol abuse.

Teenagers in the area have become more prone to alcohol abuse as well. According to a recent Working Together Coalition survey, 30 percent of sixth-grade males and 19 percent of sixth-grade females admitted to having consumed alcohol. Fifty-nine percent of ninth-grade males and 48 percent of ninth-grade females acknowledged having consumed alcohol.

"The culture of drinking has changed. It's not just drinking to have a couple

drinks, it's 'let's drink to get intoxicated,'" Felton said.

The Working Together Coalition is concerned that drinking alcohol is now the social norm among teenagers in Cass County and have strived to improve the reputation Cass County has for underage drinking.

Felton feels that teenagers are pressured to consume alcohol by a variety of external factors. She said drinking has become the social norm in the schools in Cass and Crow Wing Counties. Some students consume alcohol as entertainment with no consequences. Others view alcohol as a way to escape the pressures of difficult schoolwork.

In this area, Felton finds one thing in particular to be a contributing factor.

"It's the culture in the communities that we're working in. People come up here to vacation," she said.

Felton feels that it is hard for teenagers and others to cease abusing alcohol while living in a vacation area notorious for alcohol usage. Felton cites Cass and Crow Wing counties' high rate of DUI arrests as further evidence of the alcohol abuse in the area.

In Cass County alone, minor alcohol consumption charges totaled 71 in 2009, a 300 percent increase from 2007. In 2010, there were 145 minor alcohol consumption charges.

The Responsible Beverage Server Training class ends with a review on how to check identification for minors and how not to over serve intoxicated customers.

The Working Together Coalition has sponsored programs to interactively teach parents of teenage alcohol consumption. One program, called Hidden in Plain Sight, simulated an average teenager's room with hidden alcohol and drug paraphernalia. Parents were then instructed to find as many of these items as they could. The results showed that many parents had a naive attitude toward drug and alcohol abuse and many parents were unable to find any illegal substances or related-items.

The Working Together Coalition hopes these programs and more help inform the community of the dangers of alcohol abuse.

For more information on the Working Together Coalition or the Responsible Beverage Server Training, call Kelly Felton at 218-330-8129 or email [kelly@workingtogethercoalition.org](mailto:kelly@workingtogethercoalition.org).

The group's website is: <http://www.workingtogethercoalition.org/>.

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