FEATURED PROGRAMMES

Mothers Against Drunk Driving—MADD in the USA

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Many organizations have been born from tragedy, but few are as widely recognized, powerful, and enduring as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Primarily grassroots and volunteer driven, MADD has over 600 state organizations, chapters, and community action teams in each of the 50 states as well as affiliates in Guam, Puerto Rico and Canada. MADD consists of over three million members and supporters nationwide.

MADD is the United States leader in the fight against drunk driving. In 1980, the public's perception toward alcohol impaired driving began to shift. The spark that ignited this passion began after the tragic death of a 13 year old girl, Cari Lightner, after she was struck and killed by a repeat offender drunk driver in California. A small group of mothers joined together to express their outrage at a system that did not appropriately sanction what was soon to be recognized as "the most frequently committed violent crime" in America. Since that time, with the help of MADD, over 2500 antidrunk driving, victim rights, and underage drinking prevention laws have been passed. MADD is also the largest crime victim assistance organization in the world.

MADD has 26 national board of director members, including a youth director, who manage the business of the corporation, set the direction of the organization, and establish public policy positions based on research. These public policy positions help guide the organization's legislative agendas and determine the actions that will most effectively address the drunk driving problem.

In Dallas, Texas, Dean Wilkerson, National Executive Director, oversees a national office that develops public policy and education programs, victim assistance support and programs, public relations programs, and support for state and local affiliates.

MADD is funded by individual contributions, corporate gifts, foundations, government grants, in-kind donations, licenses, promotions, and restricted funds. Our success in securing public dollars to support this vital work comes from the progress the country has seen in reducing death and injury. Although drunk driving deaths and injuries have declined, drunk driving crimes continue to occur at astounding rates. As with all not-for-profit organizations, MADD faces the challenge of maintaining public support, and changing

public opinion, while at the same time, communicating the "don't drink and drive" message to a very different world than when it began.

Our activists work to strengthen existing drunk driving laws and adopt new ones. MADD chapters in each state actively pursue the passage of recommended laws and other laws they believe will have a positive impact on reducing the number of drinking drivers. We work with governmental agencies, traffic safety coalitions, health care professionals, schools and parent-teacher organizations, SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) and others, to achieve life preserving legislation.

One of the most critical changes that MADD in the United States has been targeting recently is a federal law that will change the legal level of intoxication to 0.08% blood alcohol content (BAC). Currently, 17 states and the District of Columbia have 0.08% BAC per se laws. Research proves that this law is a general deterrent to all drinking drivers and would save 500-600 lives and prevent countless injuries each year if enacted throughout the United States. Although the 0.08% BAC standard is one that Canada, Great Britain and many other industrialized nations possess, getting this law passed in many states is an ongoing and frustrating challenge.

Bereaved and injured victims of drunk driving crashes may call MADD's victim hotline, 1-800-GET-MADD (United States only), to reach trained staff or volunteers who provide immediate emotional support and guidance through the criminal justice system. MADD also offers a wide range of free literature to victims and their families. A twice yearly magazine, *The MADDvocate* is sent to victim members. All of these materials, as well as other public policy and program information, can be accessed through MADD's web site at www.madd.org. Many chapters have victim support groups and volunteers who monitor court cases and report outcomes to local citizens and news media. This "watchdog" function helps ensure that drunk driving offenders are punished to the fullest extent of the law. As a result, increasingly, judges are ordering drunk driving offenders to attend MADD sponsored victim impact panels, at which crash victims tell offenders how drunk driving has irreversibly changed their lives.

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National public awareness campaigns are a key component to changing attitudes and behavior. Many of our awareness programs, such as *Tie One On For Safety* (red ribbon campaign) are ongoing. Each holiday season we ask people to tie a red ribbon to a visible location on their vehicle as a symbol of hope to others who have had their lives affected by a drinking driver, and as a reminder to others not to drink and drive. Our *Designate A Driver* program heightens awareness about the dangers of impaired driving. Other projects, such as *Rating The States*, evaluates actions and effectiveness of lawmakers, state officials, and communities on impaired driving issues, and offers solutions. Volunteers speak to civic groups, educators, and youth, and distribute newsletters to keep the public and supporters informed about the issues, and what can be done to help.

The national board of directors added *prevent underage drinking* to its mission statement last year. Always dedicated to youth issues, MADD is now renewing its focus on children, teens, and young adults to stamp out the growing problems associated with underage impaired driving. Recently, we launched eight programs to more directly involve young people in our mission. Through these programs, youth are helping change a prevailing mentality that condones underage drinking as a “rite of passage”. The programs include a *National Youth Summit*. In the fall of 2000, 435 young people from each congressional district in America will meet for a week in Washington, DC to discuss underage drinking problems and to present solutions to members of the United States Congress. A traveling multimedia school assembly called *Take the Lead* and *Youth in Action* groups will also be available. MADD also has a successful, longstanding *PosterEssay Contest* on underage impaired driving.

For the past 20 years MADD has educated the public that drunk driving is not an *accident*. Those injured or killed in drunk driving collisions are not “accident” victims. The crash caused by an impaired driver involves two choices: to drink and to drive. Although there have been reduced deaths and injuries due to the irresponsible and reckless acts of drunk drivers, the war against drunk driving is far from over.

- Drunk driving is the United States’ most frequently committed violent crime.
- Approximately three of five Americans will be affected by an alcohol impaired crash at some time in their lives.

- In 1998, 15 935 Americans were killed and more than a million others were injured in crashes involving alcohol.
- In 1995, alcohol related traffic deaths and injuries cost society \$114.5 billion, including lost quality of life.
- In 1998, 2210 young people (ages 15–20) were killed in crashes involving alcohol.
- About 10 million drinkers were under 21 in 1995. Of these, 4.4 million were binge drinkers, including 1.7 million heavy drinkers.

Through the years, MADD has changed the public’s attitude about drinking and driving, as evidenced in the reduction of death and injury. MADD still continues to fight a misperception that it is comprised of “a bunch of crazed women” and that its members are against drinking alcohol. Nothing could be further than the truth. Our volunteers and supporters are men and women, of all colors and creeds, young and senior, victims and concerned citizens, all committed to ending the violence on this nation’s highways. Many of our members and supporters drink alcohol responsibly or *designate a driver* who remains alcohol-free for safe and sober transportation after an event. We strive to incorporate credible scientific research to back our heart felt, emotional calls to action.

Drunk driving kills and injures real people; it shatters families and leaves huge voids in the hearts of families and friends. It is the irresponsible action of others that brought MADD to where it is today. It is not about drinking; it is about drinking and driving.

The mission of Mothers Against Drunk Driving is to stop drunk driving, support the victims of this violent crime, and prevent underage drinking. We are proud of the 40% reduction in fatalities since the early 1980s, but there is still a long way to go. Even if drunk driving were to end tomorrow in the United States, MADD would still be needed to support the bereaved and injured victims of this entirely preventable, violent crime. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been saved and injuries prevented as a direct result of dedication to our mission. That other countries have joined in the fight against impaired driving strengthens our collective commitment and ability to ensure safety on all highways around the globe.