

Community Culture of Responsible Choices

Amy Kiger

Director, Office of Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention
University of Central Missouri

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is a comprehensive public education institution with approximately 14,000 students from 42 states and 61 countries. The 1,561-acre campus is located in Warrensburg, Missouri, a town of about 19,000 residents located 50 miles southeast of Kansas City. UCM offers 150 programs of study from which students can receive professional or graduate certificates, Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, Education Specialist Degrees, and Cooperative Doctoral Degrees.

In 2009, the Missouri Department of Public Safety awarded a subcontract to the University of Central Missouri to implement a grant focused on reducing underage drinking among U.S. Air Force military personnel. The grant is formally known as a Department of Justice Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) Grant to Reduce Underage Drinking Among Air Force Personnel. The Community Culture of Responsible Choices (CCoRC) initiative began as a result of this grant. The mission of CCoRC is to reduce underage and high-risk alcohol use among Airmen of rank E4 and below (typically 18-26 years old) stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base. The base is located within the Johnson County boundaries and is 12 miles from the UCM campus. Modeled after the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation's (PIRE) Community Trials Intervention program, this initiative includes environmental interventions, alcohol-free activities, and education. The CCoRC coalition consists of over 30 agencies in Johnson County, including Whiteman Air Force Base, the University of Central Missouri, and the cities of Warrensburg, Knob Noster, and Holden. The coalition promotes a "no illegal or high-risk use" message for alcohol and drug prevention.

Prior to the beginning of this CCoRC initiative, most Whiteman AFB and UCM partnerships were initiated and maintained at a departmental level and were not considered institution-wide collaborations. For example, the Whiteman AFB Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) and the UCM Director of Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention had collaborated as part of a county-wide sexual assault response team. The CCoRC initiative provided a framework to engage high-level leadership at both UCM and Whiteman AFB, creating a more impactful and lasting collaborative relationship.

Population Served

The target population for this initiative was the approximately 700 Whiteman Air Force Base personnel aged 18-26 years old. Whiteman AFB is located in the rural, west-central region of Missouri, in Johnson County, near Knob Noster and Warrensburg. The citizens of Knob Noster, numbering nearly 2,600, are a youthful population. Thirty-five percent of the residents are under the age of 24 and another 30% are between the ages of 24 and 44.

This base is home to the 509th Bomb Wing and is the only base in the world that houses B-2 Bombers, the premier weapons aircraft for the U.S. military. Since the B-2 is capable of delivering both conventional and nuclear munitions, Airmen working in the maintenance or operation of this aircraft are part of the Personal Reliability Program (PRP), and are held to some of the most stringent security procedures in the U.S. Air Force. Individuals who are part of PRP and receive an underage drinking citation or a DWI lose their PRP status and can potentially lose their career.

Whiteman AFB is a Total Force Base and serves as host to Air Force Reserve and National Guard units. Approximately 4,000 military personnel and families live on the base. An additional 8,000 individuals work on the base and live in off-base housing. The number of underage Airmen assigned to Whiteman AFB varies from month to month; however, since January 2008, the number of underage military personnel ranged from 240 to 413, with an average of 377 per month.

The Air Force has a unique culture. Like all military branches, a top-down management style is essential for effective completion of their mission. Therefore, the prevention strategy utilized in the past has typically been to rely mostly on “telling Airmen what to do or not do” and relying on knowledge alone to modify behavior. The Air Force also has many deeply ingrained traditions which involve alcohol. Alcohol can be easily accessible, and drinking alcohol is perceived as an inexpensive, readily available, and socially acceptable way to blow off steam. To ensure cultural competency in CCoRC program, potential grant funded university staff members were evaluated on their knowledge of Air Force culture prior to being hired. The structure of the coalition has allowed for continuous connectivity with current U.S. Air Force practices and issues.

Needs Assessment

The Community Culture of Responsible Choices initiative grew from the experiences of Whiteman Air Force Base personnel as they worked with the Warrensburg Area Partners in Prevention (WAPIP) group, a local campus-community program chaired by the University of Central Missouri. With UCM students as the primary audience, the mission of WAPIP was to promote the safe and legal sales, service, and consumption of alcohol in the city of Warrensburg. Whiteman Air Force Base was an active participant in the coalition from the inception of WAPIP in 2006, because underage Airmen often live and socialize in Warrensburg. As a result of implementing PIRE’s Community Trials model in the Warrensburg community, WAPIP helped to initiate several local systems changes between 2007 and 2009, including a new city ordinance that prohibited entry into local bars by individuals under the age of 21; a revision of the city’s house party ordinance, which now allows law enforcement officers to disperse a party after the first loud noise complaint; and a uniform disciplinary schedule of sanctions for underage student alcohol violations. These sanctions were drawn from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Tier 1 strategies.

These and other changes have contributed to a safer environment for UCM college students, such as a reduction in the percentage of underage UCM students who drink in bars or restaurants, and

a decrease in the percentage of UCM students who engage in binge drinking while in bars. The Warrensburg Police Department also reported significant reductions from 2007 to 2008 in liquor law violations, disturbances, and fights. By observing the success of WAPIP initiatives, Whiteman AFB command personnel recognized the benefits of using an overall environmental approach to reduce underage drinking rather than relying primarily on education and awareness campaigns, and they welcomed the opportunity to conduct a project targeting their population.

At the request of the Missouri Department of Public Safety, and as part of the application for the EUDL grant that funded the CCoRC project, Ms. Amy Kiger, chair of WAPIP and designated CCoRC Project Director, collaborated with Ms. Ann Beem, the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator at Whiteman AFB, to develop a needs assessment. They collected data from multiple stakeholders involved in the underage drinking issue and identified three primary problem areas. Ranked by priority, they are:

Problem 1: Driving While Intoxicated

Problem 2: Underage Consumption of Alcohol

Problem 3: High-Risk Drinking

Contributing Factors

Through this needs assessment process, there were several contributing factors to these identified problems. In addition to lax screening of underage purchases at local retail establishments and purchases for underage drinkers by friends over the age of 21, other factors that contributed to underage drinking were:

- Alcohol provided at private parties
- A culture of indifference to underage drinking in the community
- The lack of alcohol-free entertainment alternatives for Airmen
- Permissive alcohol laws in Missouri

The following chart is a summary of the community-level risks and the protective factors for the younger Airmen stationed at Whiteman AFB, as identified by the needs assessment participants.

Risk Factor	Protective Factor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to alcohol • Laws and ordinances are inconsistently enforced • Norms are unclear, encouraging use • Transient nature of community (permanent change of station) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities exist for community involvement and can be mobilized • Resources for daily living (housing, healthcare, jobs, etc.) are available • Warrensburg/Whiteman leadership is supportive of prevention efforts • UCM offers alcohol-free activities

Building Capacity

Although the target population of the project were young Airmen, the CCoRC coalition was developed to also serve as Johnson County’s coordinating body for alcohol prevention efforts. We

value collaboration and are committed to utilizing evidence-informed strategies. A variety of capacity-building techniques were part of our strategic plan. These included convening leaders and stakeholders, building coalitions, and providing training on evidence-based practices.

The University of Central Missouri and Whiteman Air Force Base are the two strongest economic engines in Johnson County, and therefore enjoy a great deal of political capital. It was important for the success of this project that the top leaders of both entities were bought into the effort, so one of the primary selection criteria for hiring the local program coordinator was the individual's ability to flow seamlessly between the military and academic culture and to bring these two entities together. This was accomplished by hiring an individual with Air Force experience. In 2010, focusing on the shared values of Whiteman AFB and UCM (i.e., service before self/education for service), Base Commander General Scott Vander Hamm and UCM President Dr. Charles Ambrose convened a community summit on underage drinking to build community buy-in to the issue. In addition to underage Airmen and university students, over 50 community leaders from a variety of sectors attended this event. Summit topics and presentations included assessing community perceptions of the problems, a data summary of underage and high-risk drinking nationally and locally, a vision for establishing a community culture of responsible choice, an introduction to environmental management strategies, and a call to action.

From this summit, the CCoRC coalition was developed. The coalition was organized into 5 groups designated as a coordinating board and four work groups: Collaboration; Sustainability & Planning; Education & Alcohol Free Activities; Data Collection & Reporting; and Enforcement Operations & Regulatory Improvements. These coalition groups, comprised of well over 70 members in total, started meeting monthly to develop a work plan and begin implementing activities, with each group developing their own capacity-building activities.

In 2011, on behalf of the CCoRC coordinating board, General Vander Hamm hosted training at Whiteman Air Force Base for 50 of the top leaders of both the base and the university. The goal of this training was to communicate a shared responsibility for creating a culture of responsible choices. At this training, we shared research regarding the impact of alcohol on Air Force work productivity and university student attrition, the current prevalence of underage and high-risk drinking, and then invited discussion about the operationalization of the term "responsible drinking." We taught the group about the socio-ecological model, the spectrum of prevention, and how knowledge alone does not alter behavior. We updated the leadership on the work of CCoRC thus far, introduced the plan for base-wide education, and introduced the concept of social norms. Then, to uncover attitudes that might undermine our overall effort, we assessed the group's perceptions of underage drinking and associated risks. We did this to illustrate the gap between perception and reality. After this summit, the Local Program Coordinator of CCoRC, Mr. Jeff Huffman, conducted a similar training with all Base Squadron Commanders and First Sergeants, in preparation for the commencement of the comprehensive education plan.

At the same time, the Enforcement Operations and Regulatory Improvement Workgroup hosted the Underage Drinking Enforcement and Training Center, which provided training on House Party saturations and Covert Underage Buyer operations to 70 local enforcement professionals representing four agencies in the county.

During this time, the Education and Alcohol Free Activities work group began meeting with underage Airmen and UCM students to determine their needs and interest for activities. Through these meetings we learned the Airmen wanted activities that would allow them to get away from

their duty station and mingle with civilian populations. We then realized not everyone was able to attend our late night events due to shift work, so the work group decided to offer additional alternative activities for off-shift hours (the “Wing It Program”).

Strategic Planning

The overall purpose of CCoRC is to reduce availability and consumption of alcohol beverages by underage Air Force personnel. The CCoRC coordinating board, in collaboration with the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation and the Missouri Department of Public Safety, developed a work plan containing the following goals:

Goal 1: Through the CCoRC coalition, strengthen and expand partnerships that use research-based and promising prevention practices to reduce underage alcohol use and its negative community effects.

Goal 2: Reduce sales of alcohol to underage youth by working with retail outlets in the community to assure alcohol regulations regarding the sale and service of alcohol are followed.

Goal 3: Reduce the amount of ARI (Alcohol Related Incidences, e.g., minor in possession, providing alcohol to minor, open container, DWI) through increased enforcement operations throughout the base and the community.

Goal 4: Review, change, and better enforce community alcohol ordinances.

Goal 5: Reduce the amount of DUI/DWIs involving underage Airmen through increased enforcement.

Goal 6: To implement innovative education and provide alternatives to alcohol.

Our expectation was that we would reach 100% of the target population in a three-year time frame, or 700 Airmen. To ensure sustainability, we engaged top leadership from the beginning of the project, secured the means to collect meaningful outcomes data, and established a broad coalition to implement the work plan.

Implementation

The CCoRC project was structured around a three-pronged approach: education, enforcement, and activities. We implemented all of the activities in the work plan using this structure. Grant-funded staff included a full time Local Project Coordinator, a half-time Program Assistant, and a half-time State Coordinator. The Project Director provided in-kind time, and the remaining staffing needs were filled through the volunteer service of coalition members or from contracted services. The CCoRC project is innovative in a number of ways. These include the integration of Air Force leadership culture by utilizing both “top-down” and grassroots prevention efforts; directly addressing the drinking behaviors of the adult providers and role models for the underage Airmen and college students; and the comprehensive scope of the project sustained at a deep level of intensity over a long-term duration.

Through CCoRC, we implemented more than 450 enforcement operations over a four year period, and provided 41 alcohol-free events for over five thousand Airmen who held rank E4 and below. While other programs and communities have implemented enforcement operations and alcohol-free activities, one of the most innovative components of this CCoRC program is the four-

phase, base-wide education work plan. The four phases were:

Phase 1: We conducted two Leadership Summits, one with the top UCM administrators and Whiteman AFB commanders and one with the Squadron Commanders and First Sergeants, to ensure top-down engagement with the project, eliminate mixed messages from alcohol providers, teach environmental management, and create community buy-in.

Phase 2: We instituted a cultural assessment of the military base to determine current norms and develop customized recommendations.

Phase 3: As the Local Program Coordinator, Mr. Jeff Huffman, used his vacation time to meet in small group educational sessions for Airmen with rank E5 and above. During these educational sessions, Mr. Huffman framed the problem using Air Force data on underage drinking violations, shared the definition of responsible drinking utilized by CCoRC, emphasized the importance of not providing alcohol to underage Airmen, discussed the importance of being a responsible adult role model, and instructed them in harm reduction strategies with a customized blood alcohol content calculation exercise.

Phase 4: Mr. Huffman worked with the Tucker Leadership Lab at nearby William Jewell College to create a customized high-ropes course. During the course, underage Airmen experienced the impact of an incapacitated team member (e.g., blindfolded) on their ability to meet shared goals (e.g., cross a tightwire), and then translated that experience to illegal and high-risk consumption of alcohol. Through this program, 915 Airmen learned the importance of bystander intervention and making healthy choices regarding alcohol.

Partnership with the University

The CCoRC project has served as a catalyst for multiple partnerships between the University of Central Missouri and Whiteman Air Force Base, further strengthening the sustainability of this effort. From the beginning of the project, higher education was conceptualized as an alcohol-free activity, and increasing access to campus resources by military personnel has been a top priority. The UCM President, Dr. Ambrose, created the concept of the “Whiteman Advantage” as an advantage that individuals stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base have because they are part of the UCM community. Through this concept, Dr. Ambrose established a new Military and Veterans Success Center on campus, a Command Pass which allows active duty military and dependents to attend UCM home sporting events at no cost by using their military ID, a Servant Leadership Lecture series which brings in national speakers to discuss servant leadership with 1,200 UCM students and Airmen, a military tuition package which waives several mandatory student fees for our military partners, and the creation of Wing Access, which gives our current active duty and veteran students priority enrollment in classes.

Impact

All 700 Airmen in the target population were impacted. Over the six year time frame, approximately 8,000 Whiteman personnel, 300 civic leaders, and 100 UCM leaders were educated through this program. In addition, approximately 1,000 UCM students attended Wing It activities, while all of the 13,000 UCM students were impacted from the increased enforcement in our community.

Evaluation

The Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention contracted with

ICF International to serve as external evaluator for this project. As a demonstration project, each test site was paired with a control site, and three years of retroactive data prior to project implementation was collected. The following is a summary of those outcomes.

Goal 1 Outcomes: The CCoRC coalition expanded to consist of four workgroups and engaged over 80 community members, including a variety of stakeholders and constituents groups from the university, the base, and the broader community.

Goal 2 Outcomes: Two training sessions were provided to approximately 80 retail owners and their employees. A total of 267 compliance checks were conducted over a four year period, utilizing underage Airmen and UCM students as covert underage buyers.

Goal 3 Outcomes:

- 100% reduction in alcohol related traffic incidents among under 21 (from 2 to 0)
- 87% reduction in alcohol related traffic incidents among 21 and over (from 15 to 2)
- 44% reduction in alcohol-related emergency room visits by persons under 21 (from 14 to 7)
- 99% reduction in open container violations by persons under 21 (from 212 to 1)
- 93% reduction in underage possession (from 617 to 40)

Note: We also saw an increase in ER visits among people 21 and over (from 56 to 61). We are unsure whether this is due to an increase of risky behavior or an increase in recognizing potentially problematic levels of alcohol consumption.

Goal 4 Outcomes: After review of local base procedures, Whiteman AFB implemented a 100% ID check policy at all on-base alcohol outlets, with monthly random compliance checks. As evidence of the increased enforcement of alcohol ordinances, the number of violations for contributing to the delinquency of a minor went up, from 3 to 14.

Goal 5 Outcomes: DUIs among underage Airmen increased marginally (from 3 to 5). It is unclear whether this is due to increased enforcement or increased drinking and driving.

Goal 6 Outcomes: CCoRC provided 41 alcohol-free Wing It events for a total of 5,111 Airmen, rank E4 and below, and provided 42 high-ropes alcohol education classes to 1,000 airmen.

Reflection on the Partnership between the University and the Base

Importance of Data

By using national and local data to illustrate the scope of the problem, we were able to help our community look objectively at underage and high-risk drinking. We interacted with a range of individuals, from those who thought there was little need for this project in our community to those who thought our concern was not warranted. Data helped us mobilize the coalition around common goals.

Importance of High Level Leadership

Mr. Huffman's ability to get early buy-in from the top leadership at Whiteman AFB and UCM was essential for the success of this project. In addition, since many similar projects fail when leadership changes, strategic plans for onboarding new leadership allowed CCoRC to maintain the strong commitment from the base even with personnel changes in Wing Commander.

Framing the Message

When the CCoRC project was introduced to the community, UCM President Ambrose placed an emphasis on the salient shared values of the Base and the University to demonstrate how this initiative would successfully fulfill the missions of both organizations and engage a broader community representation in the coalition. We deliberately focused on the humanistic goal of promoting safety for Airmen and students alike, rather than the legalistic goal of eliminating underage drinking. Underage drinking was viewed as a matter of national readiness by the Base and as a key barrier to student success and graduation by the University.

Working Around Barriers

Not all stakeholders were happy about this project. The local county sheriff, who disagreed with the enforcement strategies being used, was one of the biggest roadblocks to making progress in the county. We employed multiple strategies aimed to increase his engagement in our coalition. These included a personal visit from the UCM President and the AFB Wing Commander, press opportunities, and additional funding; these efforts were unsuccessful. In the end, we were unable to make much progress until a new county sheriff was elected. Through this experience, we learned that even when we do our best to engage reluctant stakeholders, a change in leadership may be the only way progress becomes possible.

Program Sustainability

The CCoRC initiative was funded by a U.S. Department of Justice grant in the amount of \$750,000. This funding was used over a six year period to hire staff and fund the trainings, alternative activities, and operational expenses of the project. Many coalition members were able to contribute in-kind donations in terms of volunteer hours, facilities and equipment, and food. After the initial grant funding ended in September 2015, the sustainability of the CCoRC project was more firmly secured when Mr. Huffman was hired by UCM as the Director of Military and Veterans Services. He and the UCM Director of Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention provided administrative support to CCoRC and continue to staff the coalition. This year, an additional \$20,000 was allocated by UCM President Ambrose as ongoing funding to employ an administrative professional staff member for CCoRC. Both the Whiteman AFB Wing Commander and the UCM President have expressed their commitment to continue the work of the CCoRC coalition and expand the focus to address other shared public health issues and future challenges.

This case study was based on an application submitted to NASADAD for the 2015 National Exemplary Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention Programs, Practices, and Polices.

Author

Amy Kiger, M.S., is the Director of Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention at the University of Central Missouri where she has served for 14 years. Her current work centers around building the capacity of colleges and universities to collaborate with local community organizations to apply evidence-informed strategies to address shared public health concerns such as underage drinking and sexual assault.