Partnership for a Positive Pomona, or P³, got off to a celebrated start early this year with its Coalition Kick-Off event at a local community center.

In attendance was a diverse group of 59 individuals drawn from across many sectors of the community, including schools, parents, youth, law enforcement, youth-serving organizations, alcohol and drug recovery providers, media, local and County government, health care providers and Pomona residents. The coalition initially began with the local network of substance abuse recovery providers.

Led by NCADD of East San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys' leadership and energy, the coalition was awarded the Drug Free Communities grant this past October. The Drug Free Communities program is directed by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy in partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Coalitions are comprised of community leaders, parents, youth, and teachers, religious and fraternal organizations, health care and business.

This $125,000 five-year award will enable Pomona to focus on implementing environmental prevention strategies – including affecting addiction-related policies, changing community attitudes and norms, and law enforcement – aimed at the reduction of youth substance use/abuse. It is a multi-sectorial effort and includes in its membership twelve areas of the community. There are currently over 700 such coalitions operating the United States; their distinct method of collaboration on environmental-level efforts has been shown to be highly effective at accelerating rates of decline in youth use of alcohol and drugs. Pomona plans to follow in those footsteps.

Organizers Sara Cooley and Jamie Holes wanted the Kick-Off event to be a celebration of Pomona's strengths and promote the collaborative work that's been done so far, as well as a charge for continued action.

Community members who attended the Kick Off break out into workgroupsThe event featured a slideshow of Pomona landmarks interspersed with positive messages and current data emphasizing that "most" of Pomona's youth are not currently using drugs or alcohol. Activities mixed into the presentations highlighted that this group will demand the active participation, ideas, and input of its members. One such activity resulted in the selection of a new name -- P³ -- Partnership for a Positive Pomona.

The coalition's goal is to work together to transform the community in ways that will make it likely that youth will make positive, healthy choices, and avoid alcohol and drugs. The message was clear: this is an effort for, by and with the Pomona community. The changes necessary to truly transform youth's attitudes and actions concerning drugs and alcohol have to come from multiple institutions and neighborhoods consistently and over time.

First year's focus will be building a foundation. This includes going out into the neighborhoods to draw Pomona residents to join the effort. Over the next few months, the coalition will conduct a thorough needs assessment which is a systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or "gaps" between current conditions and desired conditions or "outcomes." The coalition will then base future activities over based on the findings. In the coming year, P^3 plans to launch an educational campaign on the Social Host Ordinance, hold trainings to build internal capacity, and support augmented law enforcement by alcoholic beverage control efforts. Reaching out to the community will also be a priority: the coalition will develop a social media strategy and form a core of youth members to bring Pomona's youth into foreground.

Moving from a mainly treatment-centered approach located in the office to a more prevention-focused one out in the community has been a shift for NCADD of East San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys. As Holes states, "we have always responded to a crisis when one erupts, but we want to mobilize that voice when there isn't a crisis." This shift will enable the agency to become a more visible community leader, build capacity of its own staff as well as those of Pomona's residents and, more importantly, to address youth substance use from both sides of the problem.

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