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## Grants to help spread word about underage drinking, social host law

By Traci Chapman

Adult drinking and driving is an issue in Canadian County, but for youth who are just getting acclimated to the road, taking a drink and getting behind the wheel can be even more catastrophic.

That's where three recent grants awarded to local coalitions can make a difference, said Red Rock Regional Prevention Coordinator Michelle Bugg.

"It's a big problem, not just for the youth directly involved, but for everyone," Bugg said Monday. "It's our aim to spread the word about it."

Canadian County Coalition for Children and Families, Mustang Prevention and Coalition Team and Yu-Can Coalition each recently received a \$1,000 grant from the Oklahoma Prevention Policy Alliance, Bugg said. The grant was awarded to about 20 communities throughout the state to help raise awareness of Oklahoma's social host law, she said.

"We were very fortunate to have three coalitions within our county who could use this grant to spread the word about underage drinking and the social host law," Bugg said.

Underage drinking is not just a problem on the road. Alcohol poisoning and bad judgment equate to injuries and deaths of youth who don't always know their limits or when it's time to stop drinking.

That was the case with Cody Greenhaw, a Tulsa teenager who died in 2004 from a drug and alcohol overdose. The subsequent legislation, known as Cody's Law, was a social host law enacted in 2011.

Coalition members hope to spread the word and avoid a death in Canadian County like Greenhaw's, Bugg said. All three coalitions plan to use grant money to purchase banners and other items for students and their parents, Bugg said. Banners would be displayed at school sporting events and pep rallies. The Mustang coalition will also purchase shirts for youth members at Mustang Public Schools, as well as posters for Mustang High School and handouts for parents, she said.

"We are also getting magnets and flyers to give out to get people talking about the problems of underage drinking and what the consequences can be for breaking the social host law," Bugg said.

A first social host violation could result in a \$500 fine and misdemeanor conviction; a second violation could mean a \$1,000 fine. Subsequent convictions could result in a violator spending up to five years in prison and paying a \$2,500 fine, according to Oklahoma State Statutes.

Social host laws govern underage drinking no matter where it takes place, Bugg said. Whether it's a youth's parents who allow alcohol consumption at their residence or a teen who gives alcohol to his friends, the law dictates that individual – the "host" – is responsible for minors' health and their actions.

"It doesn't matter the circumstance, the message is don't allow minors to drink, period," Bugg said. "And if an underage drinker causes an injury or death, those penalties are even more severe – between a \$2,500 and \$5,000 fine and up to five years in prison."

"I think this grant is very fortunate," Bugg said. "It gives us the chance to get the message out and reach people we otherwise wouldn't be able to reach."