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Kathryn M. Cavins Talks About Young Drinking

Charlie Schlenker
WGLT, Illinois State University

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A Coalition of Bloomington Normal campuses, healthcare providers, governments, and law enforcement is trying to reduce binge drinking by young people in the twin cities. WGLT's Charlie Schlenker has more...

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Charlie Schlenker: Kathy Cavins is the Dean of Students at Illinois Wesleyan University. She's part of the Bloomington-Normal Community Campus Committee, which is compiling a guidebook in developing a marketing campaign on socially acceptable party behavior. While thousands of students have relatively few effects from a big party night where they down too many drinks, Cavin says there are lots of costs to binge drinking culture in college.

Kathryn Cavins: I think you'll see situations where there are assaults, sexual assaults that are connected to binge drinking, obviously medical issues and ask either of our hospital emergency rooms just how much money is used to respond to young people who've been binge drinking. Of course there are consequences to them as students in terms of pursuing their own goals as students and learners but there are also unintended consequences to the community. What's it like to have a party next door to you or across the street from you regularly? One of our members indicated that—what does it mean for somebody to go into the emergency room and have to wait because the person next to them is being treated for binge drinking and what does that mean for other people seeking that treatment? But there are lots of quality of life issues, I think, when you have a problem with binge drinking and it's not just for the individual who's choosing that but it's for those who live around them as well.

Charlie Schlenker: The nature of the adolescent or young adult mind is that their brains really aren't done cooking yet, they're prone to impulsive behavior that **short-circuits** good decision-making. Does a thoughtful guidebook really change the character inherent in the age of the person?

Kathryn Cavins: It may and it may not, but for those who will read it and think about some of the laws and values of this community and maybe change their behavior or maybe remind someone else who may be impulsive and not thinking about that, then it's worth it.

Charlie Schlenker: You're also talking about a marketing campaign to promote this and healthy drinking culture in the area but young people also often respond to perceived pressure to conform by running in the opposite direction, so how do you address a marketing campaign to that mindset when a clever young man or woman sees what these adults are after and sometimes will oppose it by reflex?

Kathryn Cavins: Well, I think a marketing campaign that perhaps involves young people is maybe a first approach to that but I think people are—misunderstand college students if we think that everybody's here to binge drink. That's not true, a lot of students will indicate that they don't drink but they think that everybody else does and we've tried norming campaigns to help students understand that a lot of students don't drink and they choose not to drink.

Charlie Schlenker: How many students don't drink?

Kathryn Cavins: Well I'm the Vice-President at Illinois Wesleyan University and about a third of our students indicate that they don't drink at all. When you measure that out, some students drink very, very lightly or very rarely and then there are the students—there's a percentage of students who will binge drink and I think that that's not unusual for college campuses but not everybody does that and as members of a community, even the binge drinkers are responsible to the others, but I want the students who are not binge drinkers to also have some structure and support that helps them know that we're addressing those things and trying to educate our whole community.

Charlie Schlenker: When is this going to be ready?

Kathryn Cavins: Well we're just starting on this process. We got a grant for \$250,000 for the next two years. We've already hosted a forum at Illinois Wesleyan University and at Heartland. We're going to have a community forum and another campus forum in the fall to gather some information and what this process is is to gather information about the values of the community, what it means to be a member of the Bloomington-Normal community here from lots of different facets of the community and then start to craft our message and we'll have one then guidebook for all of the campuses and then all of the retailers in lots of different places in town where people can get their hands on that.

Charlie Schlenker: In the guidebook there will be tips on drinking etiquette, local alcohol ordinances and neighborhood relations, what do college students need to know about those things? What's important?

Kathryn Cavins: Well I think college students need to know something about all of those things. As you talked earlier about students and their developmental process, sometimes students respond more so to the consequences of law. Sometimes students are at a place where being good neighbors is important to them and they'll respond to the values of the community. Sometimes issues of etiquette—they want to fit into this community and to our campus communities or to the Bloomington-Normal community and so having some community standards that outline that perhaps will help students frame their behavior.

Charlie Schlenker: IWU Vice-President Kathy Cavins says the coalition will have the guidebook on healthy drinking and behavior ready in the fall of next year. I'm Charlie Schlenker, WGLT News.