



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Rio Grande Valley Community Meets to Address Underage Drinking

Intensive day-long event focused on raising awareness and developing actionable steps to reduce underage drinking, injuries and death

(McAllen, TX | June 27, 2022) – Today, local Rio Grande Valley leaders and youth convened at a daylong event to develop strategies for reducing underage drinking and its consequences. The event, “Zero Alcohol for Youth Academy,” was uniquely designed to empower both youth and adults in taking action to make their local communities safer and healthier. The event was hosted by Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth, the state’s leading advocacy coalition working to reduce youth alcohol, drug and substance use, and The Uniting Neighbors and Drug Abuse Defense (UNIDAD) coalition, a program of from Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas.

Multiple sessions throughout the day provided participants with the information and resources for developing targeted solutions for their home communities. Presentations included information on trends in youth alcohol use, data findings on underage drinking and impaired driving, key prevention strategies, and ways of mobilizing local engagement and action.

“Everyone who participated in today’s event is focused on one critical goal: saving lives,” said **Alicia Rosas, Youth Engagement Specialist at Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth**. “The unfortunate reality is the vast majority of youth have already experienced underage drinking or know someone who has. Even worse, many of these kids have also experienced the car crashes and other life-changing consequences associated with drinking. No matter what their age, everyone here today clearly showed they want to put an end to underage drinking and its risks, and help keep Texas roadways safer. The Academy is proud to provide them with the tools they need to make that happen.”

UNIDAD Coalition Coordinator, Vianca Vieyra stated “Having youth and adults from within our community come together to have open discussions and brainstorm ways to approach underage

drinking, is crucial. It allows us to see things from different perspectives, address gaps of information and be able to collaboratively do something with everyone's benefit in mind."

Studies show drinking at a young age can lead to lifelong damage in brain function, memory, and coordination, and makes it more likely youth will develop addiction or substance abuse problems later in life. In Texas, the average age youth have their first drink is 13 years old, and nearly one-third of 7-12th grade students reported using alcohol in the past month, according to the most recent data available from the Texas School Survey. Additionally, driving under the influence of alcohol is the cause of more than 1,000 deaths per year in the state. With nearly 25 percent of all traffic fatalities in the state attributed to alcohol, Texas regularly ranks as the state with the highest number of alcohol-impaired driving fatalities in the country. There were more than 1,000 DUI crashes in the Rio Grande Valley in 2021, of which 140 resulted in serious injuries or fatalities. In McAllen alone, there were more than 100 alcohol related crashes.

More information about TxSDY's youth-focused training can be found at <https://txsdy.org/youth-focused-training/> and more information about the Zero Alcohol for Youth Academies can be found at <https://txsdy.org/zero-alcohol-for-youth/>.

About Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth

Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth is the state's leading organization working to end underage alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Founded in 1997 with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation administered by the American Medical Association, the statewide coalition builds on the strengths and successes of its longtime identity, Texans Standing Tall, while bringing new focus and energy to its mission of creating healthier and safer communities.

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