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## **Successful Local Submission: Letter to the Editor**

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### **Teen alcohol abuse**

After reading the article "Local teens sop up more suds, state says" (March 20), I feel I must respond. As a substance abuse prevention specialist and director of the East Central Florida Regional Prevention Center at Stewart-Marchman Center, I found it disturbing to read an article in which some people question the prevalence of underage drinking in our community.

Too often, parents and other members of our community try to diminish the very real facts about substance abuse.

Stewart-Marchman Center treats more than 6,800 people annually for alcohol and other drug-dependence problems. More often than not, these people report that their alcohol use began in their adolescent years. As a community, we need to take responsibility for our young people by keeping them away from drugs and alcohol. As a prevention professional, I would like to emphasize three things:

- It is a proven fact that the longer we can delay substance exposure and use by young people, the less likely they will be to have long-term abuse issues.
- It is not OK to let your children try alcohol, even in small quantities, even if you are present. It is illegal, but, more important; it is a much stronger message if you, as a parent, say that drinking is not OK until they are 21 years old. Period. Research has shown that when parents are clear that drinking, smoking and using drugs are not OK, children are less likely to do those things.

One of the reasons alcohol is illegal for people under the age of 21 is because until that time, the brain is still developing. Alcohol use in people under 21 can cause very real damage to a young person's developing brain.

Alcohol use and special events are a part of the culture in Daytona Beach. As a community, however, we need to engage in the discussion of how we keep alcohol out of the hands of teenagers and promote responsible choices about the use of alcohol in general.

**ELAINE DUNLAP, Ormond Beach**