

## **Could Underage Drinking Affect My Future? By Deanna Felts, Certified Prevention Specialist, Seven Counties Services, Inc.**

Brandon was the guy others made fun of back in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He was so clean that he squeaked when he walked. I don't think he even knew what beer tasted like. I remember Michael telling him that "Reality is an illusion that occurs due to lack of alcohol" and all of Michael's buddies laughed with him at the poor guy. While many of my friends were out drinking at parties, Brandon was probably home studying his calculus equations and atomic symbols. When Brandon was at parties, Michael would get everyone a beer and go out of his way to ask Brandon if he wanted milk or lemonade with enough sarcasm to make everyone laugh.

What did the future hold for Brandon and Michael? Could Michael's drinking affect his future? Why did Michael start drinking at a young age? Did his parents know? Did they look the other way maybe thinking that drinking was a rite of passage, or that it was better than using harder drugs? Or, did they try to get Michael the help he needed to stop?

And what about Brandon? Did he start drinking from the ridicule he received or did he stay focused on his dreams for the future? Well, here's one hint - Michael was 5 times more likely to develop alcoholism than someone who waits until the legal age to drink.

As an informed parent on the dangers of drinking underage, I realize that I am not going to be able to protect my kids from the pressures that may entice underage drinking. I hope and pray that my husband and I are able to encourage and support positive choices and use teachable moments appropriately to show how drinking underage can affect what we value and can lead to a host of problems. Many think of underage drinking as leading to driving while intoxicated and the resulting tragic accident. While that is a significant consequence to underage drinking, it's not the only one. Others include unintended sex, poor school and job performance, limited future career choices, family and friend's disagreements, embarrassments, fights and the list continues.

What do you want for your teen? What you want most is to have them avoid all of those negative consequences. Seven Counties Services, Inc. and its Regional Prevention Program have a host of resources available to help you. Visit the website at [www.sevencounties.org](http://www.sevencounties.org).

A fun and educational way to get your teen involved in promoting positive choices is through participation in the ReelAction video contest. Teens develop a 28 second video commercial aimed at preventing underage drinking. Have your 12-17 year old go to [www.ReelActionKY.com](http://www.ReelActionKY.com) to see how they can enter. Parents have a great influence on their kids but teens still like to hear social messages from their peers. Let's make the message clear, no underage drinking! The deadline to submit your video is January 17, 2012 so there is plenty of time to be creative.