



## COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

---

### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND ACTION FOR HEALTH UNIT

Friday Night Live Program

1400 Emeline Ave., SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060



### Press Release

---

For Immediate Release

Date: December 19, 2024

Contact: Maggie McGonigle

(831) 454-5483

### LOCAL YOUTH TAKE THE LEAD IN EFFORTS TO COMBAT UNDERAGE DRINKING

Santa Cruz County, CA – This fall, young people from Pacific Collegiate and Watsonville High School Friday Night Live (FNL) launched campaigns to tackle underage drinking in Santa Cruz County. FNL is a youth-led program that builds partnerships for positive and healthy youth development, engages youth as active community leaders, and generates resources to create positive changes on issues that matter to them.

Although underage drinking rates continue to decline, the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) found that young people in 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades have engaged in alcohol use in the past month at rates of 4%, 10%, and 14% respectively (CHKS, 2023). Research from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) has shown underage alcohol consumption can lead to a variety of risks and dangerous consequences, including impaired judgment, risky behaviors, interference with brain development, and increased risk of developing substance use disorders in adulthood (NIAAA, 2024). California young people from Pacific Collegiate School and Watsonville High School chapters are taking a stand to promote healthy alternatives to underage drinking, creating safer communities.

“There is a common misconception that all young people engage in underage drinking, perpetuated by movies, television, music, and social media,” said Nancy Willard, Manager of the Youth Empowerment and Action for Health (YEAH!) unit at Santa Cruz County Public Health. “These portrayals create a skewed image of youth behavior and as a result, many young people who choose to avoid drinking may feel isolated or out of place.”

Research shows that social norms (the behaviors and attitudes a group believes are acceptable) significantly influences individual choices and can shape teens' behavior and what they think is "normal."

In response to this, youth from Pacific Collegiate School and Watsonville High School chapters are launching a multi-media campaign designed to challenge the negative stereotypes about youth and alcohol. The initiative will promote positive social norms by sharing posters, digital graphics, and public service announcements created by young people about making healthy choices and living alcohol-free. By amplifying these voices, the campaign aims to inspire other teens to make empowered decisions about their health and well-being, while shifting the broader narrative about youth and alcohol.

“Being in FNL is important to me because it gives me a chance to speak up and have my voice heard throughout the community,” said a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student from Pacific Collegiate.

Throughout the year-long underage drinking prevention campaign, young people will receive training on data collection, public speaking, creating public service announcements, and leadership and advocacy skills. Santa Cruz County Friday Night Live chapters are part of a statewide initiative, that includes forty-five FNL chapters from across California, who receive support from the California Friday Night Live Partnership (CFNLP) through funding provided by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). The FNL young people will utilize environmental prevention strategies through youth-led initiatives to educate their peers, neighbors, and local leaders on ways to reduce underage drinking access and mitigate the damages caused to communities resulting from underage drinking.

For more information about FNL, visit [fridaynightlive.org](http://fridaynightlive.org) or @sccfnlp on Instagram

For further details surrounding the above-listed data points, please see the resources below:

<https://calschls.org/reports-data/>

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/underage-drinking>

<https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/about-iccpud/data/national-reports/report-to-congress/default.aspx>

###