

## **Raising the Bar Against Sexual Assault in Downtown Flagstaff Establishments**

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Arizona Department of Health Services Flagstaff agency, Northland Family Help Center (NFHC), the Northern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault (NACASA) and the Flagstaff Police Department have been working together for the last three years to assist Flagstaff bars in making sure they have the tools they need to meaningfully address a few realities.

1. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance to facilitate “date rapes” and sexual assault.
2. Sexual assaults can and often do happen at any bar in town, all year round.
3. As bystanders to the potential for violence, bar staff who have been trained in prevention strategies can play a critical role.

Students understand the events that mark Tequila Sunrise as the most widespread college drinking weekend of the year, where participating bars open their doors at 6AM, to coincide with Homecoming events at Northern Arizona University. Less realized is that this weekend is also commonly characterized by an increase in sexual assaults.

This past year (2010) was different because the spike never quite subsided. People, mostly women, were being drugged and sexually assaulted throughout the month of November. Stories about what the director of community education at Northland Family Help Center, refers to as “non-alcohol drug facilitated sexual assaults” continue to be circulated across town.

“We are basing the increase in non-alcohol drug facilitated sexual assaults purely from word of mouth and informal disclosures ... Women are simply coming forward and telling us or telling someone who is close to them, who then shares with us, that they have been drugged while being at a bar.”

A Flagstaff DJ who spins regularly in many bars downtown, commented on how widespread sexual assault is, “A majority of the people I know in this town, including myself, have been drugged and/or targeted for sexual assault, and that’s not confined to the bar scene. It happens at house parties, it happens on campus, it happens at restaurants.”

While, the DJ regards the recent increase in sexual assaults stemming from downtown bars as cause for concern, he believes it is also a good opportunity to engage bar owners and bar staff, as well as patrons, in these issues.

The 2010 Tequila Sunrise marked the third year in a row where NFHC offered sexual violence prevention training to local bar staff. Through their partnership with NACASA and the Flagstaff Police Department, NFHC also delivered posters to bars for the event with sober messages about watching your drink, looking out for your friends, and the popular “in your hands, you hold the power to stop rape,” which is intended to be placed above urinals in the men’s bathroom.

The Green Room was the only bar in town that had these posters hung up in the bar on the morning of Tequila Sunrise. NFHC community educators and staff utilized an intercept survey to gather data from patrons on their reactions to the posters. We wanted to get a sense for how these messages were being received.

Many women “thanked us” for our work while others shared stories of being drugged, harassed, and assaulted. Many men were appalled it happened at all. “If people feel the need to hang these posters” said one guy, “it is clear there is a problem, and that is really sad.”

When one owner of a bar heard word his bar was a source of victimization, his response was “Shock and dismay, the typical 'I never thought this could happen to me' response. Then anger and frustration with the world, followed quickly by problem solving and crime fighting.” In addition to meeting with NFHC staff to figure out what more his bar could be doing to create a safer space, the owner of this bar committed to having his bar staff trained.

The NFHC Director of Community Education praised the bar for what it already does and the owner’s commitment to have his staff trained by NFHC community education staff. “He is really trying hard to create a climate within his bar that is not conducive to sexual assault. He is re-educating his staff.”

In February 2011, the Green Room will host the first of three sexual violence education and prevention trainings given by NFHC community educators. The trainings are specifically geared toward bar staff to meaningfully and appropriately combat sexual assault, highlight the important role bars can play in creating a safe space for their patrons, and are open to the public.

Although between 12 and 15 bars have historically been interested in hanging sexual violence prevention and awareness posters in their establishments, NFHC Peer Educators are trying to push bars further in their participation. Currently bar staff from the Green Room, Salsa Brava, and Flagstaff Brewing Company eager to participate in these trainings. It is likely that other establishments will jump on board.

Trainings will cover everything from basic information on rape and sexual assault to issues of consent, bystander education, and how and when to report, among much more.

“I think that this education will hopefully start some conversations, raise awareness, and dramatically reduce the chance of this happening,” said Mr. Jenkins. “One of the biggest reasons why I decided to go into business for myself was the belief that I could help the community.”