QUESTION: Is Underage Drinking a Problem?

ANSWER: Yes!

Underage Drinking

Alcohol use by persons under age 21 years is a major public health problem. Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States, more than tobacco and illicit drugs, and is responsible for more than 4,300 annual deaths among underage youth. Although drinking by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, people aged 12 to 20 years drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States. More than 90% of this alcohol is consumed in the form of binge drinks. On average, underage drinkers consume more drinks per drinking occasion than adult drinkers. In 2010, there were approximately 189,000 emergency rooms visits by persons under age 21 for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol.

Consequences of Underage Drinking: Youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience:

- School problems, such as higher absence and poor or failing grades.
- Social problems, such as fighting and lack of participation in youth activities.
- Legal problems, such as arrest for driving or physically hurting someone while drunk.
- Physical problems, such as hangovers or illnesses.
- Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity.
- Disruption of normal growth and sexual development.
- Physical and sexual assault.
- Higher risk for suicide and homicide.
- Alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries, such as burns, falls, and drowning.
- Memory problems.
- Abuse of other drugs.
- Changes in brain development that may have life-long effects.
- Death from alcohol poisoning.

Resources and information regarding underage drinking

https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/
http://www.madd.org/underage-drinking/
http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources

A personal "Message to our Youth" above is handwritten message from an incarcerated woman, age 34.