



Advocating for evidence-based policies and practices
to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, January 18, 2023
9 a.m.

A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the December 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. 2023 Legislative Session (through Day 9)
 - a. Outlet Density (LB 259, 377, 512)
 - b. Three Tier System (LB 375, 403, 452, 512)
 - c. Problem solving courts (LB 50 & 352)
 - d. Good Bills (LB 253 & 301)
 - i. Legislative Tracking Sheet will be available at
www.projectextramile.org/policy
 - e. Policy Work Group immediate after coalition today
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Family Dollar Liquor License Applications
 - ii. Clair Memorial United Methodist Church, 402-451-8322
 - b. Policy
 - i. Prevention Letter
 - ii. SBIRT & Advocacy Training – April 28th, 2023
 - c. Enforcement
 - i. Training on Compliance Checks – March 29th & 30th, 2023
 - d. Youth
 - i. Leadership Network Update
 - ii. Next meeting: February 6th at 7 p.m.
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **February 8th, 9 a.m.**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – February 7 & 8, 2023

6001 Dodge Street, CEC 228
Omaha, Nebraska 68182-0600
402.963.9047
www.projectextramile.org

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES December 14, 2022

- I. Call to Order: Chris Wagner called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members in attendance: Greg McVey, Sharona Crittenden, Palistene Gray-Moore, Margie Magnuson, Karl Meister, Don Hoes, Shelly Rea, Jen Pollock, Alfonzo Shade, Russ Zeeb, Jim Timm, Carey Pomykata, and Jim Begley. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Liene Topko, and Summer Woolsey.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the November 9th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. Looking back at 2022
Staff summarized the various initiatives the coalition worked on in its five main focus areas of policy, enforcement, education/awareness, media advocacy, and youth leadership during 2022.

Coalition members spent the rest of the meeting networking and discussing opportunities for collaboration in 2023.
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements: none
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will take place at the UNO Community Engagement Center at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, January 18th, 2023.

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

2023 Legislative Bill Tracking

Bill #	Sponsor(s)	Description	Bill Status	Additional Information
LB50	Geist Judiciary	Change criminal justice provisions including set-asides, restitution, and parole; create criminal justice pilot programs; terminate an oversight committee; and create a task force	<i>Introduced</i> 1/5/23	Permits a district court to establish a problem-solving court (ex. drug, veterans, mental health, driving under the influence, reentry, young, adult, other). Individuals may participate in such a court through a pretrial diversion program. Requires at least one type of court to operate in each judicial district by January 1, 2024.
LB91	Hansen; Aguilar, Ballard, Brandt, Brewer, Clements, Dorn, Dungan, Erdman, Holdcroft, Jacobson, Lowe, Murman, Slama, Wayne, Wishart Transportation & Telecommunications Briese name added	Change motorcycle, moped, and autocycle helmet and eye protection provisions	<i>Hearing</i> 1/24/23	Provides an exemption for those 21 years and older to not be required to wear a helmet while on a motorcycle or moped. Requires certification by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation and eye protection for operators of motorcycles and mopeds.
LB110	McDonnell Judiciary	Change potential conditions of pretrial release and provide for a pretrial risk assessment services pilot project	<i>Introduced</i> 1/6/23	
LB137	Geist Judiciary	Provide for a penalty enhancement for a controlled substances violation resulting in serious bodily injury or death	<i>Introduced</i> 1/6/23	Enhances the penalty if someone under the influence of any controlled substance causes serious bodily injury to, or death of, another person.
LB150+	Dover General Affairs	Change provisions relating to entertainment districts under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/9/23	Differentiates the definition of an Entertainment District between a city of the primary class or city of the metropolitan class and a city of the first class, second class, county or village. Permits the latter to have a street running through it where customers may cross at a designated crosswalk.
LB253	Brewer Judiciary	Provide for an additional location for the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center	<i>Introduced</i> 1/10/23	Expands the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center to two locations, the current one in Grand Island and a new one in Scottsbluff.

LB258	Low General Affairs	Eliminate provisions relating to near beer under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/10/23	Removes 'near beer' from the definition of beer.
LB259 <i>Oppose</i>	Low General Affairs	Allow farm wineries to obtain additional retail licenses under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/10/23	Permits farm wineries to obtain an additional retail liquor license to sell other alcoholic products.
LB276+	Wishart Health & Human Services	Adopt the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/10/23	Implements the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model to increase access to mental health and substance use treatment; expand capacity to address increased need; and establish innovative community partnerships with law enforcement, schools, and hospitals to improve care, reduce recidivism, and address health disparities.
LB301 <i>Support</i>	Linehan General Affairs	Change a tax on ready-to-drink cocktails under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/11/23	Increases excise tax for ready-to-drink cocktails (RTDs) from \$0.95 to \$3.75 per gallon.
LB328	Raybould Judiciary Conrad, Hunt, Cavanaugh M name added	Create the Office of Liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons	<i>Introduced</i> 1/11/23	Requires the Attorney General (AG) to establish the Office of Liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons to serve as connector between AG's Office and local, state, tribal, and federal entities in reporting or investigating missing and murdered indigenous persons cases in Nebraska.
LB352	Wayne Judiciary	Change criminal justice provisions including offenses, sentencing, set asides, restitution, pretrial diversion, and parole; provide for benefits under the Rural Health Systems and Professional Incentive Act; create criminal justice pilot programs; terminate an oversight committee; and create a task force	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Permits a district court to establish a problem-solving court (ex. drug, veterans, mental health, driving under the influence, reentry, young, adult, other). Individuals may participate in such a court through a pretrial diversion program. Requires at least one type of court to operate in each judicial district by January 1, 2024.
LB375	Low General Affairs	Authorize certain licensees to purchase alcoholic liquor for resale from a gas station, grocery store, liquor store, or similar establishment under certain circumstances as prescribed under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Permits eligible craft brewery and microdistillery license holders to purchase up to five alcoholic products per week for resale and consumption from a gas station, grocery store, liquor store, or similar establishment. Licensees must notify the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) within 24 hours after the purchase is made.

LB376	Lowe General Affairs	Change provisions relating to the importation of alcoholic liquor into the state under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Requires out of state licensed manufacturers, wholesalers, or holders of a shipping license to submit to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, along with applicable fees, forms including the name, license number, designated Nebraska wholesaler (if applicable), primary source of supply, product to be imported, and evidence of compliance with federal label requirements prior to shipping product into the state.
LB377	Lowe General Affairs	Change provisions relating to special designated licenses under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Expands a nonprofit corporation's, whose purpose is fraternal, charitable, or public service, ability to obtain a special designated license (SDL) for up to twelve, rather than six, days in a calendar year.
LB403 <i>Oppose</i>	Vargas General Affairs	Change provisions relating to a craft brewery license under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Increases how many barrels of beer craft breweries are allowed to directly sell or re-sell to off-premise sites from 250 to 500. Permits licensees to utilize common carriers for self-distribution.
LB404	Vargas General Affairs	Change provisions relating to agreements between wholesalers and suppliers for the distribution of beer	<i>Introduced</i> 1/12/23	Allows small beer producers to enter into contracts with wholesalers to sell their product.
LB452 <i>Oppose</i>	Murman; Brewer, Vargas	Change provisions relating to microdistilleries under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/13/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows Nebraska microdistilleries to annually self-distribute up to 2,000 gallons of their product • The product must use at least 51% of Nebraska-grown agricultural products • The product may only be moved by employees in business-owned or leased vehicles
LB512	Brewer	Change the number of locations allowed for a craft brewery or microdistillery under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/17/23	Allows craft breweries and microdistilleries to have ten physical locations.
LB543	Lowe	Change provisions relating to entertainment district licenses under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/17/23	
LB596	Hardin	Authorize a manufacturer or wholesaler to enter into a sponsorship or advertising agreement with certain licensees or organizations under the Nebraska Liquor Control Act	<i>Introduced</i> 1/17/23	

* Testimony provided by Project Extra Mile

+ Emergency clause included

Prepared by Project Extra Mile

Last updated: 1/18/2023

January 14, 2023

Attachments: What Works

Dear Senator,

As a state legislator, you have the power to help prevent the untimely deaths of over 700 Nebraskans each year by working to strengthen alcohol policies that have proven effective in other states and countries. In doing so, you'll also *support* Nebraskan businesses by reducing an estimated \$838 million in productivity losses those businesses experience each year (Sacks et al., 2015).

According to both the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Nebraska experiences more than 700 alcohol-related deaths annually (NE DHHS, 2017; CDC ARDI, 2022). Surveys have indicated that Nebraska ranks as the sixth-worst binge drinking state in the nation (CDC, 2021) and we have five cities in the top 60 worst binge drinking cities in the US from those indexed that year (CDC, 2020). We are also beginning to see troubling trends and statistics from the pandemic related to alcohol both in Nebraska and nationwide. An average 11.5% of Nebraska 8th, 10th, and 12th graders self-reported an increase in their alcohol consumption in the 2021 Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey, while a study released in March 2022 concluded that alcohol-related deaths increased by 26% between 2019 and 2020, outpacing all-cause mortality which increased by 16.6% (Spencer et al., 2022).

In addition to individual consequences, our communities are also paying the price. Excessive alcohol consumption also comes with steep economic costs for Nebraskan businesses and taxpayers to the tune of \$1.2 billion (Sacks et al., 2015). Nebraskans also self-report driving under the influence of alcohol more than twice the national average and significantly more than 48 other states with a rate of 955 episodes of alcohol-impaired driving per 1,000 population (Jewett et al., 2015). Stories of Nebraskans both young and old and even those unborn that have lost their lives tragically to an impaired driver dominated the news cycle in 2022. Two of the most high-profile cases include a March 2022 crash in which two women in their 30's, one of whom was eight months pregnant, were killed by an impaired driver and an October 2022 single car crash in Lincoln that killed six young people who had been out drinking at multiple establishments that evening.

These are the tragic consequences of a consistent rolling back of state alcohol policies that have made alcohol more accessible, convenient, and affordable. There has not been a clear focus on the public health and safety consequences of these changes, but we are looking forward to having these conversations with you and your staff in the coming years. These policies have cost children, families, taxpayers, and businesses more than you know.

The good news is that a nonpartisan group of scientists and researchers have reviewed policies in other states and countries and have provided a list of evidence-based policies proven reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its harms. We have included a summary of their recommendations along with this letter.

Please let us know if you have any questions on these strategies or the issue of excessive alcohol consumption and the consequences for Nebraskan families. You have a critically important role to play in ensuring that we not only avoid exacerbating these problems by weakening alcohol policies during the next Legislature, but that we begin to strengthen these policies in years to come to keep our communities healthy and safe for all Nebraskans. We look forward to working with you to protect families and businesses from excessive alcohol consumption.

Respectfully,

Chris Wagner
Project Extra Mile
Omaha

John Jeanetta
Heartland Family Services
Omaha

Lanette Richards
Monument Prevention
Coalition
Scottsbluff

Maggie Ballard
Prevention Means Progress
Omaha

Connie Holmes
Central Nebraska Council on
Alcoholism and Addictions
Grand Island

Pastor Jon Lucas
New Rising Star
Baptist Church
Omaha

Lindsay Huse
Douglas County Health Department
Omaha

Nebraska traffic fatalities hit 15-year high in 2022

Written by Bella Caracta

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - "Every single crash has a victim, and those victims are really who MADD is here for."

MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, is a nonprofit organization with roots across the country. In Nebraska, they go into the new year faced with the challenge to tackle traffic fatalities, a number that went up by 15% in 2022. 254 people were killed last year and 221 the year before. That's 33 more deaths in Nebraska due to traffic fatalities.

"We are always disheartened when we see numbers like that. We ultimately want that future with no more victims. So how does MADD help in that? We continue to do the work that we do and we up our level," said Sara Draper with MADD.

Despite the daunting numbers, MADD says they plan to be even more intentional with their work.

"We're educating our communities about that through a lot of different things. Through victim impact panels, through speakers, through youth empowerment programs," said Draper. "Some of the things coming down nationally are really great to help reduce impaired driving. The HALT [and] RIDE Act was passed and is going to help put new technology into new cars."

MADD works under a grant from NDOT and relies on community support. They also offer victim services to families affected by impaired driving.

According to the Nebraska Highway Safety Administrator, it's for a few reasons.

"The main contributing factors we're seeing are driver behavior or dangerous driving behavior," said Bill Kovarik. "Over 75% are not wearing a seatbelt...30% of people killed in crashes are impaired or one of the drivers are impaired."

"Our x-ray camera equipment, it showed that around 10% of all drivers on the road in Nebraska are on their cell phones while driving...10% of the people you're meeting on the road are not looking where they're going. They're looking somewhere else," he said.

While most fatal crashes were in rural parts of Nebraska, the jump in traffic fatalities this year was in urban areas across the state. Within those areas, it was on local city roads that data shows more fatalities happened from 2021 to 2022.

Twelve-time drunk driver given several chances to turn his life around

Written by Mike McKnight

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - In fourteen years as a deputy, Sarpy County attorney Ben Perlman has prosecuted dozens of drunk drivers -- but none with the driving history of 48-year-old Michael Evezic, allegedly caught drinking and driving again.

"Our records show between this latest arrest and going back to 1997, the defendant has been convicted of drunk driving as many as 12 times," Perlman said.

The most recent arrest was Dec. 2.

The arrest affidavit states on a Friday about Noon, police were called to a Bellevue gas station on the report of a possible drunk driver. A witness had seen a vehicle nearly strike a gas pump.

The officer states Michael had bloodshot eyes and could barely talk. A preliminary breath test registered .302 -- nearly four times the legal limit.

Perlman said he offended again within three to five days of getting off probation.

Evezic served less than two years in prison for felony drunk driving and released on probation with monitoring. November 29th, a judge signed an order approving early discharge from his probation. By our calculations, that's about five months early.

"People need to be held accountable, and more importantly, the community needs to be kept safe," said Andrea Frazier, executive director of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. "This individual was probably high-risk and unfortunately allowed to get off probation early."

Evezic's probation officer submitted the application for early release. State probation won't comment but points to the early discharge statute that says for low to moderate-risk-to-reoffend individuals who follow the rules, the probation officer shall submit an application for early discharge. In other words, the probation officer had no choice.

"We don't understand why early release is an option, and is this something we can maybe work with a state senator to understand why the law is written like that," Frazier said.

Since probation ended early, the various drunk driving prevention devices lifted, just four days before Evezic was arrested for DUI at a Bellevue gas station.

"Allegations that a gas pump is almost hit...the concern speaks for itself," Perlman said. Despite a dozen DUI convictions on the defendant's record, the law allows only those in the last 15 years to count on any new charge. Evezic faces a third-offense DUI, but there are several other charges filed like driving with a revoked license and refusing an alcohol pretest.

Evezic remains in jail on \$500,000 bond and declined our request for an interview.

Lincoln woman charged with felony after threatening suicide in front of children

Written by Andrew Wegley

Prosecutors have charged a 34-year-old Lincoln woman with felony child abuse after she threatened to kill herself before firing a gun inside a house with two children present last week, police alleged in court records.

Mallory Ruel called the father of a middle school-aged girl Dec. 28 and asked the man to pick the girl up from her house near 40th and Randolph streets, Lincoln Police Officer Patrick Sullivan said in an affidavit for a search warrant for the woman's home.

When the girl's father arrived, he heard someone yell "I'm going to do it," from inside the house before Ruel emerged, holding a revolver to her chin, Sullivan said in an affidavit.

The man retreated to his car and called police, and soon police arrived on scene and negotiators contacted Ruel by phone. By then, she had gone back into the house, where the children — the girl and a young boy — remained, Sullivan said.

As police spoke with Ruel over the phone, they heard her arguing with one of the children before a gunshot rang out, according to the affidavit.

That's when officers forced the front door open and took Ruel into custody, Sullivan said. Investigators later recovered a .38-caliber revolver and a single spent shell casing.

The girl who had been in the home later told investigators that Ruel had been drinking that morning and frequently wielded the revolver and threatened suicide, Lincoln Police Sgt. Sara Genoways said in an affidavit in support of a temporary custody order for both children, who were turned over to family members at the scene.

Ruel was taken first to the Lancaster County's Mental Health Crisis Center before she was moved to the county jail Saturday.

At her initial court appearance on the child abuse charge Tuesday, a county judge set Ruel's percentage bond at \$10,000. She must pay \$1,000 to be released.

UPS driver with open container crashes into car, house near Holland, sheriff says

Written by Andrew Wegley

A UPS delivery driver crashed into a parked car and a utility pole before careening into a house in southern Lancaster County on Wednesday, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The driver, a 37-year-old Lincoln woman, was headed south on 96th Street with an open container of alcohol in the company truck at around 4:30 p.m. Wednesday when she lost control just south of Panama Road in Holland, Sheriff Terry Wagner said in a news release.

The truck crashed into a parked car, causing \$15,000 in damage, before striking a Norris Public Power utility pole and continuing into a house at 22205 S. 96th St., Wagner said.

The crash caused \$3,500 in damage to the pole, \$30,000 in damage to the house and another \$10,000 in damage to the UPS truck, the sheriff said.

The woman was cited for careless driving and having an open container.

Pedestrian deaths hit 7-year high in Omaha in 2022

Written by Marlo Lundak

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - Across the metro in 2022, there was a significant uptick in pedestrians killed after getting hit by cars.

"We had 12 this year -- you can actually count it as 13," says Omaha Police Lt. Allen Straub. "One of the females that was hit was 22 weeks pregnant. For us, that's a lot. That's probably 13 too many."

In 2021, there were five deaths, and four in 2020. Lt. Straub says the unfortunate truth behind the numbers this year is that it's not always due to distracted or reckless drivers.

"Seven of those people we suspect to be under the influence of either drugs or alcohol, and a lot of them were crossing mid-block," Straub said. "They were crossing when there was other traffic present, not using crosswalks, crossing where there's either dim lighting or no lighting."

All 12 pedestrian deaths happened at night - and they were spread across the city. With this 7-year high, Vision Zero is as important as ever.

"It's really concerning, because it's something that in Vision Zero, we really feel that these are preventable deaths," said Jeff Sobczyk.

The Vision Zero strategy is to eliminate traffic deaths. Omaha's Vision Zero Task Force will present their action plan to the city this summer. In it will be a series of recommendations on how lawmakers might prioritize safety.

"A lot of road infrastructure ideas and how to calm traffic using a lot engineering principles to slow vehicle speeds down," Sobczyk said. "When you do that, you not only increase the safety of the driver behind the wheel, but the vulnerable users outside."

Sobczyk says the culture shift they're hoping for will take time and education for all road users, drivers, riders and pedestrians. Lt. Straub says he's hoping for a safer 2023.

"Probably one of the worst parts of the job is having to tell a loved one that a family member is gone."

Whitepaper on the Ongoing Battle Over Taxation in the Alcohol Industry

Written by Center for Alcohol Policy Staff

Today the Center for Alcohol Policy released a new whitepaper outlining the battle over taxation in the alcohol industry. The report was commissioned by the Center and authored by Patrick Maroney, President of Maroney Consulting Services, LLC and former Director of the Colorado Department of Revenue's Liquor Enforcement Division.

"The practice of conducting background checks on liquor license application is a must in order to ensure an orderly and safe marketplace. Keeping unscrupulous actors out of the alcohol industry is an important role of government entities tasked with regulating alcohol production, distribution and sales," said report author Patrick Maroney.

Maroney's report provides an overview of the origin of alcohol taxation, and its primary intent of regulating consumption in addition to funding government entities. Citing *Toward Liquor Control*, Maroney explores the benefits of different levels of taxation for different alcohol products, striking a balance between availability and overconsumption.

After a historical review of the benefits of targeted alcohol tax regimes, Maroney outlines how in modern times, alcohol excise taxes are falling. He finds it critical that legislators and regulators understand the history of alcohol laws, regulations, and taxation toward the goal of public health and safety, but also recognize there is no silver bullet.

"Even prior to Prohibition, there has been a strong understanding of the need to regulate different types of alcohol differently – including how each product is taxed," said Brannon Denning, Advisory Council for the Center for Alcohol Policy. Denning is also an Associate Professor of Law at Samford University's Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham, Alabama. "Taxes represent an important aspect of alcohol regulation, one where there is an understanding that the stronger the beverage there ought to be a corresponding increase in its regulation. However, taxation alone will not solve the public health and safety concerns of the nation and policymakers must utilize a broader chest of regulatory tools to accomplish those goals."

Bellevue family displaced after intoxicated driver smashes into home

Written by Marlo Lundak

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - A Bellevue family is being forced to live with other family members after an intoxicated driver smashed into their home last month.

"It sounded like a huge explosion coming from our bathroom," says Elizabeth Martin. "I heard my husband go, is that a car?"

It was around 2 a.m. on December 9 when Elizabeth Martin and her husband, William, along with their two kids, were woken up in the dead of the night.

"I opened the door to see indeed a car on the back of our house with a man sitting on top of it and the cops in our backyard," Elizabeth says.

Even more bizarre, the driver, who police say was under the influence of drugs, had a costume.

"Yeah and the weirdest part was with him with the 'Jason' mask," says William.

Police told the Martin family they were after the driver when he drove off the road, hit a powerpole, smashed through the Martin's fence, rolling several times before stopping when it collided with the house.

"Is this actually really happening? It kind of took us, seriously a day to comprehend," William adds.

The crash immediately knocked out the Martin's heat and power, along with the entire neighborhood's power for several hours.

The Martins were forced out of their home in the middle of the night just weeks before Christmas. They're staying with Elizabeth's sister.

"The longer it takes to get electricity, the longer it's going to take us to get in here," says William.

The crash left the Martins with several unexpected costs that insurance won't cover. Because of Bellevue's updated codes, the Martin's electric wiring and meter didn't meet those new codes.

"So since the part that is out of code was not damaged in the crash, the insurance is saying that we are on the hook for it basically," Elizabeth says.

The Martins say recent health issues and surgeries have drained their bank account, and they aren't sure what they're going to be able to afford.

The crash destroyed the upstairs bathroom, which caused flooding in their basement. It also impacted the home's foundation.

"It is cracked all the way down to the corner," William explains as he points to the damage done to the concrete wall in his basement.

As of now, it's not yet clear how much the Martins will need to pay on their own. They say their insurance company is already estimating costs of \$100,000.

But overall, the Martins are just thankful no one was hurt or killed, and they're forgiving and empathetic of the driver.

"We can only hope that this is a turning point for him," Elizabeth says about the driver.

"We were originally mad at him, but we realized you know, people make dumb mistakes, and hopefully this is a turning around point for him," William adds.

The Martin family has a GoFundMe page to help them cover their unexpected costs.

Art replaces alcohol at the Whiteclay Makerspace

Written by Mike Tobias

They call it art over alcohol. One building in a northwest Nebraska village transformed into something providing much needed jobs and hope to a troubled area. In today's Signature Story, Nebraska Public Media producer Mike Tobias takes us inside the Whiteclay Makerspace. The story is part of our "What If..." project on innovation and creativity in Nebraska. Watch this story in a new episode that premieres tonight at 7 p.m. CT on Nebraska Public Media.

Nadine Morrison is a master of the room-filling quilt machine. Using something like a steering wheel to easily guide a sewing machine sitting on eight feet of rails, back and forth to create a full size star quilt.

Morrison sketches the design first, then "we have a pattern that we just trace for all the lines and then we just follow it with the needle," she says. "I do two to four star quilts a week."

The bright colors of Morrison's blouse and quilt she's creating give life to an otherwise drab cement block room and building. The Whiteclay Makerspace is clearly a work-in-progress. But for Morrison and other Oglala Lakota creators it's a place where they can make and sell their work. It's a better use for the building than what it used to be.

A little background. For years, Whiteclay, Nebraska, population eight, was best known for having four liquor stores selling millions of cans of beer yearly, mostly to the Oglala Lakota living a short walk north on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation. On the reservation alcohol is banned but widespread alcoholism drives poverty, unemployment, violence and death. On Whiteclay's streets people were drinking, passed out and fighting. There were accounts of rape and murder.

"It was pretty rough back then," says Lily Larvie, an Oglala Lakota woman who lives on the Pine Ridge reservation. "A lot of bad stuff happening here all the time, and a lot of people died around here."

Change came when Nebraska officials forced the beer stores to close in 2017.

"What we're basically trying to do is provide opportunities for Oglala Lakota to help themselves," Jon Ruybalid says. We talked with the lawyer-entrepreneur in space that used to be a beer cooler for the Arrowhead beer store.

Ruybalid helped turn one of the abandoned liquor stores into the makerspace. Fans that used to cool beer still hang high on the walls of this room. Now it's full of beads, cloth and other supplies makers can purchase. Everything in the building is about creating jobs.

"What we're trying to do is help Lakota artists and crafters who have natural abilities, or they've been taught by their grandma or whatever, how to make things with bead work or leather work. They really have these skills, but they need resources. They need basic tools or dremels or a quilting machine or sewing machine."

About 10 artists, most living in nearby Pine Ridge, work or sell here each week. They pay small fees for space and sales. The non-profit operation is mostly supported by donations. They hope to grow the number of makers, offer more classes, and build an outdoor area.

“We're in it for the long haul,” Ruybalid says. “We don't expect to set the world on fire this year or next, or whenever, but one artist and crafter at a time, one household at a time.”

Morrison is here a lot. She helps Ruybalid runs the makerspace, and she makes a lot of star quilts. These are important, sacred symbols in Oglala Lakota culture, created and given to celebrate births, graduations and weddings, and honor those who've died. Many of Morrison's creations have been for deaths in her community.

“For me, it was therapeutic. I feel like it helped people in our community because I would listen to their stories. Some of them were tragic. I would go home, and I'd cry and pray for them.”

The Whiteclay Makerspace was born from a couple things, including a study that found half the households on the reservation depend on home-based businesses. Most involved arts or crafts, and getting supplies meant a long drive to the nearest city. Closing liquor stores and creating a makerspace hasn't ended alcoholism on the reservation. But it has provided opportunity and hope.

Oglala Lakota creator Brenda Good Lance makes star quilts, necklaces, dream catchers, warrior shields, medicine wheels and other things. “I love this makerspace,” she says. “It helps me to feel much better about myself knowing I can come somewhere where we're safe, no alcohol, and we could do our jewelry, beadwork, and make some money on the side for our families, our rent, lights, car bills. So I am very happy this is open.”

“The people are struggling,” says Oglala Lakota creator Larvie, “and I wish more of them would learn more of the art side of things because it helps. It helps you stay busy and stay out of trouble and gives you an income.”

Morrison also wants to inspire a younger generation of Oglala Lakota to create with their hands like their ancestors. Like Leilani McLaughlin, Morrison's granddaughter. We talked with her about what art can do for her generation of Oglala Lakota, as she worked on the background of a painting of a cherry blossom tree. “I feel like it's a good way to express ourselves and what we want to do. It could be a distraction for if anything's going on and you just need to get away. I feel like it's a good way to clear your head and it's very relaxing.”

“I think it's cool what they turned it into,” McLaughlin adds.

Art over alcohol is a social media hashtag here. A philosophy. It's a place that makes Nadine Morrison feel happy.

“I think it's just really amazing that we could turn a bar into a place where we can create,” Morrison says.