

MADD

From its humble beginnings 25 years ago, MADD has evolved into one of the most widely supported and well-liked non-profit organizations in America. Since its inception in 1980, MADD has worked to make a difference. The organization was the result of grief-stricken parents coming together to do something about a horrendous problem across the nation. There was Candy Lightner, for example...

“Sue LeBrun-Green remembers the May 1980 day well. Authorities called her real estate office searching for her friend and colleague Candy Lightner. The news was tragic. A hit-and-run driver had struck Candy’s 13-year-old daughter Cari while she was walking to a church carnival. Knocked out of her shoes, Cari landed 125 feet away. She died never knowing what hit her. The hit-and-run driver was turned in by his wife, who was suspicious at his efforts to hide their badly damaged car. “A couple of days later Candy called and said, ‘Sue, we just found out the driver was drunk. Take me over to the DMV. I want to pull his records.’” There, the friends hit a brick wall. “We were told we couldn’t just walk in and pull someone’s driving record. Candy said, ‘This man killed my daughter.’ And they said, ‘It’s not the DMV’s fault.’ They told us we should be talking to judges. Judges’ offices referred us to state agencies. Little by little, people were sending us all over the place. We were actually laying the foundation for MADD,” LeBrun-Green says.

The duo quickly learned what traffic-safety advocates already knew. Drunk driving was not on society’s radar. “Before the 1980s, drinking and driving was how people got home. It was normal behavior,” says MADD chief executive officer and longtime traffic safety advocate Chuck Hurley. Yet tens of thousands were dying and no one but law enforcement and a smattering of researchers and government agencies seemed to care. “I was working hard on this issue, just like a lot of us bureaucrats,” says Marilyn Sabin, who was then alcohol coordinator for the California Office of Traffic Safety. Yet she watched DUI bill after DUI bill fail in her state. The feds met a similar fate. “Congress had put \$35 million into Alcohol Safety Action Programs around the country, but nothing was happening. Judges were treating it with a wink and a nod,” says Jim Fell, MADD national board member who then worked for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). “Alcohol was involved in nearly 60 percent of fatal crashes and we were banging our heads against the wall. Then, all of a sudden, a woman named Candy Lightner came along, kicking and screaming about her daughter who had been killed.”

LeBrun-Green says the early days were hectic. “We gathered information, found other victims through classified ads, mailed newsletters and tried to answer one question for ourselves and other victims: ‘How do I not get the runaround from the system?’”...Victims called faster than they could keep up. Speaking engagements and media requests flooded in. And, politicians returned calls. By September, MADD, or Mothers Against Drunk Drivers as it was originally called, was incorporated. By 1982, MADD was 100 chapters strong and President Ronald Reagan announced the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving and invited MADD to participate. By 1983, 129 new anti-drunk driving laws had passed... President Ronald Reagan signed the Uniform Drinking Age Act into law on July 17, 1984.” [http://www.madd.org/getattachment/48e81e1b-df43-4f31-b9a1-d94d5b940e62/MADD-25-Years-of-Saving-Lives.aspx]

Quite a success story, but the problem is still far from solved...

