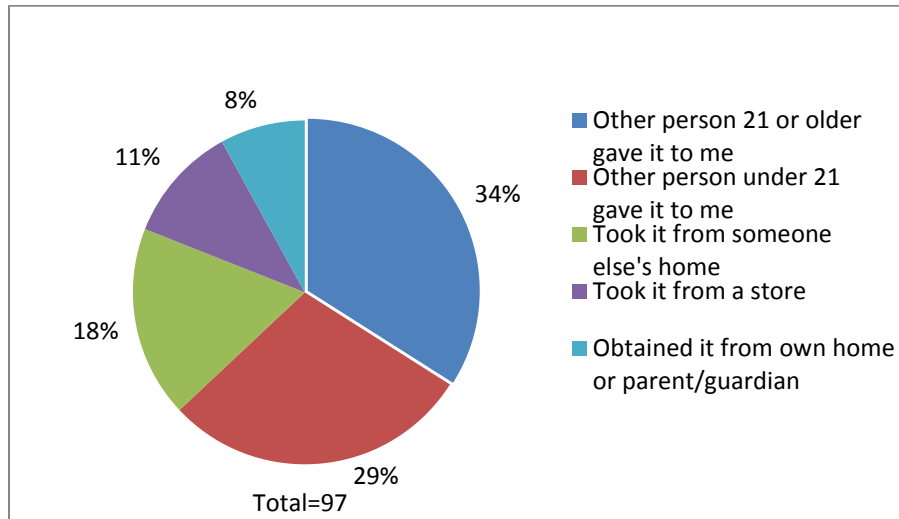


### Implications of Juveniles' Easy Access to Alcohol on Local Prevention Efforts

Findings from two recent national surveys on teen alcohol and other drug use indicate disturbing trends regarding the age at which teens first use alcohol and the ease with which they do so. The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) survey found that 21 percent of high school students nationwide had consumed alcohol for the first time before the age of 13<sup>1</sup>, with nearly all teens age 12 to 14 who used alcohol in the previous month getting the alcohol for free (93%).<sup>2</sup> Lending urgency to these findings is other research that shows teens begin drinking alcohol before 15 years old are six times more likely to develop alcohol dependence problems than those who begin drinking at age 21.<sup>3</sup>

As part of SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, results from local interviews with recently arrested juveniles in 2009 show that on average, juvenile arrestees first used alcohol at 12.9 years of age (range 6 to 17,  $SD=1.56$ ) and of the 97 juvenile arrestees who said they got it without buying it, around one in four (26%) got it from their own home or someone else's, as opposed to a retail establishment (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**MAJORITY OF JUVENILE ARRESTEES ACCESSED ALCOHOL FOR FREE**



SOURCE: SANDAG, 2009 Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region, July 2010

While juveniles accessing alcohol from their own or a friend's home is not a new phenomenon and it is possible that SAM youth may have different methods for obtaining alcohol than the general juvenile population, these data do have potential implications for effective prevention strategies. These include the importance of engaging and educating parents early on regarding when alcohol use may start, the necessity of having open dialogues with other parents in their communities about availability, and critically examining how accessible alcohol may be in their homes.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, June 4, 2010. Vol. 59. No. SS-5. Department Of Health And Human Services. Available on-line at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2011). *Data Spotlight: Young Alcohol Users Often Get Alcohol From Family or Home: National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Available on-line at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.