

National Children's Advisory Council

*Advice to the Minister
On
Alcohol Use/Misuse by Young People*

Report prepared by Lynne Peyton

October 2003

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council was asked by the Minister of State with Responsibility for Children to provide advice on the issue of alcohol misuse by young people and in order to comply with this request, the Council commissioned a consultation exercise and report by Lynne Peyton, an Independent Child Care Consultant.

In its terms of reference for the project the Council required consultation with all members of Council and in particular the young people representatives, as well as appropriate background research. Consultation was to focus on Council Members' views on the Interim Recommendations of the Task Force on Alcohol as well as seeking the Members' views as to what works with young people and the policies and initiatives that might be effective. It was also considered important that the obstacles and challenges should be identified and ways of overcoming these suggested. The Council was particularly aware of the comprehensiveness of the Task Force's work to date, the extent of media attention and public debate as well as recent developments as regards policy and legislative reform since the publication of the Task Force Report. A subgroup under the chairmanship of Susanne Connolly (Barnardos) was established and included the two Young People Representatives on Council. In view of the complexity of the issues surrounding alcohol use and misuse by young people and the diversity of opinion, it was felt by the subgroup at an early stage that it was going to be difficult to bring anything new to the issue. However the Council felt a responsibility to explore and reflect on the issues from the point of view of young people themselves and to better understand the extent of underage drinking, the reasons for it and what factors might influence young people towards resisting the temptation to drink until they were 18. The starting point was consultation with Council members who shared their experience as service commissioners and providers, ministerial and local authority representatives, lobbyists, academics and of course for many of them, as parents themselves.

Responses to the Task Force recommendations were fairly consistent and while there were variations in approaches and the extent to which people were passionate about specific issues there were no really significant areas of disagreement. Consultation with the young members of Council was undertaken separately, in view of their unavailability due to exams and other commitments and with hindsight this probably facilitated their perspective being unaffected by the other members' views. In the discussions with Council members there was huge concern about the extent of alcohol misuse among the young and about the apparent powerlessness of society in general to tackle what is in effect a significant child protection issue. Many of those who were service providers were already offering specific initiatives for young people at risk from alcohol and drug misuse. Others were actively lobbying public representatives to provide urgent leadership. Consultation with recognised experts on the issue emphasised the importance of seeing young people's drinking habits and behaviour in the context of Irish culture and society and advised that strategies which focussed specifically on young people would not be effective unless there was a shift in the behaviour of adults.

While young people have always experimented with alcohol the situation in Ireland at present seems to have spiralled out of control with children as young as 11 and 12 reporting drinking alcohol, while 13 and 14 year olds appear to find it relatively easy to be served in pubs, discos and off-licences. Many 15 to 18 year olds appear to drink regularly at weekends and the reported extent of binge drinking raises worrying questions about how young people access alcohol and about parental supervision. A big difference in the past 10 years seems to be the amount of disposable income as many teenagers have part-time jobs and are not expected to

contribute to household finances. However many others are given significant amounts of pocket money by their parents. The position and attitude of parents is an area which needs to be further explored. Do they know about and condone their children drinking? At what age are young people permitted to stay out to 1.00am and 2.00am unsupervised? When does this become a neglect issue?

In order to respond to the Minister's request it was decided that in addition to responding to the Task Force's recommendations it would be helpful to consult with young people, with parents and with other service providers. It is recognised that this was not a scientific approach and the Government is keen to ensure it invests in scientifically proven approaches. However we believe that the views of children, parents and service providers are valid and a number of consistent themes emerged which are worthy of further consideration. Perhaps most striking is the finding that across Ireland, in both rural and urban settings there is a dearth of alcohol free recreational and leisure facilities for young people. The report also includes some models of good practice, in Ireland and elsewhere, as it would be wrong to assume that the phenomenon of young people drinking heavily is peculiar to Ireland. Indeed recent research in the UK revealed that Accident and Emergency Departments are seeing young children inebriated at the age of six.

However young people in Ireland recognise that in France, Spain and Italy where there is tolerance for earlier drinking by children, there is no tradition of the binge drinking displayed by British and Irish teenagers at home and abroad. We need to examine in conjunction with young people and parents why this phenomenon has developed and how we can challenge the causes and the practices.

What is clear is that whatever the reasons, the situation cannot be allowed to continue and must be tackled in a coordinated way at all levels. There is a need for young people to be responsible for their own behaviour and we need to explore how there can be effective and immediate consequences for underage drinking that do not result in longer term implications for career and citizenship. Criminalising underage drinking is not the answer and it is inappropriate for young people to be barred from some career options because of alcohol misuse as a juvenile. However community service may be an appropriate response particularly to emphasise the seriousness of repeat offences. There is also a clear role for parents, for licensees and for politicians and other public figures as well as for law enforcement agencies and for public policy makers.

The Council recommends that the following strategies should be urgently implemented:-

Promotion of a range of alcohol free sport and leisure facilities which are attractive to adults as well as young people should be included within County Development Plans, and coordinated with other strategies such as the National Youth Development Plan and the Irish Sports Council's Strategy.

The Government should urgently produce and resource an action plan and timescale for implementing the remainder of the Task Force recommendations as well as the World Health Organisation's Declaration on Young People and Alcohol.

There must be awareness raising that alcohol is the number one drug of choice among young people in Ireland and is associated with all other forms of drug misuse.

The Alcohol and Drugs Task Forces must work together to ensure the National Policies on Alcohol and Drugs are more closely coordinated and delivered through local coalitions of relevant organisations.

Irish politicians and leaders in all walks of life must be prepared to show the way and demonstrate commitment to tackling alcohol misuse in Ireland as a whole and for young people in particular.

Relationships and negotiations with the drinks industry must have clear outcomes in terms of harm reduction.

Coordinated and integrated action is needed at all levels including at home, in schools and in communities to ensure reduced availability and improved effectiveness of law enforcement.

Young people must be fully engaged in the debate and in designing the solutions, including trendy late opening and accessible alcohol-free clubs and cafes.

The needs of young Travellers and other minority groups should be researched and addressed in culturally appropriate ways, and there should be measures to ensure that programmes and initiatives are inclusive and accessible for young people with disabilities and special needs.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Council has been asked to advise the Minister of State with Responsibility for Children on issues around alcohol use and abuse by young people under 18 years of age.

In order to accede to this request the Council engaged Lynne Peyton, an Independent Child Care Consultant to assist them with a consultation exercise to inform their response.

In particular the Council wanted the consultation exercise to:

- Examine the recommendations made in the Interim Report of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol (2002).
- Outline their views on what works with young people in relation to prevention and education around alcohol use/abuse.
- Detail initiatives/policy measures that may be helpful to the successful implementation of the recommendations.
- Identify the challenges/obstacles which would need to be overcome.

The exercise was to include:-

- Consultation with all Council members with reference to the Task Force recommendations as outlined above.
- Appropriate consultation with the young members of the Council to facilitate their full participation in the project.
- Appropriate background research to support the work of the subgroup.

Methodology

The following methodology was employed:

- A review of the content of a presentation to the Council by the Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children, with regard to the work of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol.
- The establishment of a Reference Group to oversee the project.
- An invitation to all Council members to:
 - Provide information on action being taken by their Organisation on the issues.
 - Suggest opportunities for consulting with young people and parents.
 - Identify examples of good practice on any aspect of the recommendations and in particular successful alternatives to the pub culture.
- A focus group with Council members.
- A focus group with members of the Executive of Children's Rights Alliance.

- A series of individual meetings and/or telephone consultations with Council members and/or their agency representative.
- Telephone consultations with representatives of Health Promotion Unit, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of Education and Science and Department of Addiction Studies at Trinity College Dublin.
- Telephone consultation with representatives of Sporting Governing Bodies.
- Telephone consultations with service providers for a range of community prevention initiatives.
- Meeting with Coordinator Donegal Alcohol Forum.
- Review of relevant reports.
- Consultation with young people including:
 - Young persons representatives on the Council.
 - Transition Year/5th year students in Dalkey and Tipperary.
 - Young people receiving aftercare support in an addiction service.
 - The County Donegal Youth Council, an elected representative body.
 - Review of previous consultations undertaken with young people in Donegal, Blanchardstown, Bray and Dublin.
- Consultation with Parents including:
 - Parent Educators in Whitechurch Addiction Support Group (WASP)
 - The North Western Health's Board's Parent Support Programme, Fás Le Chéile.
 - Review of previous consultation by National Parents Council – Post Primary.

The opportunity was also taken to gain a different cultural perspective by involving a group of American young people and their parents in discussion groups, during a recent trip by the Consultant to the United States.

While it was planned initially that consultation would focus on the experiences and expertise of members of the Council, it became clear as the work progressed that it was imperative that the voices of young people including those with dependency problems, as well as parents and direct services providers, informed the Council's response. A number of reports of consultation initiatives previously undertaken with young people and parents on alcohol and drugs were provided by Council Members and their content reviewed. Council members also identified relevant people and projects to inform the report.

The Council would like to record its appreciation to all those who contributed.

Findings

What was apparent throughout this exercise, is that there is massive concern about the extent and effects of alcohol misuse generally in Ireland and the drinking patterns of young people

need to be seen within that broader context. The early age at which children experiment with alcohol, the close relationship between alcohol and drug taking and the level of binge drinking among many young people has led to a growing sense of urgency and a need for action to redress the balance. Young people are giving clear messages that adults, particularly parents, licencees and the Gardaí need to have effective barriers in place to limit where, when and what young people drink. In a country where the pub is the traditional meeting place there also needs to be affordable and accessible alternative venues for young people and for families.

The sense is one of a national crisis and while there is widespread support for the National Alcohol Policy and the Task Force Recommendations there is a lack of confidence in the will to fully implement them. There is recognition of the value of some recent legislative reforms, and it is imperative that these are fully implemented and monitored. Nevertheless considerable scepticism remains as to the extent of Government commitment, as well as anxiety about the relative strength of the Drinks Industry Lobby.

3 BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT RESEARCH

The National Alcohol Policy launched in 1996 was aimed at:-

- Reducing the level of alcohol-related problems and
- Promoting moderation for those who wish to drink.

Since its publication many important initiatives have taken place in respect of health promotion, research, training and legislation. The Commission on Liquor Licensing, 2000 recommended the establishment of a Task Force on Alcohol and in January 2002 the Minister for Health and Children established a Strategic Task Force on Alcohol to bring forward recommendations on specific measures to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm.

Specifically the Task Force was to review international research, examine changes in alcohol consumption and related harm and recommend evidenced-based measures to prevent alcohol related harm in Ireland. The Task Force's Report makes compelling reading and provides an overview of the current unacceptable levels of alcohol misuse by adults and young people in Ireland.

Their interim report of May 2002 recommended urgent action in 5 key areas including:-

- To reduce total alcohol consumption at the population level to the EU average.
- To reduce harmful consumption of alcohol at an individual level, especially binge drinking and regular heavy drinking.
- To provide greater protection for children and adolescents from the pressures of drink.
- To prevent and reduce the risk of alcohol related harm on the roads.
- To prevent and reduce the risk of alcohol related harm in the drinking environment.

Specifically to protect children and reduce pressure on adolescents to drink, the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol made a number of detailed recommendations including restrictions on alcohol advertising, promotion of alcohol-free sporting environments and restrictions on when children could be in licensed premises.

On receiving the Task Force Interim Recommendations in May 2002 the Minister established an Inter-Departmental Group to coordinate responses to the recommendations. Each Department is currently bringing forward proposals with regard to taking forward the various recommendations. The Task Force itself continues to meet to address the outstanding areas of the WHO European Charter on Alcohol.

A review of the National Alcohol Policy is scheduled for 2004.

Within this national policy context, Ireland has endorsed the World Health Organisation's Declaration on Young People and Alcohol 2001 which recognises that alcohol policies directed at young people should be part of a broader societal response and that young people can contribute positively to resolving alcohol related problems. Ireland as a Member State has been asked to adopt the following targets to be achieved by the year 2006.

- Reduce substantially the number of young people who start consuming alcohol.
- Delay the age of onset of drinking by young people.
- Reduce substantially the occurrence and frequency of high-risk drinking among young people, especially adolescents and young adults.
- Provide and/or expand meaningful alternatives to alcohol and drug use and increase education and training for those who work with young people.
- Increase young people's involvement in youth health-related policies, especially alcohol-related issues.
- Increase education for young people on alcohol.
- Minimise the pressures on young people to drink, especially in relation to alcohol promotions, free distributions, advertising, sponsorship and availability, with particular emphasis on special events.
- Support actions against the illegal sale of alcohol.
- Ensure and/or increase access to health and counselling services, especially for young people with alcohol problems and/or alcohol-dependent parents or family members.
- Reduce substantially alcohol-related harm, especially accidents, assaults and violence, and particularly as experienced by young people.

Research-based and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that alcohol use/misuse is deeply rooted in Irish society and is an accepted and expected element of all family occasions including birthdays, weddings, christenings, wakes and even at confirmations where young people take the pledge to abstain. Excessive use of alcohol is generally tolerated and the resultant behaviour viewed as amusing, with few social sanctions for those who take 'one too many'. Most social and political functions include alcohol and a recent attempt by Barnardos to have politicians model good behaviour as part of their 'Pledge' Campaign, demonstrated how deep-seated the behaviour is and how ambivalent we are as a society to address it.

Alcohol Consumption in Ireland

The evidence as summarised in the Strategic Task Force's Report is clear:-

- Between 1989 and 1999 alcohol consumption per capita in Ireland increased by 41%, the highest increase among European Union countries.
- By 2000 Ireland's consumption was 11 litres of pure alcohol per head of population compared to an EU average of 9.1 litres.
- Spirit sales have increased dramatically since 1996 due in part to the advent of new 'designer drinks', commonly known as alcopops which are targeted at young adults but widely consumed by those underage.
- Alcohol abuse plays a substantial role in accidents as demonstrated by attendances at A & E Departments.
- Street violence offences almost doubled (97%) in the period 1996-2000 and alcohol is a factor in the majority of public order offences.
- At least 30% of all road traffic accidents and 40% of all fatal accidents are alcohol related.
- Alcohol abuse is a significant factor in suicide.
- 26% of male admissions and 11% of female admissions to all psychiatric hospitals in 1999 were for alcohol disorders.
- **Alcohol related problems costs Irish society approximately €2.4 billion (£1.9 billion) per year. Costs include healthcare, road accidents, alcohol related crime and lost productivity due to absences from work.**

Alcohol Consumption by Young People

Most Irish young people are continuously exposed from an early age to the drinking culture in Ireland within their personal life, in their communities, via the media and in particular through television advertising.

- Peers and peer stereotypes are the biggest influences on young people.
- The Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC) Survey revealed that half of Ireland's young people start to experiment with alcohol before the age of 12.
- One in five 12-14 year old boys are current drinkers.
- 50% of 16 year old girls and 66% of 16 year old boys are current drinkers.
- Binge drinking is a particular concern and one third of 15-16 year olds reported binge drinking regularly (drinking 5 or more drinks in a row).
- Alcohol seems to be accessed by the younger age group under 15 from parents' supplies in the home, 15-17 year olds access alcohol mainly through off-licences, clubs, discos and pubs.
- Drinking in someone else's home appears to be an issue for all age groups.
- The consequences of alcohol misuse for the young include alcoholic poisoning and the potential for long-term dependency as well as physiological problems and the dangers associated with unprotected sex.

- There are direct links with juvenile offences and the negative effects on school performance and on relationships, can also be evidenced.

Experience Elsewhere

Recent surveys in the UK undertaken by the BBC in conjunction with the British Association of Accident and Emergency Medicine reveal:-

- The number of children under 18 coming to A & E Departments because of excessive alcohol consumption has risen between 33% to 50% in the past 5 years.
- Children as young as 6 are being treated for binge-drinking on alcopops and lager.
- Many children seen in A & E Departments are over the drink driving limit and many are unconscious or semi-conscious through alcohol.

Research by the National Office of Statistics (UK) shows that the number of young people dying from alcohol abuse has tripled, rising from 2% in 1981 to 7% in 2001 of all deaths among young men.

Information from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in the United States endorses the dangers of teenage drinking.

Research suggests that:-

- More than 40% of individuals who start drinking before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some time in their lives. If drinking is delayed until age 21, a child's risk of serious alcohol problems is decreased by 70%.
- Rates of drinking differ among racial and ethnic minority groups with binge drinking reported by 34% of non Hispanic white students, 30% Hispanic students and 11% African/Americans.
- Adolescents who abuse alcohol may remember 10% less of what they have learned than those who don't drink.
- 28% of suicides by children aged 9-15 could be attributed to alcohol.

4 COUNCIL'S FEEDBACK ON TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Council members generally applauded the Task Force's Report and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the recommendations. They were not however aware of the document being formally consulted upon and were concerned about the length of time that had elapsed since the Interim Report and the need to ensure momentum is sustained. In particular the Council are keen to ensure that the Inter-Departmental Group is active in implementing the various recommendations, on a coordinated basis and in a timely fashion.

In prefacing their feedback to the recommendations the Council were keen to make a number of points of principle.

- The level of alcohol consumption in Ireland among adults as well as young people is extremely serious and needs to be tackled.
- The extent of alcohol misuse within families, by parents and by young people themselves constitutes an urgent child protection issue.
- The Government has provided excellent advice and direction in the National Alcohol Policy of 1996 and more recently in the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol Interim Recommendations. However the National Alcohol Policy has not been fully implemented and there have been many developments since 1996 which are contrary to the Policy, including extended opening hours and increased availability of alcohol through additional licences in garages, supermarkets and restaurants. These developments have ensured easier access by young people to alcohol.
- Although there needs to be a better understanding of why young people drink to such excesses, there also needs to be greater control.
- While there should be leadership at all levels in Irish society, the Government has a specific responsibility to tackle the problem.
- There must be a range of affordable, acceptable and accessible alcohol-free leisure facilities for young people.

RI. Regulate Availability

The Council's comments relate specifically to the impact of the likely recommendations on young people.

1.1 Increase alcohol taxes and use the additional Exchequer revenue to implement the recommendations set out in this report.

Agreed. Increasing taxes will increase the cost of alcoholic beverages which will to some extent reduce the ability of young people to pay for them. Substantial additional revenue is needed to resource alcohol free alternatives, and to pay for additional treatment and support for children and families affected by problem drinking. This could be resourced in part from additional taxation. However young people

representatives felt putting the price of cigarettes up hadn't worked so far but the proposed major price increase on a pack might put some young people off smoking. They were concerned that if the price of brand named alcohol went up with increased taxation, young people would buy the cheaper imported alternatives.

1.2 Establish a National ID card scheme for the entire population in such a manner that cards can also be used for proof of age purposes in connection with the sale of alcohol. In the meantime promote the existing age card scheme. An obligation should be placed on all licensees to demand the age card for the purchase of alcohol by young people.

This issue evoked considerable debate among Council members and it was agreed that any ID Card Scheme should not discriminate unfairly against young people. There is support for the new provisions in the Intoxicating Liquor Act (2003) to be enforced and all licensees should refuse to serve any young person without evidence of age. The existing voluntary Garda ID card scheme seems to be working and is acceptable to young people. Passports, Driving Licences and other forms of photo ID, are also acceptable and facilitate the tourist and transient population in Dublin and throughout Ireland. Young People pointed out that there is a huge black market in fake IDs with websites selling them. Licensees should be trained to detect fake IDs and ways of guarding against forgeries should be explored. There should be heavy penalties for providing fake IDs for young people. **Licencees who don't ask for proof of age should be prosecuted. ?**

1.3 Maintain licensing measures which restrict greater availability of alcohol sale outlets (both on-licences and off-licences). The criteria for the granting of any new licence should include the need to protect public health and safety, the risk of access for underage persons, the need to reduce density of premises (in relation to size and location), the need for adequate control and supervision and the incidence of alcohol-related problems in the area.

Agreed. This recommendation is considered particularly important if there is a genuine commitment to reducing alcohol availability and the associated social consequences. The Intoxicating Liquor Act (2003) brings closing time on Thursdays back to the original time of 11.30pm, following evidence of missed work and school and of employees and pupils clearly suffering from hangovers on Fridays. Several Council members felt the new legislation could have simply reverted to the old opening hours (prior to 2000) as well as making it more difficult to get exemptions for late licences. The Council would point out that the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 2000 completely contravened the 1996 National Alcohol Policy by extending opening times and increasing the number and availability of licences. All attempts to further increase alcohol availability for example through internet purchases must be resisted, as these

would be impossible to police and would be another route for young people to access alcohol.

1.4 Make provision in legislation for a Health Board, to have the right on public health grounds, to object to the granting of new licences, licence renewal, exemptions or to set specific conditions for licences in their region.

The Committee queried whether Health Boards had the staff and capacity to undertake these additional functions. There must however be effective mechanisms to challenge new licences and licence renewals and ways of coordinating action by local communities in conjunction with statutory authorities.

R2. Reduce Drink Driving

- **Introduce random breath testing and promote high visibility enforcement.**
- **Lower the blood alcohol limit to .50mg% in line with most other European countries.**
- **Lower the lower alcohol limit for provisional drivers to zero (this action is provided for in the Road Traffic Act 1994).**

Agreed. All of these measures were considered appropriate and should be rigidly enforced. It was noted that the majority of drink/driving offences are committed by adults and that young people seem to be generally very responsible in selecting nominated drivers or determining not to take the car. Nevertheless the number of serious accidents and fatalities is unacceptable and there should be harsher penalties for any one driving with blood alcohol levels in excess of the agreed limit. There should be zero tolerance for alcohol consumption by provisional drivers.

R3. Limit harm in drinking environments

3.1 Target hotspots, by mapping the locations where disturbance and violence occur, through a coordinated approach between appropriate services such as the Gardaí, emergency services, the health boards and local alcohol outlets.

Agreed. Many of the 'hotspots' are already well known to community police and the need for a coordinated approach is evident. Targeting specific areas with both vehicle checkpoints and additional Garda patrols will only move the problem somewhere else unless strong penalties are issued to those licensees who fail to comply with existing legislation around not selling to minors and those who fail to enforce new requirements to refuse drinks to someone who is clearly intoxicated.

3.2 Ensure greater enforcement of the laws that prohibit the serving of alcohol to intoxicated customers.

While welcomed in principle this may be difficult to enforce in practice and there was concern that the definition of intoxicated requires the person to be a danger to themselves or others. This will require responsible behaviour by licensees in both on and off-licences and effective policing by undercover Gardaí. It is disappointing that new provisions requiring off-licences to stamp their name and address on cans and bottles to enable tracing, has been successfully opposed by the drinks industry.

3.3 Restrict alcohol sales promotions that encourage high risk drinking such as free alcohol, below cost sales promotions and “happy hours”.

Agreed. The inclusion of this provision in the 2003 Act is particularly welcome and The Committee would also like to acknowledge the importance of the “Framework for an Alcohol Policy in Colleges”, as this group were particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous promotions by the drink industry.

3.4 Mandate the Responsible Serving of Alcohol Programme as a condition of licence renewal.

Agreed. Training and certification for employees in the drinks industry would need to include awareness of the law as well as factual information about the effects of alcohol on the body, and guidance on validating ID cards.

R4. Protect children and reduce pressure on adolescents to drink

4.1 Reduce the exposure of children and adolescents to alcohol marketing.

a) Limit where alcohol advertisements can be placed: TV, radio, cinema, magazines, schools, youth centres, public transport, public buildings etc.

Agreed. This is part of the larger debate on children’s advertising generally. Responses among Council members ranged from a total ban on alcohol advertising to a recognition that prohibition generally is counter productive and what is needed is greater regulation. Several members felt the situation is so desperate that a total ban on TV advertising would give a strong message from the Leadership that alcohol consumption has reached crisis point and the trends must be reversed for the good of the nation.

The young people representatives felt cinemas should be more responsible and advertisements should be appropriate for the age limit of the film e.g. no alcohol adverts for PG or R rated films.

There was absolute agreement that the industry cannot police itself and that there should be serious limitations on the timing and content of alcohol advertising and that it should be outlawed in all public buildings, schools, youth centres, leisure centres etc. TV advertising is particularly powerful and should be monitored closely against

standards to guard against the insidious conditioning that drinking alcohol makes you happy, popular and brings pleasure and satisfaction.

As a balance there should be more public education and awareness raising adverts such as 'sometimes it is time to stop', which show the reality of drinking too much. These advertisements can be effective in promoting conversation between parents and children about alcohol. Advertisement could also challenge Irish societal view that drinking does you no harm by demonstrating the extent to which alcohol is a mood altering drug and highlighting the risks to which young people are exposed when they are drunk, including assault, rape, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

b) Ensure the content of alcohol advertisements does not appeal to children or adolescents.

Agreed. Advertising of light beers, alcopops and similar 'designer' drinks should be banned as they are targeted specifically at a young audience. All advertising should be screened to ensure it is not either using young actors or trying to appeal to teenagers. Like smoking the health warnings should be clear and alcohol advertisers should be required to include the small print which is now compulsory for many organisations like banks and financial institutions.

c) Ban drinks industry sponsorship of children and adolescents' leisure-time activities.

Agreed. The Council recognises this is a huge issue in Ireland with sponsorship by Guinness at national level for junior hurling and at local level where the local pub sponsors the shirts for the football team. Nevertheless it is inconsistent with good practice for young people's leisure activities to be sponsored by the drinks industry. Some members were concerned about difficulty in finding alternative sponsors and the potential negative impact on a situation where there is an absolute paucity of alcohol-free alternatives for young people in many areas. However AIB's sponsorship of Gaelic football is a high profile example that alternative sponsorship is achievable.

d) Set-up a steering group in co-operation with drinks and advertising industries to establish an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with codes and regulations.

While there is recognition of the need for partnerships, the power and influence of the drinks industry must be challenged to ensure that appropriate codes and regulations are upheld and that there is a fundamental shift in reducing the per capita consumption of alcohol. It is difficult to envisage this being supported by the licensing trade and while they should be consulted, the balance of power within any Steering Group must be the statutory health promotion interests.

Young people felt monitoring would definitely need to be independent and young people should be involved in the censorship process as they are best placed to evaluate what appeals to young people.

The issue of television programming also needs to be urgently addressed as many programmes are set in pubs and clubs and depict alcohol use/misuse as part of everyday life.

4.2 Actively encourage all national sports organisations to promote alcohol-free sporting environments for children and adolescents.

Agreed. The strong lead of the Irish Sports Council in its Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport offers clear policy direction for all clubs on this issue particularly as regards the need to organise receptions in alcohol-free environments and the responsibility to encourage all young sports people to refrain from using alcohol, drugs and tobacco, as it is incompatible with a healthy approach to sport.

Most of the sporting Governing Bodies have adopted the Code and training for the 20,000 local sporting clubs throughout Ireland is offered in conjunction with local Sporting Partnerships and Health Boards. Guidelines around alcohol-free environments and behaviour are addressed in training.

An example of good practice as to how these guidelines are integrated into a Governing Body's policy is the Irish Rugby Football Union's (IRFU) Code of Ethics for Age Grade Rugby. The Code covers all aspects of behaviour and interpersonal relationships, on and off the field, and sets standards for behaviour for players, coaches, parents and spectators.

It is a fact of life that the social aspect of many sports including post match food and refreshments takes place in venues which have licences to sell alcohol. Clubs can however adopt sensible approaches to ensuring youth team events are alcohol-free and the IRFU's Code goes a long way in the right direction.

Provision within the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 for the granting of licences at sporting stadiums seems to be contradictory to the objective of ensuring sporting venues are alcohol free as many families and children attend matches in the national stadiums in Dublin. Although the Department of Equality, Justice and Law Reform suggest this will effectively bring additional controls, the Council feel it would have been better to ban alcohol sales in the grounds at sporting events.

4.3 Restrict children at certain times and circumstances from licensed premises, as it exposes them at an early age to a form of alcohol promotion, which is unnecessary, potentially damaging and undermines the aim of better health for children.

This recommendation provoked some considerable debate. The Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 introduces a 9.00pm watershed after which young people under 18 are excluded by law from licensed premises, a reform which is welcomed by many and which should make it easier to enforce the law on underage drinking. However parents' representatives in particular felt that this limits opportunities for family meals, participation in local snooker competitions by young people and even young people playing in bands in pubs. Some members felt there is an argument that young people in their parents' company should be allowed to remain after the watershed. The key issue however was that in many villages the pub is the only available venue for family meals and leisure activities and if alcohol free alternatives were available they would be preferable.

Young people representatives agreed in principle with the 9.00pm rule and also felt bouncers should ask for ID in clubs. However they were concerned about where young people will go instead as there are few non-licensed alternatives.

R5. Provide information, education and services.

5.1 Raise awareness of alcohol issues and promote a greater understanding of the importance of public health alcohol policy.

Agreed. The Committee were extremely concerned by reports from a variety of service users that parents view alcohol as a lesser evil than drugs and by the evidence that many parents have a considerable tolerance for their children drinking alcohol extensively. The extent of evidence of drinking among children as young as 11 or 12 obviously raises concerns about neglect and lack of supervision. Factual information on the law as well as the dangers of alcohol misuse must be disseminated to parents through a variety of effective mechanisms. Television advertising and written material must be simple and easy to read.

5.2 Develop the delivery of information and skills in the school and out of school setting as part of an overall health promoting approach.

Agreed. While there is conflicting evidence of the benefits of school-based health promotion initiatives, nevertheless as part of an overall strategic and coordinated approach, there must be attempts to educate children and parents about the harmful effects of alcohol. Many parents and young people seem to be oblivious about the risks of both binge drinking and regular alcohol consumption and many see alcohol as the considerably lesser of two evils as compared to taking drugs. Health promotion initiatives which demonstrate the links between alcohol misuse and drug abuse need to be evaluated and promoted along with initiatives which involve parents and young people themselves as peer educators.

From September 2003 all schools are required to provide SPHE classes which include a module on tobacco, alcohol and drugs within the curriculum and there are many examples of constructive schools based initiatives such as the Whitechurch Addiction Support Programme which is delivered in conjunction with the community.

5.3 Expand the provision of alcohol policy developments for out-of-school settings and develop support mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of such policies.

Agreed. All sport, leisure and community based activities for young people should have an explicit alcohol policy within their overall policy and procedures.

5.4 Discourage high risk drinking for those who wish to consume alcohol.

Agreed. This is a major imperative and needs to be tackled urgently. Council members felt more information and research is needed about the drinking patterns of young people. Perhaps rather than suggesting total abstinence we should be encouraging young people to be more responsible in their approach to alcohol. Examples were quoted of European countries where young people are allowed to drink at 16, where there is no evidence of the binge drinking which is becoming common place among 15-17 year olds in Ireland.

5.5 Expand appropriate health and social services to provide for people who experience problems as a result of other people's or their own drinking.

Agreed. As evidenced in Barnardos Family Matters Campaign there are two distinct issues, the first being the need for support and treatment for young people with drinking problems and the second the need to recognise and address the significant consequences for children of parental alcohol abuse.

Lack of treatment is a particular issue for young people as there is patchy access to services around the country with only one dedicated adolescent addiction unit in Kilkenny serving the whole of Ireland and even taking referrals from Northern Ireland. Since opening a few years ago the service has had over 500 referrals. Young people and parents have to travel huge distances to take part in the compulsory aftercare programme for 2 years after in-patient treatment is completed. Elsewhere young people seem to access services in adult addiction teams, which are increasingly recruiting adolescent drug and alcohol counsellors.

As part of their contract with the Department of Health, Health Boards should be resourced to provide appropriate levels of accessible alcohol and drugs treatment and support services for young people.

R.6 Research and Monitor Data

6.1 Put in place a systematic data collection procedure for the key harm indicators.

6.2 Continue to identify appropriate research to further our understanding of alcohol

issues in Ireland.

Agreed. Reliable statistical information collated from a variety of sources is the key to better understanding and management of the problem. We also need to commission further research into the extent of the problem and the specific issues faced by minority and hard to reach groups such as Travellers, Asylum Seekers, settled minority groups and the more transient immigrants from Eastern Europe. There is a dearth of literature on the needs of these groups and how for example their lack of access to clubs and pubs may result in even riskier alternative drinking behaviours. The extent of alcohol misuse among homeless young people and the particular issues for young people with disabilities also need to be explored.

Alcohol-Free Facilities

The Council was concerned that the Strategic Task Force Report failed to address the important issue of providing alternative and acceptable alcohol-free environments for the population generally and particularly for young people. A coherent nationwide strategy to provide alcohol-free facilities should be a priority and any developments must be planned and delivered in conjunction with young people and should be community based and locally relevant. The Council welcomed the feedback from a range of projects and initiatives and from young people themselves as to the kind of alternatives they would want. While most of these suggestions appear reasonable and realistic there appears to be no obvious mechanism for funding alcohol-free alternatives within the range of funding streams currently available. One local Council trying to fund a youth centre with an internet café has been unable to access capital funding for the refurbishment. In view of the cost to the country in dealing with the consequences of alcohol misuse there must be immediate commitment to funding alternatives and to promoting incentives which encourage commercial partners to design alcohol-free venues as viable business ventures.

5 FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

What Young People Said

Information on the views of young people were gathered from two sources.

- A review of previous consultations by a number of agencies and of a recent survey by transition year students in a Dublin school.
- Specific consultation sessions were organised with young people on a number of key issues. These included a meeting with Young People Representatives on the Council, Focus Groups with their schools in Dublin and Tipperary, consultation with all 6 districts of the County Donegal Youth Council, feedback from a group of young people in an addiction aftercare group and a discussion group with American teenagers at a holiday resort in Florida.

In attempting to collate the views of young people it is important to recognise that neither those surveyed earlier nor those who actively contributed to the current consultation, represent a homogenous group. They did however reflect rural as well as urban perspectives and a range of ages and socio-economic circumstances. While obviously young people had some different attitudes and opinions, nevertheless there was considerable consensus among the young people who participated in both the current and earlier studies. We are particularly indebted to the group of young people who shared their views from the perspective of personal dependence on alcohol/drugs.

A summary of the feedback from each of the groups is contained in Appendix 1

There appear to be broad agreement by young people on the following areas:-

- Alcohol is the drug most commonly misused by young people.
- Alcohol is widely available with apparently little checking of IDs in off-licences pubs or clubs. Young people always know the pubs and off-licences where it is relatively easy to be served.
- Drinking is seen as normal teenage behaviour and young people drink for something to do.
- Young people don't see alcohol as a drug and don't think of alcohol use as a health issue.
- Money for drinks comes from part-time working and from parents.
- More information is needed on alcohol and drugs and on the dangers of excess drinking.
- Friends are the most important influence for young people, then parents and then their brothers/sisters.

- The laws on underage drinking should be enforced with harsher penalties for those who sell alcohol to those under 18.
- ID cards are a good idea and there should be a crackdown on fake IDs.
- Gardaí need to be more visible and more active.
- Advertising is an influence in the choice of drink.
- Advertising should not be allowed to appeal to young people and should show the negative consequences of drinking. Some young people felt that advertisements should be shown later at night.
- In many neighbourhoods the pub is the only place to socialise.
- There has to be a range of appropriate alternatives to pubs which are planned in conjunction with young people and which stay open late. Young people suggested a wide range of facilities including swimming clubs, youth clubs, discos, skateboard parks, cinemas, drop-in centres with a range of activities.
- Parents should provide closer supervision and exercise greater controls over younger children. (Many young people think their parents don't know they drink because they drink early in the evening and the effects have worn off by the time they go home). Parents should talk to their children.
- Most young people want to be involved in the issues and in planning new facilities.
- Some felt the drinking age should be lowered.

It was particularly interesting that the higher drinking age of 21 in the United States, combined with rigorous enforcement of underage drinking and drink-driving legislation seems to have been effective in delaying the onset of drinking behaviour among this group.

What Parents Said

The views of parents were gained from two sources, namely previous consultations undertaken by the North Western Health Board and the National Parent's Council – Post Primary, as well as direct consultation with parents which was facilitated by a Parenting Programme in Donegal and the Whitechurch Addiction Support Programme, Dublin. Feedback from specific projects is included in Appendix 2.

As with young people, the parents involved in the consultation exercises had a range of opinions but there appeared to be a level of consensus among parents about the following:

- Parents are more concerned about drugs than alcohol.
- Parents need information about alcohol and its effects.
- Parents need a network of other parents for support and need to get involved in alcohol prevention initiatives in their area.
- Parent support a National ID System.

- Parents believe licencees should be more responsible and should be prosecuted for selling alcohol to minors. Penalties should include high fines and loss of licences.
- Many parents are in favour of their children having a drink at home or with them from about age 16.
- There are very few facilities for young people to socialise and a tendency to hang out in fields, lanes, street corners and parks.
- Parents want to see more recreational facilities such as youth clubs, school and community discos, and drop in centres with a wide range of activities.
- Parents worry about the potential for their children to get into trouble when they drink including taking drugs, fighting, sexual behaviour and drink driving.
- Parents believe that they have a responsibility to model good behaviour and to get more involved and better educated on the issues. They also felt parents should know where their children are and set age appropriate limits.
- Many parents felt that communication with children should be more open.
- Parents believe that the Gardaí have an important role to play in both enforcing the law as regards sales to underage children as well as in apprehending children who are drinking, treating this seriously and either bringing them home or sending for their parents.

What Service Providers Said

Many agencies are finding that alcohol misuse by young people is such a huge social problem that they are targeting the issue in specific ways and through special initiatives. Feedback from individual agencies is included in Appendix 3.

Comments from a number of agencies demonstrate similar findings.

- Alcohol is the most widely misused substance in Ireland and is the drug of choice across the generations.
- Irish society tolerates alcohol misuse.
- The risks to young people of underage drinking are numerous and increasing.
- Binge drinking is a huge problem and children are starting to drink heavily and regularly younger and younger.
- Alcohol abuse by parents is widespread and has serious consequences for children.
- Alcohol is the gateway to many other drugs and is associated with all other forms of drug abuse.
- Both alcohol and illegal drugs are widely available and increasingly affordable to young people.
- Young people must be involved in developing policies and initiatives to combat alcohol abuse and in designing alcohol-free alternatives.
- Legislation on underage drinking must be enforced to curtail availability.
- Alternative social and recreational opportunities must be developed and funded.

- Little is known about the needs of minority communities and they are not addressed within current policy.
- The needs of young people with disabilities are neglected with regard to both ensuring they are provided with information and education about alcohol and drugs and also in ensuring that treatment and support services meet their needs.
- There needs to be accessible support and treatment resources, dedicated to young people with dependency problems.

Particular concerns were raised by a number of Council members about the lack of treatment facilities for young people. The extent to which services are provided or funded by the Health Boards needs to be further explored and there are also issues about how accessible services are given that some services only accept referrals through GPs. The need for flexible, self-referral and drop-in type resources is evident.

The Aislinn Centre in Kilkenny appears to be the only dedicated residential treatment service for young people under 18 who are dependent on alcohol and drugs in the whole of Ireland and takes referrals from throughout the country. There needs to be a clearer assessment of the extent of underage alcohol and drug dependency and a strategic response which ensures easy access to counselling and support by young people themselves as well as encouraging early detection and referral by GPs, teachers and others on their behalf.

6 POLICY MEASURES AND INITIATIVES WHICH COULD BE HELPFUL IN SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Measures

As stated earlier the Council endorses the existing policy initiatives and would like to see these fully implemented. The Interim Report of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol provides a summary of the effectiveness of a range of policy initiatives demonstrating that the most effective policies are those which reduce availability and enforce regulation.

This exercise confirmed that any approach needs to be pragmatic, achievable and long term and involve working collaboratively with all sectors and interest groups.

Policies likely to be most successful will:-

- Involve young people in the issues and solutions.
- Encourage responsible approaches to drinking by all adults, particularly parents and enlist their support in delaying the onset of drinking by young people.
- Limit accessibility and strictly enforce underage drinking laws and prosecute those who provide alcohol for minors.
- Encourage young people to take responsibility for their own actions, delay drinking, drink only in moderation and never pressurise peers to drink to excess.
- Promote accessible and effective support and treatment for young people.
- Promote closer coordination between Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces and consider a dedicated team to drive implementation of the strategies through local coalitions.

Some additional suggestions are included in the final recommendations section.

INITIATIVES AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

During the consultations for this exercise it became apparent that many organisations are already trying to effect various aspects of the Task Force's recommendations through local initiatives. This section includes information on examples of good practice for effective interventions at local, community, county and national level and recognises that these are only illustrative of the good work on the ground. Ways of sharing information and good practice should be developed and a website could be established to facilitate this.

Whitechurch Addiction Support Project (WASP)

This initiative involves a partnership between parents, teachers, children, community workers and Gardaí in the Rathfarnham/Sandyford areas of Dublin. The emphasis is on assessing in conjunction with young people the problems and difficulties around substance misuse and then developing programmes delivered in cooperation with parents, and within local schools. While the group was set up by the National Task Force on Drugs and funded by Drugs Task Force monies through the Eastern Health Board Health Promotion Unit most of the programmes are alcohol related because alcohol misuse is the main concern. Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers are important partners in the scheme and feedback from parents demonstrates their enhanced knowledge and confidence as a result of involvement with the project. WASP facilitates parents and others in the community in obtaining qualifications in Community Addiction Studies.

Gonzaga Parents Support Group

Concerned by the level of teenage drinking and by their relative isolation as individual parents in handling the issue, a Parents' Council in Gonzaga College in Dublin is working on an initiative to educate, support and network parents. They have developed an information booklet with the support of the School Board of Management and teaching staff and plan to circulate this to all parents.

The Donegal Alcohol Forum

Recognition of the lack of dedicated services for young people who either abused drugs and alcohol themselves or who suffered as a consequence of substance misuse by their parents, led to a joint meeting between Regional Child and Families Services Managers and Regional Addiction Services Managers in the North Western Health Board in 2002 to explore the issues. Funding was agreed for two Youth Counsellors for Alcohol and Drugs, and appointments were made in Sligo where significant numbers of young people in need had already been identified, and also in Donegal. In view of the dispersed and rural character of Donegal, it was agreed that there should be appropriate consultation as to how best to organise and deliver the service and a Conference was organised in October 2002 involving national experts and all of the local stakeholders.

The need for a coordinated approach was evident and a coalition of interested parties formed the Donegal Alcohol Forum in March 2003. The initiative is supported by The National Alcohol Policy Advisor at the Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children and chaired by the founder of the Northland Centre in Derry, a long established addiction centre with proven results. The Forum members include all relevant agencies including Health Board representatives, Gardaí, Churches, media, schools, County Council, County Development Board as well as the Vintners Federation and a night club owner. Following a presentation by the Donegal Youth Council, a constitutionally elected forum, young councillors aged 16 and 17 have been selected to sit as full members of the Alcohol Forum. The Youth Council intend to elect a special interest sub-committee on alcohol and drugs to ensure effective communication between the Council and the Forum and to facilitate informed responses.

The Forum's goal is to give a local impetus to taking forward the report and recommendations of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, which have been formally adopted by the Forum. Although a relatively new body, the Forum comprises significant expertise and is committed to listening to and working with young people and their parents. In launching the Forum the Coordinator spoke of the need for parents "to regain some control and re-establish house rules and boundaries". Adult behaviour in regard to alcohol is critical and parents as well as licensees and law enforcement agencies must give clear and consistent messages about not tolerating underage drinking. A club owner told of increasingly sophisticated fake IDs and of parents pleading for young people to be let in so they are part of the crowd. A survey among young people revealed their commitment to ID Cards and to the "no card, no access, no service" approach.

Recognising the role of parents the Supporting Parents Programme was another outcome of the conference and was offered initially to parents of young people identified by GPs as having dependency problems. Following positive evaluation it is hoped to extend this initiative to ensure appropriate information and support is available to all parents. A leaflet entitled 'Parents Do Make a Difference' produced some years ago, is currently being updated.

The Forum have agreed a number of coordinated initiatives, identifying how every interest group can make a contribution. This includes collecting and analysing relevant data such as local crime statistics; involving the clergy and the local media as well as health professionals in ante-natal, out patient and mental health services; encouraging everyone to be more tuned in to the issues and 'thinking out of the box' to find creative and effective ways of responding.

The Donegal Alcohol Forum is supported by local politicians and has been invited to make a presentation to the Dáil Health Committee where hopefully it will be viewed as a model of good practice with the potential to be replicated elsewhere.

Irish Sports Council

The Irish Sports Council in its Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport (2002) sets out a clear and unequivocal policy in relation to alcohol as follows:-

- The use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco should be actively discouraged as being incompatible with a healthy approach to sporting activity.
- A Sports Leader should not smoke when taking a session or drink alcohol before taking a session.
- Underage clubs and teams should be encouraged to organise receptions and celebrations in a non-alcoholic environment and in a manner that is suitable for the age group concerned. Adults should act as role models for appropriate behaviour and refrain from drinking alcohol at such functions.

- Sports Leaders in children's sports should refrain from seeking sponsorship from the alcohol and tobacco industries.

This approach needs to be adopted and reinforced at grass roots level and there is growing evidence that governing bodies and local clubs are increasingly reviewing their responsibilities and working towards creating alcohol-free environments. Many examples of good practice are available within rugby, bowling and basketball of officials, coaches and parents working together to set good examples and to provide appropriate role models by themselves refraining from consuming alcohol during any youth events.

The Sports Council Strategy for encouraging greater participation by children in sport as well as the development of local Sports Partnerships throughout the country is one active mechanism for creating alternative outlets for young people. The Partnerships need to be aware of the views of young people as regards late opening of leisure and sporting facilities and also need to address the issues of access to sport and sporting venues within dispersed rural communities. It is noted that many of the Partnerships are actively trying to encourage greater levels of participation by people with disabilities, young people from designated disadvantaged areas and travellers.

The Irish Rugby Football Association

The IRFU's Policy requires all young people playing at representative level to sign up to a code which includes a total ban on drinking alcohol for under-18s teams. For other age-grade competitions which could involve players under 18, the advice is that all laws/regulations regarding drinking must be adhered to.

In view of the fact that many rugby clubs have licensed premises on site, the IRFU Youth Committee are now drafting a specific Code of Ethics on the use of alcohol which will offer comprehensive advice to clubs on limiting the potential for young players' exposure to alcohol.

Bray Community Action Programme

The Cider Industry Council initiated the Bray Community Action Programme in an effort to develop a nationwide model for communities to research and tackle underage drinking. In Bray, the Garda Síochana have implemented a number of schemes to tackle the escalation of underage drinking including:-

- A ban on alcohol consumption in open public places.
- Covert surveillance of supermarkets and off-licences for underage sales and resultant prosecutions.
- Confiscation of alcohol from minors and prosecuting those who purchased alcohol for minors.
- Juvenile Diversion Scheme.

In the Bray Survey of the general public and licencees as to where responsibility lay for underage drinking, licencees said the major responsibility belongs to pubs, off-licencees and parents and also felt the Gardaí had a major responsibility. In terms of initiatives to tackle underage drinking, the trade respondents rated ID Cards and greater parental diligence as the most helpful approaches. The general public strongly endorsed greater law enforcement, licensed premises and off-licencees being more careful, ID Cards and greater diligence by parents.

Recommendations from the Bray study included the establishment of a coordination group under the auspices of the County Council, local initiatives and school programmes which ensure parents are fully involved, the need for young people to be more responsible and that local authorities should make alcohol consumption in public places an offence.

Garda Initiatives

Mention has been made of the importance of collaboration with the Gardaí as regards preventative strategies for young people including in Rathfarnham, Dublin and in Donegal as well as initiatives in Mayo which have displayed low tolerance for licencees who provide alcohol to young people.

Operation Encounter, which started in early 2002, focuses on public order issues in the community and targets hot spots where there are significant potential for disorder with particular emphasis on nightclubs, licensed premises and fast food outlets. In the period February to September 2002 there were 57,000 detections for offences ranging from disorderly conduct to intoxication in a public place and assault. It is of interest that while there were 830 detections for purchase/consumption of alcohol by under-18s there were only 173 detections for provision of alcohol to under-18s and 173 for selling alcohol to under-18s. There were however 21,486 detections for intoxications in a public place.

Between July 2002 and April 2003, 198 licensed premises were closed for up to a week for selling alcohol to minors and of these 38 appealed.

ISPCC Training and Awareness Programme with children who are at risk of drug and alcohol misuse

ISPCC's experience in designing and providing drugs and alcohol awareness programmes in their centres throughout Ireland has provided some crucial insights into the most effective ways of delivering programmes and also confirms the need for young people's involvement in programme design.

The dual aims of the initiative were to prevent drug misuse including alcohol and to prevent /reduce early school leaving, given the relationship between the two issues.

Lessons learned include:-

- Stand alone drugs prevention and education programmes are not effective in reaching out to those children most at risk of drug misuse.
- Simple 'say no to drugs' messages have little significance.
- Effective drugs prevention can only be conducted in an integrated manner and as part of ongoing work with parents and young people.

Following evaluation the ISPCC Drugs Prevention Programme is targeted at young people at risk of early school-leaving through drug/alcohol abuse. Each child is assigned a mentor who supports them in becoming involved in a specific activity until such time as their self esteem and life skills improve to the point they can attend successfully alone. For those at greater risk specialist staff work with the young person and the parents on an individual basis. ISPCC also offers training to schools, as well as organizations and groups in the area who are working with the young people to ensure a coherent approach. Engagement of parents is critical to success.

ISPCC found that young people's involvement in designing the campaign greatly influenced the final programme. Specifically children wanted the scheme to be activity based and they were concerned that the title 'Natural High' should be positive and unrelated to drugs and alcohol.

7 THE CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES AND HOW THEY CAN BE OVERCOME

There are many and considerable obstacles to reducing alcohol misuse among young people and encouraging moderation from young adulthood throughout their life. As with any major societal change, progress will take time and the pay-offs will benefit future generations.

Smoking is an example of how social censure and ever increasing regulation has been more effective in reducing prevalence than simply providing information and education.

The challenges and obstacles to reducing alcohol misuse among young people include:-

- The need to raise awareness among parents, the general public and policy makers as well as young people that alcohol is the number one drug of choice among youth in Ireland. The seriousness of this issue is still not registering despite extensive media attention and debate. Parents and politicians must overcome their perception of alcohol as being a better alternative to drugs and recognise that both are harmful and need to be tackled through joint initiatives.
- Ambivalence by politicians and by policy makers to taking a firm stand on the issue. Recent experience by Barnardos Pledge Campaign highlights the strong links culturally between locally elected representatives and both local bars and the wider drinks industry. There must be alternative venues for TDs Clinics, especially as they represent young people as well as adults and must give consistent messages around not organising activities within venues that sell alcohol. Strong media messages are needed from the leadership that they are moderating their own drinking and providing good role models for society as a whole and not just for young people. The “Leadership” initiative within the United States is a State-wide strategy to combat alcohol misuse among young people and is a coalition between all Governors’ spouses, federal agencies and local community projects. Similar leadership must be shown in Ireland and there is scope for an Irish/American joint initiative.
- The power, influence and financial standing of the Drinks Lobby in Ireland and its influence on policy making and legislation must be balanced with the health promotion imperative to reduce alcohol consumption across the nation. Partnerships with the industry need to be focused on initiatives such as providing alcohol-free drinks at competitive prices and special promotions such as ‘happy hours’ for alcohol free beverages.
- The current fragmented approaches to drugs and alcohol are reinforcing the mistaken belief that drugs are a separate and more serious problem. There needs to be recognition of the experiences of service providers and of the fact that many projects and initiatives at community level are already integrated. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that strategies that are successful are those which change social norms, reduce availability and improve the effectiveness of law enforcement and that coordinated action is needed at all levels including at

home, in schools and in the community. The website of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in the United States provides a model of a multifaceted strategy. Similarly in Northern Ireland, the alcohol and drugs strategies are now more integrated and this is reflected within the 4 – tier multi-agency strategy on substance misuse developed by Northern Health and Social Services Board.

- Advertising portrays alcohol as an essential element of young people's lives and an asset to being trendy and socially acceptable. This needs to be reversed with identified celebrities who don't drink or who drink only in moderation. The message needs to be that 'its cool to be alcohol free'.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is aware that much of the content of this report confirms what is already known and that many of the recommendations which follow have been suggested elsewhere. However in view of the serious nature of the information shared with us by young people themselves, by parents and by those who provide services and see directly the consequences of alcohol abuse for children and families, the Council has decided to reemphasise a number of imperatives for action.

Provide a range of low cost alcohol free alternatives

There needs to be a clear commitment and strategy to provide a range of alcohol free sport leisure and recreational facilities which are attractive to young people of different age groups as well as young adults. These should be included within County Development Plans and coordinated with other strategies such as the National Youth Development Plan and the Irish Sports Councils Strategic Plan, and should be appropriately resourced.

Implement the Task Force Recommendations and WHO Declaration

The Council calls on the Government to urgently fully implement the remaining Task Force Interim Recommendations and bring forward proposals to achieve the World Health Organisation's Declaration on Alcohol and Young People. There needs to be a comprehensive coordinated strategy with clear and achievable targets, which is consistently led, promoted and supported at the highest levels of Government and appropriately resourced.

In view of the lack of current understanding of its status and purpose there is a need to clarify the role and remit of the Inter-Departmental Group and communicate this to all relevant agencies. Membership of the IDG should be expanded to include representation from all relevant Departments as well as the Gardaí, HeBE and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The IDG should provide clarity about the proposed timescale for implementing the remainder of the Task Force recommendations and agree action plans and resources for each.

Promote closer Coordination between Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces

All of the feedback given to Council suggests that the inter relationship between drugs and alcohol misuse is so great as to require coordinated approaches at all levels. There were numerous examples of drugs funded strategies which were having to tackle alcohol abuse issues. Strategies elsewhere including the UK and Northern Ireland appear to be more integrated and there appears to be a need for closer coordination at strategic as well as operational levels. Coordination between agencies young people and parents is also needed at local level and the model of the Donegal Alcohol Forum is one

which may have wider relevance. Such local coalitions would need to work in partnership with the Local Drugs Task Force and should work to ensure coordinated initiatives which are resource efficient.

Involve Young People in all aspects of the issues and solutions

Young people must be involved in the process at all stages, advising and informing on all aspects of the issues. They are not a homogenous group and inevitably, like adults, they will have differing views which will have to be considered and negotiated. As noted in the evaluation of ISPCC's project, young people are not always right about what works in practice but they do bring an essential perspective to the table. They must also be represented on broader initiatives which are tackling alcohol consumption more generally. While urgent action is needed specifically on the prevention of harm to young people through alcohol misuse, this must continue to be addressed within an overall strategy to tackle the chronic levels of alcohol consumption within Irish society as a whole.

Encourage responsible approaches to drinking

While more research is needed into why young people in 2003 are binge drinking more than previous generations, campaigns can be designed to encourage responsible approaches to drinking by adults generally and by parents in particular as well as by young people themselves.

Empower parents through clear information and promotion of networks

Parents need to be helped to liaise with other parents and to agree what are acceptable places for young people to frequent, curfew times, as well as attitudes to age-appropriate alcohol use at home and outside. They need to be familiar with the law and with the effect of alcohol on the body as well as considering in conjunction with their children and other parents as to what are appropriate levels of spending money. Parents particularly need encouragement to build trusting relationships with their children built on open and honest communication which acknowledges and respects young people's views.

CONCLUSION

The National Children's Advisory Council welcomed the opportunity to consult with interested parties and in particular children themselves on the use and misuse of alcohol among young people. It is hoped the findings and recommendations of this report are of benefit to the Minister in taking forward resolved action to combat this increasingly destructive social phenomenon. While the Council recognises that underage drinking is only one aspect of the broader cultural issue of excessive alcohol use generally in Ireland, there is nevertheless a moral imperative to prioritise the protection of Ireland's young people through taking forward the Council's recommendations.

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Appendix 1

Consultations with young People

Review of Previous Projects

A number of consultations have already been undertaken by other agencies regarding young people's views on alcohol and these are summarised below.

a. North Western Health Board – Young People, Alcohol & Drugs Project (1999)

In response to growing concern about underage drinking in the North Western Health Board a survey was undertaken in 1999 to explore within local communities the most effective ways of working with 11-13 year olds to promote their non-use of alcohol and drugs. The project consulted with early school leavers, parents, service providers and teachers in Donegal. The results demonstrated that 11-13 year olds had sophisticated levels of information about illegal drugs but only 11.5% named alcohol as a drug. 17 year olds who were still in school as well as early school leavers both indicated that alcohol is the main drug of abuse. Parental monitoring was the major influence for 17 year olds still in school, on their behaviour in relation to non-use of alcohol and drugs "It's all to do with how much freedom you get". 11-13 year olds wanted their parents, teachers and the Gardaí to provide them with information about alcohol and drugs. Early school leavers felt that more information is needed about alcohol as well as self-esteem training and increased access to support services.

b. Barnardos HOOD Campaign (Hanging Out – Operation Discovery) 2003

Barnardos asked young people to do a survey in their local area to compare the number of pubs, nightclubs, off licences etc (that they cannot access under 18 years) with the facilities that are available to them in their local neighbourhood such as cinemas, cafes, parks and youth clubs. The survey form was available on Barnardos website and promoted through local press and radio. Results demonstrated that the two most frequently available facilities in local neighbourhoods were both inaccessible to young people. Pubs doubled the number of other facilities available (19%), followed by off licences (9%). Young people indicated they meet to socialise at home (5%) or outdoors/on the football pitch (28%). When asked what resources they would like young people were clear in what they would like in their local area – football pitch (21%), cinema (18%), playground/park (14%), amusement parks (11%), followed by a range of sports facilities such as skateboard park (7%), basketball courts (7%), snooker hall and swimming pool.

c. Blanchardstown Youth Service (BYS) Youth Perspectives Research Project 2003

In line with the National Children's Strategy, the Youth Perspectives Research Project "provided a mechanism for young people to have a voice in Blanchardstown in 2003". Research was commissioned into issues affecting young people in the area and drugs, alcohol and tobacco; crime and safety; and racism/discrimination were the top 3 issues identified by young people themselves. Over 400 young people aged 12-18 took part in the survey and the majority (70%) were in the 14-16 year age range. 58% of all respondents reported drinking alcohol, with 79% of 16-18 year olds drinking once a week. 25% said they had used drugs, primarily the older male teenagers (16-18 year olds).

When it come to influencing their behaviour, friends were revealed as the most important influence in the young people's lives with parents/guardians and brothers/sisters coming second and third.

While health concerns influenced young people's decisions in terms of smoking and drugs it played no part in their decision surrounding alcohol.

Young people's recommendations with regard to tackling teenage misuse of alcohol included:

- An alcohol-free night club with separate times for under-15s, and 15-18s.
- A smoke and alcohol-free youth and leisure centre with a coffee shop.
- Training for Gardaí on how to deal with young people more effectively.

Respondents also felt more facilities would have an impact on reducing crime rates in the area and would integrate travellers and make refugees more welcome. It is of interest that although they felt there was a need for drug rehabilitation centres, the young people did not perceive a need for alcohol rehabilitation in the area. This seems to confirm the typical stereotype that drinking is normal while use of illicit drugs is perceived as both criminal and dangerous.

d. An Investigation into Teenage Alcoholism and Drinking Patterns – A Transition Year Project 2003

A study undertaken by 15 year old transition year students in St Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School in Dublin focused on underage drinking from an underage perspective. In a survey distributed to first, third, transition year and sixth year pupils, information was sought about where young people socialised and the extent to which alcohol was a feature. The ages at which experimentation with alcohol began, reasons for drinking, where alcohol was obtained and views on the age of consent as regards alcohol purchasing were also explored. Conclusions were consistent with findings elsewhere. In the 14-16 age range 58% of males and 45% of females reported drinking alcohol whereas in the 17-19 age group 80% of males

and 90% of females see alcohol as a normal part of their socialising behaviour. While beer was popular with the boys, girls overall seemed to prefer spirits. Only 14% of the group reported drinking alcopops and the group suggested additional taxing of beer as the most common drink for both boys and girls in the group. All of the respondents between 14 and 19 said they have drunk alcohol.

In the under 13 group, 82% of girls and 50% of boys said they obtained their alcohol at home although it was not clear whether they were given it by parents or took it from parent's supplies. 50% of boys and 28% of girls in this age group (under 13) reported getting alcohol from off-licences and the majority of 14-16 year olds purchased from off-licences while 83% of girls and 50% of boys over 17 got their alcohol from pubs. 100% of 17-19 year old boys said they had been drunk in a public place.

The young people's recommendations included a clamp down on off-licences and pubs who sell alcohol to underage young people and making it an offence for people over 18 to procure alcohol for minors. The group were generally in favour of retaining the 18 year age limit. The biggest concern of the group was that every single response indicated that young people felt pressured to drink by their friends and one 17 year old indicated that in Ireland it is expected to drink.

The young people have written to the Chief Medical Officer urging the Government to fully implement the National Alcohol Policy and the Recommendations of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol.

Direct Consultations with Young People

For the purpose of this report young people's views were sought in a number of ways including consultation with the young people representatives on the National Children's Advisory Council, Focus groups with transition year/5th year students in schools attended by the young people on Council, discussions with the Donegal Youth Council and consultation with young people in aftercare in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Kilkenny.

Although the views of the young representatives on Council are included within the Council's comments, they made some additional important observations on the extent of drinking in buses and public transport at night, and the risks this poses for young people. Apparently there is no attempt to manage this public nuisance and single handed bus drivers appear to have little choice but to ignore it. They also confirmed the discrimination reported by other young people as regards the Gardaí moving young people along if they are sitting on public benches but leaving adults and the elderly in peace.

a. Donegal Youth Council

At meetings of the Donegal Youth Council during September 2003 in the six electoral areas of Inishowen, Donegal, Letterkenny, Glenties, Stranorla and Milford, a total of 47 Youth Councillors debated the range of issues and their findings are outlined below.

How can we encourage young people not to Drink?

Young people felt there should be more alternative activities for young people including youth projects and in particular activities available at night time and especially on Friday and Saturday nights when there is no alternative to the pubs and bars.

When asked how young people could be more responsible in their use of alcohol their advice related to not drinking alone in dark areas such as parks and drinking with friends in well lit places. Their general feeling was that in rural areas as well as towns that there is nowhere safe and they were also concerned about the risks of young people taking drugs or drinking alone and collapsing.

What steps should Government take to reduce access to alcohol by young people?

Suggestions included:-

- Stricter enforcement of laws and stricter penalties for bar owners.
- More bouncers in pubs.
- More Gardaí on the streets and Gardaí being more active.
- Compulsory ID.
- Community service for young people who break the law.

How much effect does advertising have in influencing young people's choice of drinks?

Responses were mixed. Advertising can influence the choice of drink but not necessarily the decision to drink. Young people really liked the advertisements and did not feel alcohol advertising should be banned. They suggested ads should not be shown until after 10pm.

There was no support for the idea that trendier advertising of soft drinks would encourage young people to drink these as an alternative.

How can parents help teenagers resist the pressure to drink?

Some young people did not drink and did not feel they were under pressure to drink.

Ideas included:-

- Raising kids to say no to peer pressure and encourage open communication between parents and young people around alcohol.
- Parents should treat teenagers as young adults, treat them with respect and help them to respect themselves. Some young people felt parents should not let young people out at weekends if they know they are going to drink.

What kind of facilities that are alcohol free would you like to have in your area?

The range of facilities that young people would like to see included youth venues, band/skate parks, cinemas, swimming pools and drop-in centres. Young people particularly wanted drug and alcohol-free venues for Friday and Saturday nights somewhere with a stage to facilitate a band or a DJ. They also like the café idea such as “Eddie Rockets” with nice lighting and comfortable seats.

Young people’s involvement in planning new facilities.

There was strong support for involvement of young people in groups where decisions are made and one suggestion was to have a young person representative on each of the festival committees through County Donegal.

Involving young people in tackling alcohol and drug abuse by children in their areas.

One of the key recommendations was for confidence building courses in personal development. Examples were given of good courses in some youth projects and it would be useful if these were more widely available. Young people felt that the arrangements they have for feeding into the Donegal Alcohol Forum was a good model which could be replicated elsewhere. They also felt consultation with the Health Board would be important and again emphasised the need for suitable alternatives.

Other advice for the Minister

Suggestions included banning alcohol advertising and lowering the drinking age.

b. Feedback from Transition Year/5th Year Students in Schools attended by the Young Person Representatives on National Children’s Advisory Council

Over 80 students took part in classroom discussions facilitated by their teachers.

The feedback from both schools is collated and the key points highlighted below.

How can we encourage young people not to drink?

- Make them aware of dangers of excess drinking – particularly in young developing people.
- Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities.

Or if they are drinking to be responsible in their use of alcohol?

- Make them aware of effects of alcohol.
- Think about the consequences.
- Introduce them to social drinking in the home.
- Set limits to the amount at any given session.
- Drink in moderation.

What steps should government take to reduce access to alcohol by young people?

- Use the National Age Card as the only form of identification.
- Enforce the laws already in place.
- Penalties should be increased (consensus view) for off licences and pubs for infringement of laws.
- Ironically, some felt if the age level were lowered it might have a beneficial effect on those who abuse drink in unlawful settings.
- Increase facilities for young people.

How much effect does advertising have in influencing young people's choice of drinks?

- Big influence.
- Introduces variety.
- Makes drink appealing.
- Glamorises alcohol – the reality is not shown.

Should alcohol advertising which appeals to young people (eg ads for alcopops/ light beers) be banned?

Opinion divided on this issue with one school in favour of banning and the other advocating a more moderate approach of showing adverts later at night.

- Absolutely.
- No – later times, higher age group.
- People have the right to choice.

Would trendier advertising of soft drinks (like the Sprite advert) encourage young people to drink more soft drinks instead of alcoholic drinks?

- No – groups concluded that young people will drink soft drinks as well as alcohol.
- Two different products. You drink Sprite when you are thirsty.

How can parents help teenagers resist the pressure to drink?

- Lead by example.
- Be realistic – not too strict.
- Young people seem not to consider drinking as a ‘pressure’ that is unacceptable.

What kind of facilities that are alcohol free would you like to have in your area?

- Youth centres – equipped well eg video games, table-tennis etc.
- Discos.
- Youth Club/Swimming Club.
- Cinemas.
- Over 16 clubs with night club ambience. (not called discos)

Would you like to be involved with planning new facilities in your area

- In one school 80% said yes but others felt it was the Government’s responsibility.
- In the other school, 1/3 said yes and 2/3 said no.

How can young people be more involved in tackling concerns such as alcohol and drug abuse by children and teenagers in their area?

- Involved in group discussions.
- Posters/Campaign aimed at young people to advertise dangers of substance abuse.
- Get involved in youth club.
- Identify places where young people can talk to each other.

What other advice would you give the Minister?

- Start doing something as it is only getting worse.
- Get his act together and “get in touch”.
- Have young people involved in helping young people.
- Ask young people what they want.
- Avoid stereotyping young people.

c. Ashlinn Centre, Kilkenny

The Centre Director facilitated discussion on a number of issues within an aftercare group in the Centre. The experiences and opinions of this group, are obviously particularly pertinent and their responses are reported in full.

How can we reduce young people's access to alcohol?

- Garda identification only to be accepted in pubs, clubs, off licences and supermarkets.
- Make it an arrestable offence if found underage drinking.
- Move legal age of drinking up to 21.

Should alcohol advertising which appeals to young people (eg alcopops) be banned?

- Yes, it glamorises alcohol.
- Alcopops are aimed for young people, they hide the smell of alcohol, they go down quicker and you need more.
- They are like drinking fizzy drinks.
- All alcohol advertising should be banned prior to 10pm – all alcopops advertising should be banned altogether.

How can parents help teenagers resist the pressure to drink?

- Parents should not go to the pub as often.
- Parents shouldn't drink as much around children.
- Parents shouldn't bring children into pubs.

What kind of facilities do we need that are alcohol free?

- Nightclubs for young people.
- Late night coffee shops.
- Pool/snooker halls.
- More community activities
- 24 hour gym.
- Bowling alleys.
- Go-kart tracks.
- Quad tracks.
- Paint balling.

What other advice would you give the Minister?

- Kids under 15 should be off the streets.
- More consequences for children found drinking out doors.
- Take winos off the streets.
- Close off-licences and pubs earlier.

d. Discussion Group with Young People in the United States aged 14 – 20 years

Opportunity was taken to consult with young people from across the United States who were on vacation at a resort in Florida. They were happy to contribute to a project in Ireland by sharing their own views and experiences of growing up in a culture where alcohol is illegal under the age of 21 and where policies aimed at reducing availability and enforcing legislation are the norm and are generally accepted. All of the young people were white and from relatively affluent families. Six of them were still in high school and four were in College. Discussion focused on ways of preventing underage drinking.

How effective are ID Cards?

ID Cards generally work although there is a market for fake IDs. Virtually all children and young people carry ID Cards as most high schools and all Colleges issue standard IDs.

Liquor stores, bars clubs and restaurants will usually all check IDs, as will major grocery stores and gas stations. Easier to purchase alcohol in smaller delis and locally owned stores. Young people generally know where they can purchase alcohol.

At what age do young people start drinking?

Average age young people start drinking is 15/16, sometimes 14. Binge drinking can start at 16 but often it's seen as a College experience. After College most young people only drink in moderation.

Where do young people get alcohol?

Many access it at home because parents have beer in the fridge or via older brothers and sisters and their friends. Single sex house parties are common, with sleepovers – the kids drink when parents go out or go to bed. In rural areas young people meet to drink and chat in a barn or a field.

Drinking and Driving

Most young people don't drink and drive and appoint a designated driver. Penalties for drink driving are very severe and young people can't risk losing their licence. Boys are more likely to drink and drive than girls.

What prevents young people drinking?

Sport is a big interest for many young people and athletes tend to drink less because they are in training. Parental influence is very important. Fear of being arrested is real as the police will break up parties.

What strategies work in preventing underage drinking?

- Definitely need ID cards with servers trained to check for fakes.
- Stores should limit the amount of alcohol purchases eg 12 beer limits especially if they suspect it is for someone underage or for a campus party.
- In bars and clubs, servers should refuse drinks to anyone who is drunk.
- Young people should be fined for underage drinking.
- Parents should exercise greater influence and control and provide better supervision for their children.
- Education is important for young people. Should focus on being safe, blood alcohol levels, sensible drinking.
- Advertising should definitely show the negative consequences of drinking.

Appendix 2

Views of Parents

Review of Previous Projects

A number of consultations have already been undertaken by other agencies to ascertain parents views on alcohol misuse by young people.

a. North Western Health Board Young People, Alcohol & Drugs Project (1999)

In the Donegal study in 1999, parents' main concern was about illegal drugs and they felt disempowered and lacking in knowledge in the area of drugs information. They were ambivalent towards alcohol believing that drugs are worse than alcohol and believed that they could delay worrying about drugs and alcohol until their children were 15 or 16. They identified alcohol and drugs information, as well as support from other parents as key elements in aiding their role in prevention.

b. National Parents Council Survey

A survey of 400 parents carried out in conjunction with the National Parents Council in 1998 found that 82% of parents felt the problem of underage drinking had got worse. They were however inclined to underestimate the incidence of drinking generally as well as the numbers of young people who had been drunk. The main concern for parents was the inappropriate behaviour associated with underage drinking and they were worried about young people drinking in parks or on beaches without supervision. More than half of the sample were in favour of children having a drink with their parents. Parents generally felt the laws on selling alcohol to minors should be enforced and felt a national ID system was essential. Nearly all parents favoured discussion with their children about alcohol and recognised the need to set an example.

Direct Consultations with Parents

For the purpose of this report the views of parents were accessed through approaches to a number of agencies and projects including:-

- Donegal Parents Support Programme (North Western Health Board).
- Whitechurch Addiction Support Group, Parent Educators Discussion Group.
- Discussion group with parents of American young people.

a. Parents Support Programme (NWHB)

Facilitation of discussion with parents who lead the support programmes on alcohol and drugs issues was organised by the Health Promotion Department of the North Western Health Board and given the extent of their exposure to parents views on these matters combined with their own knowledge, these parents/programme leaders are particularly well placed to provide informed and representative views.

Where do young people socialise in your area?

There were clear differences between those living in urban and those living in rural areas where fewer facilities were available. In the absence of anywhere else to go young people congregate in certain public areas.

- Football club
- Disco
- Cinema
- Pubs/ pool tables
- Parks
- Play area
- Amusements
- Behind supermarkets/off-licence
- Market square
- Shopping centre
- Around centre shops
- Corner shops
- Each others houses

There are no alcohol free facilities for them.

What other alcohol free facilities would you like to have available?

- Drop In Centre
 - A place open before school, open in evening, late night
 - Snacks available,
 - Lounge area/coffee bar look,
 - Music/Juke box,
 - Pay for drinks/snacks.
 - Pool.
 - Football.
 - Weekly supervised disco.

- Games area.
- Create better use of schools after hours
 - Schools making room available after hours – space for music practice/drama/dance.
 - Promote a wide range of activities.

“If you aren’t interested in GAA in our town, there’s nothing else.”

Where do young people get alcohol in your area?

- Pubs.
- Friends.
- Supermarket.
- Off-licence.
- Home.
- Cross-border purchase.
- Out of town – where age is not an issue.
- Older kids buy in the pub/disco.

As parents what are your main concerns about children drinking?

- Personal safety – Boys/Girls (what they might do or what might be done to them).
- Amount consumed.
- Acceptable culturally to get drunk.
- Hidden depression as a result of drinking.
- Parents worried about future impact of drinking.
- School attendance – “Monday morning” – “won’t be at school on Thursday – getting full the night before”.
- Danger - risk taking behaviour – pregnancy/sexually transmitted infections/driving/fights/accidents.
- What to do about their drinking and where to go for help.
- Acceptance among young people that heavy drinking is what you do.

What can parents do to help their own children resist the pressure to abuse alcohol?

- Example.
- More specific about expectations from early age.
- Talking and listening – good communication.
- Encourage alternatives and provide alternatives.
- Giving them your time.

- Must know where kids are and who they are with.
- Get involved in local initiatives and more parents getting involved.
- Sense of community/gone.
- Get involved with other parents.
- Limits – age to do things.
- Reduce available money.
- Early parenting – “our family does it this way”.
- Set clear limits and boundaries.
- Know their friends.
- Check up on them.
- Be careful about part-time work.

How can parents be more involved in tackling concerns such as alcohol and drug abuse by children and teenagers in their community?

- Parents need to be educated to the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug misuse.
- Parents together and parent support programmes.
- Parents need information.
- Parents need to stop blaming publicans, guards, teachers and start saying “They are my children, what can I do”.

What is the role of the Gardaí in controlling underage drinking?

- Enforce the law.
- Zero tolerance.
- Role model good behaviour – no late night drinking/when on duty.
- More cases taken in Courts.
- When children/young people are picked up drunk, phone the parents and get them to come into the Garda station.
- Take notice of places where young people drink, glue sniff.
- Intervene with parents earlier, don’t wait for a crisis.
- Enforce the law equally. In small towns, who you are influences the action the Gardaí take.
- Some people felt there are not enough Gardaí and others mentioned a gulf between Gardaí and the community.

What other steps should government take to prevent alcohol misuse by young people?

- Welcome ‘new legislation’ on drinks promotions.
- Ban drinks promotion offers in 3rd level education.
- Reduce tax on non-alcoholic drinks.

- Produce extra resources – Gardaí.
- Promote interagency approach.
- Reduce late night extensions.
- Training for judges.
- Investing in parenting initiatives.
- Resource drop in centres.
- Tax incentives for business people offering alcohol free alternatives.
- Ban drinks advertising/or cap amount allowed to be spent per ad.
- Start with A & E in hospital to gather data.
- Routine blood and alcohol testing at all car accidents.

What other advice would you give the Minister?

- Pour more money into education.
- Put resources into local communities.
- Early years parenting initiative.
- Take on the vested interests such as the drink industry.
- Recognising and support parents.
- Don't invest in initiatives that look good, but do nothing.

b. WASP

Consultation was facilitated with the parents particularly in community groups and school youth clubs based programmes on alcohol and drugs prevention.

Where do young people socialise in your area?

- There are no facilities.
- Laneways/open green spaces.
- Street corners.
- Only church grounds/back of school.
- Park benches.

What other alcohol free facilities would you like to have available?

- Youth club – for teenagers.
- Community Hall.
- Monthly disco/school discos.
- Schools should take kids away.

Where do young people get alcohol in your area?

- Some parents.
- Older brothers and sisters.
- Anywhere they can.
- Shops/off-licences.

As parents what are your main concerns about children drinking?

- Consequences including drugs, leaving school early, unemployment.
- Getting into trouble with the Gardaí.
- Being taken advantage of.

What can parents do to help their own children to resist the pressure to abuse alcohol?

- Set a good example by not drinking too much.
- Less alcohol in the home.
- Talk regularly with children.

How can parents be more involved in tackling concerns such as alcohol and drug abuse by children and teenagers in their community?

- Keep regular checks on their children.
- Know where they are at night.
- Educate themselves about the dangers.
- Entertain their children and not expect others to do so.
- Do things with their children.
- Get involved in community addiction studies.

What is the role of the Gardaí in controlling underage drinking?

- Stop young people drinking on the streets.
- Take the drink off them and contact their parents.

What other steps should Government take to prevent alcohol misuse by young people?

- Clamp down on advertising.
- High fines to those who serve drink to underage children and after a warning, lose their licence.

What other advice would you give the Minister?

- Walk the area at night and see the situation for himself.
- Get his act together.
- Stand down and let someone who knows what they are doing do the job.

c. Discussion Groups with Parents of Young People aged 14-22 in the USA

In a wide ranging discussion with two groups of parents from New York, Indiana and Pennsylvania the extent of underage drinking in high school and college was explored. Due to pressure from the Federal Government the drinking age in most States has been raised from 18 to 21 and parents generally support this change in policy. Laws on underage drinking are rigidly enforced by licensees and by the police and penalties for breaking the law are severe.

Offences include

- Having open alcohol containers in a car or in a public place.
- Supplying alcohol to minors.
- Supplying fake IDs (\$2500 fine).

The law is clear on parental responsibility and parents are held responsible if children are drunk in their home, even if they were out and unaware that a party was happening. Proof of age to purchase alcohol is mandatory everywhere and the main form of ID is a driving licence. For ease of detection driving licences for minors are stamped “not 21 until(date)”. All students have High School or College ID.

There is a very low incidence of drink driving as legislation and consequences are very harsh. A first Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Offence results in driving suspension for a month, mandatory classes and \$1000 fine while second offence can result in a jail sentence. DUI offences limit access to certain professions such as teaching and medicine. Young people are very aware of the consequences. A young person caught drink driving automatically loses his licence until he is 21. Any citation for underage drinking has consequences for driving licence. If drinking under 18 – lose licence until 18. Between 18 and 21 lose licence for 90 days. Average age of starting drinking is 14/15 and young people usually get drink in someone’s home or through an older relative a friend. Young people often gather in barns/huts on farms.

Bars/stores caught selling to minors lose their licence.

Binge drinking is a college phenomenon and despite the legislation, campus parties are common.

While beer is the most common drink for boys, shots are increasingly popular. At 21st birthday parties dangerous drinking games and behaviour can result in alcoholic poisoning.

Some parents reported good alcohol-free alternatives. In Indiana, a predominantly rural State, there are under-21s dance clubs throughout the State which are popular and are viable commercial projects. In New York young people can gain access to some clubs at 18 but have to be 21 to get an alcoholic drink. Once ID is checked, over 21s get a wristband as proof of age.

Although this group was not representative it does nevertheless provide an insight into a culture where there is a no-tolerance approach for underage drinking and where legislation is rigorously enforced and clearly acts as a deterrent. The consequences appear to be reduced availability and hence reduced consumption and a delay in the onset of drinking behaviour.

Appendix 3

Views of Service Providers

Several of the organisations represented on the National Children's Advisory Council are already actively engaged in tackling the issues of alcohol misuse among young people at policy or service delivery level.

a. Barnardos

Barnardos the National Children's Charity has mounted a specific campaign, Families Under the Influence, to draw attention to and promote coordinated action to combat the ever increasing levels of problem drinking in Irish Society. The threat to young people is twofold. The direct adverse consequences of underage drinking in terms of the physical, mental and social consequences are noted earlier in this report. They are particularly at risk of assault, becoming included in a crime or becoming pregnant. In addition many young people are also put at risk because of excessive drinking by parents leading to ill-health, relationship difficulties, domestic violence and aggression, accidents at home work and on the roads, financial problems and direct physical and emotional abuse. Parents with alcohol dependency problems are inconsistent as parents and their children experience material, physical and emotional neglect.

Based on direct experience of working with many families for whom alcohol abuse is an issue, Barnardos identified the grim realities of problem drinking and its impact on children and young people which can include:-

- Acute childhood poverty in families where a high proportion of income goes on alcohol.
- Parents drink in front of children, neighbours and friends.
- Children see and are often victims of alcohol-related domestic violence.
- Children can become addicted to alcohol and/or drugs while in their teens.
- Children become isolated and embarrassed covering up for their parents: their self-confidence and self-esteem inevitably suffers.
- School attendance and performance often declines.
- Young people particularly boys may themselves become aggressive.

Consequences for young people will of course vary significantly depending on their own resilience, whether support is available from other family members and friends and the extent to which problem drinking impacts on family life.

Achieving an appropriate coordinated balance of services which both address the needs of the adult patient and the child care/child protection issues will require greater understanding and commitment by both addiction and childcare specialists.

b. National Youth Federation of Ireland

The National Youth Federation in its response to the final report of the Liquor Licensing Commission draws particular attention to the impact of alcohol and drugs on the increasing level of public order offences and challenges the extended licensing hours as well as proposals to open more licensed café bars, thus making alcohol ever more accessible.

The Federation encourages the involvement of young people in developing policies and initiatives to combat alcohol abuse and harm and the NYF has offered to facilitate listening sessions on alcohol issues. While supporting totally the requirement on publicans to require proof of age and welcoming the voluntary ID Card scheme, NYF have concerns about introducing a statutory ID Card for 18-23 year olds as a form of discrimination.

The NYF is opposed to alcohol advertising directed at young people and feels all sports bodies should eliminate sponsorship of events and teams by alcohol related companies, initially targeting under-18s events and moving to a total ban within 3 years.

They highlighted the need for resources to fund alternative social and recreational opportunities for young people linked to the Youth Development Plan.

Finally the response calls for a stronger and unequivocal lead from Government with enactment of appropriate legislation and measures aimed at consequences to curtail sales to underage clients.

c. Pavee Point

The organisation raised particular concerns about the lack of attention to drinking behaviour among young Travellers suggesting that they are at significant risk. While the age profile of the Traveller Community is particularly young, with over 50% of the population under 15 years old, the views of Traveller young people and indeed of other minority communities are rarely sought in the context of consultations with young people about a range of policy developments. The separate culture, identity and value systems of Travellers should be acknowledged and culturally appropriate responses to this identity resourced. The fact that Traveller culture, identity and ethnicity are not recognised in Ireland means that for young Travellers their identity is neither affirmed nor validated. Any alcohol strategy should therefore incorporate culturally responsive initiatives that are sensitive to and do not reinforce

negative cultural stereotypes of Travellers and alcohol, and which include young Travellers in both mainstream and targeted interventions.

Earlier school leaving, high levels of unemployment, discrimination and reduced access to diversionary activities such as mainstream youth and sports clubs can be contributing factors to young Travellers accessing and using alcohol, as their choices as young people are limited. There are particular concerns about lack of access to alcohol and drugs education programmes because young travellers leave school earlier than the settled population and also because most existing programmes rely on literacy and are not culturally relevant.

It is notable that the Task Force on Alcohol does not include any analysis of alcohol misuse among Traveller Communities and do not propose specific measures to tackle the issue among Travellers. This is despite inclusion of the need of this group within the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund set up through the National Drugs Strategy.

Pavee Point suggests that policy on alcohol needs to include:-

- A model that incorporates a long term sustained programme on alcohol that looks at all dimensions of the issue.
- An acknowledgement that young travellers are multi-disadvantaged and approaches to reducing alcohol misuse need to be viewed in that broader context.
- Programmes must be culturally appropriate and all those working with young Travellers need training on drug and substance misuse.
- Adult Travellers and young people need to be trained as peer educators in developing appropriate programmes for Traveller parents and children.
- More research is needed into alcohol and drugs issues within Traveller community and other ethnic minority groups.
- National sporting and youth organisations should be working together to promote sport and recreation among marginalised groups including the development of anti-racist codes of practice.
- Funding is needed for Community Action approaches to alcohol misuse among all Travellers.

Pavee Point were unable to facilitate consultation with young Travellers during the timescale of the report in view of projects having closed for the summer months. They have committed to consult during the autumn and will share their feedback with the Task Force as well as the Council

c. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

The Committee is currently trying to access information from workers supporting children in minority communities with dependency problems themselves and those living in homes where addiction is an issue. NCCRI points out that there is no disaggregated information which could facilitate analysis of the issues for settled minority communities nor for refugees, asylum seekers or migrant workers. Minority ethnic groups need to be involved both in consultations around the issue as well as in devising responses to identified problems. Policy responses should be culturally appropriate and equality proofed for their impact on minority ethnic groups. The potential for minority ethnic groups (particularly visible minorities) to be labelled for extraordinary alcohol abuse should be recognised and challenged.

d. People with Disabilities in Ireland

Little is known about the extent of alcohol misuse among young people with disabilities and there needs to be close liaison between agencies working with young people on this issue and disability groups.

People with Disabilities in Ireland (PWDI) suggests the following action:-

- Programmes which aim to raise awareness of the dangers of alcohol and drugs use should be inclusive and must be disability proofed to enable children with disabilities to be as well informed as their peers and enabled to make appropriate decisions.
- Literature on alcohol and drugs will have to be published in different formats to be accessible to young people with a range of disabilities.
- There will need to be teachers and youth workers who are skilled in communicating these programmes to young people with disabilities.
- Drug and alcohol treatment programmes for young people will have to be able to respond to the needs of young people with disabilities.
- Closer liaison is needed between those offering education, support and treatment for young people on alcohol and drug misuse and organisations working with young people with disabilities.

e. ACET – Aids Care Education & Training

Although not represented on the Council, the Director of ACET was approached to comment on the relationship between alcohol misuse and drug abuse generally, in view of the frequency with which this relationship came up as an issue.

ACET's clients are all from the heroin community, and the organisation's work with families often involves 3 generations, with up to 4 or 5 heroin dependent family members, some of

whom also have HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. In addition to their heroin dependency, they often use a wide range of other drugs, and alcohol misuse is very common in most of the families.

Typically the older generation in the household are not using street drugs, but will often have a high level of, or history of, alcohol misuse. The middle generation are using street drugs, but also often misusing alcohol. The children often develop patterns of alcohol misuse very young, from early teens, even if they are not using the street drugs.

In recent years mixing cocaine into alcoholic drinks at parties following exam results and at other youth events has become commonplace and well reported in the Irish press, and this practice builds a bridge from the widely acceptable misuse of alcohol with the world of street drugs.

ACET makes the following recommendations:

- Need for recognition that alcohol misuse is a danger to the health and wellbeing of our young people, and is on the increase with both young men and young women.
- Need for recognition that alcohol is the most widely misused substance in Ireland, and is the drug of choice for most people across the generations.
- Need to differentiate between appropriate use of alcohol as compared to the misuse of alcohol.
- Need for a long-term media campaign to profile normal trendy young people choosing not to misuse alcohol.
- An abstinence message may not be credible, given the deeply rooted acceptance of alcohol at all levels of social, family and working life, but a moderate use message could be helpful. So the image would be one of moderate use being cool, excessive use being identified as misuse and a danger to the health and well-being of the individual and those around them.
- Strong, cool, trendy role models to balance off the deeply rooted patterns of misuse, in TV soaps, youth culture magazines, press, TV adds, and in the popular music scene.
- Health Education along these lines to be seriously funded in schools, and in the Youth and Community sectors.
- Increasing treatment opportunities and support group facilities for young people affected by misuse.
- Encouraging politicians to adopt support for a change in values and attitudes to alcohol misuse and to profile this along with other topical issues like the environment, human rights, equality issues etc. A similar move is currently underway to limit smoking in bars in the ROI.
- Securing a statutory commitment to release the necessary financial resources to do this, contrasting the relatively low cost, compared to the extremely high cost to the State of the consequences of alcohol misuse.