

Targeted youth support

Integrated support for vulnerable young people – emerging practice



Partnership working combats under-age drinking

Area: St Neots, Cambridgeshire, East of England, population approximately 30,500

“Working like this is not about getting or putting in extra resources, it is about aligning what everyone does so we can do it more effectively. If as an individual you can achieve marginal success then imagine how much more successful you can be working together. This is the only way we can make a real impact - **Charlotte Wilson, Project Manager, Community Alcohol Partnership, Cambridgeshire County Council – August 2008**

Challenges

- Reducing under-age drinking and associated problems such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) and litter
- Protecting young people who can be vulnerable when drunk
- Addressing the problem holistically – getting police, local authorities, retailers and the community to work together
- Making sure public perception reflects the improvements
- Ensuring the work is embedded so sustainable post pilot
- Measuring the impact with little hard empirical data

Key Actions

- Met all key groups to get right people involved/enthused
- November 2007: St Neots six month pilot launched – three pronged approach: education, enforcement and challenging public perception
- Education: Think 21 training and information materials aimed at retailers; uniformed police in schools to talk about dangers of drinking, consequences of crime etc; parents targeted through alcohol awareness sessions warning that providing alcohol is an offence and you can be fined
- Enforcement: Trading standards/police evening patrols in hotspot areas; alcohol confiscation; working with retailers to refuse sales to minors and those buying alcohol for them; test purchasing and prosecutions as a last resort
- Public perception: use of local media; newsletters and posters to raise community awareness and publicise results
- Work evaluated, lessons learned fed into Cambridge roll out
- July 2008: Cambridge roll out launched
- Next steps – merge alcohol with drugs for adult education/ awareness raising and promote peer to peer work in schools

Key Implementation Tips

- Be enthusiastic about what you do and maintain this energy – show that by working together you can achieve more
- Feed into resident action groups where possible – helps to encourage participation and raises awareness
- Determine who is vital to the pilot’s success, meet with them and get their buy in from the outset
- Make sure all partners understand and are committed to their role in the pilot
- Set up a cross partnership project team and delegate work to them
- Contact the editor of the highest circulation local newspaper and offer him/her the story
- Spend time and money on publicity if you can – mail drops will now form a part of the Cambridge roll out
- Survey residents perceptions about drinking and ASB in advance so that you can accurately measure the impact on public perception

Impact

In the last four months of the pilot, January to April 2008 inclusive, incidents of ASB dropped by two per cent over the pilot area and by 45.8 per cent in one of the main hotspot areas. Alcohol related litter fell dramatically. In the first weekend of the pilot 21 bottles and 86 cans of beer, cider and alcopops were found. In the last weekend this was down to one bottle and eight cans. At the end of the pilot far fewer young people were caught with alcohol and the local Member of Parliament recently commented that he receives fewer complaint letters in respect of ASB in the hotspot areas. Overall, anecdotally, St Neots is now considered a better place to live.

There has been a real cultural change in the way the partners now work together. The pilot has improved relationships, which has had a positive knock on effect for other, non-related, projects. Attitudes have changed with the police, for example, now focusing on educating and working with retailers rather than just arresting them for under-age sales. In addition, concerns about vulnerable young people identified through the pilot are fed back into the wider multi-agency team so that, if needed, the root causes of the under-age drinking such as problems at home can also be addressed. Real success measures will be further down the line and will depend on whether the work can be sustained, but early results look good.

To find out more, contact

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