

Young People and Alcohol Guidance Department for Children, Schools and Families

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

April 2009

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

Introduction

4. NCVYS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department for Children, Schools and Families' *Young People and Alcohol Guidance* and in particular the inclusion of young people in the consultation process. This response focuses on the *Alcohol: Advice and Information for Children and Young People* document as this was the most appealing part of the consultation to NCVYS's youth forum ENVOY (Enthusiastic National Voice of Youth).
5. This response has been informed by consultation with ENVOY. A total of 16 young people, aged 13 to 23 years old with equal representation across gender, contributed their views to this paper.

Key comments on facts in the guidance

6. The key facts that stood out to the young people who commented on the guidance for children and young people were:
 - some 10,000 young people are admitted to hospital every year because of drinking';
 - more than one in ten 15-16-year-olds had been involved in an accident or had an injury as a result of drinking; and
 - girls who drink alcohol are more than twice as likely to have an unwanted pregnancy as their non-drinking friends.
7. The majority of young people responded positively to the use of facts and case studies as it provided them with more information to base decision-making on and it brought the effects of drinking closer to reality. However, young people thought that the fact about drinking and the probability of getting into an argument was too long.
8. Most of the young people felt that the facts would not really make them consider their drinking habits, mainly because they do not drink very much anyway.

Key comments on advice in the guidance

9. There was a mixed response regarding the advice messages contained in the guidance. Some young people thought that the messages were unclear and contained complicated words, but others thought that they were clear messages. One young person, (male, 19 years old) stated that:

Though alcohol can have positive effects, it can also have a whole load of negative ones. You can choose not to drink if you don't want to, based on this information [in the guidance], and that's a defensible position.

10. It was noted that the weblinks given in the guidance were too long.
11. There were mixed feelings about whether the advice messages would make participants in the focus group and poll consider their drinking habits, ranging from 'not at all as it seems to be from an adults perspective' to maybe. No one was definite that the messages would make them consider their drinking habits.

Who should be communicating messages to young people?

12. Young people involved in NCVYS's consultation process suggestions for who should be communicating messages to young people included:

- individuals that young respect in their community or in the media;
 - recovering alcoholics;
 - psychiatrists;
 - youth workers; and
 - other young people.
13. Ideas were mixed around parents being the ones advising young people about alcohol consumption. Some thought that they would listen to their parents as they respected them, however others suggested that some young people might not get on with their parents.
14. Responses were also mixed around Government communicating the messages to young people. Some were receptive to this as they thought that Government was reliable and impartial, however some stated that Government advice often does not seem relevant to young people.

How should the messages be communicated to young people?

15. Young people's ideas for how messages around alcohol should be communicated to young people included:
- Facebook and myspace;
 - magazines;
 - television ad campaigns;
 - through quizzes; and
 - simply promoting the facts without any propaganda around it so young people can know the implications and make their own decisions.
16. One young person commented that it might be useful to include more information on how young people could help their friends who drink, e.g. how to talk to them about it.

The design and language

17. Young people who commented on the guidance gave a mixed response to its design and language used. Positive comments included describing the design as engaging and colours attractive. However, other young people did not like the colours and thought that the text was too small. One participant suggested that the guidance could be condensed to make it punchier.
18. Some young people stated that they thought that the language was patronising:
- At two points the leaflet says 'if you don't know what a unit is'...to me this sounded accusative and patronising, and I can imagine only more so to a younger person. I'd recommend changing it to something like 'to see what a unit is...'
19. The majority of young people did not like the use of text speak as they also felt that this was patronising.