

YORK AND SELBY CARERS CENTRE RESPONSE TO NATIONAL ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY

Due to limitations of time and the fact we have only recently been made aware of this consultation through the young carers service we operate from our centre, our comments are primarily around the issues of young carers.

One of our carers once said to us “If it wasn’t for you I would have taken to the bottle”.

This was not said lightly, this was a comment that this particular carer made after constantly reaching for alcohol to cope with the pressure of little or no support, isolation and stress of caring for someone – in this case someone with a mental health problem.

Cultural and behavioural issues round alcohol misuse

Young people – our young carers are often caring for and affected by parents with alcohol misuse problems. The services people with alcohol addiction problems receive often do not extend to the people caring for them, especially when they are young carers (i.e. under the age of 18), many of our young people in this situation do not receive any advice, training or support in dealing with alcohol misuse problems or how to treat and support the misusing parent. Another issue is that the young people still are frightened they will be taken into care if they seek help. One young person known to us worked evenings to earn money to ensure his siblings were able to eat, as his father used their family funds to buy alcohol. He too was worried the family would be split up if the authorities got to know about the problems.

English drinking culture is such that it often excludes families and this may contribute towards the feeling that bad behaviour and violence is acceptable amongst adults. Limited opening times may be said to encourage binge drinking.

Advertising campaigns promote links between alcohol and glamour, success and popularity.

Approximately 10% of our young carers are supporting or caring for people with dual diagnosis.

The link between mental health and self medication (through drugs or alcohol) is also documented and these issues need to be addressed.

The link between drugs, drink and criminal activity is well documented.

Anti crime and anti social behaviour initiatives needs to be targeted on giving young people alternatives and something else to do.

All of the premises indicated in the consultation documents have implications for funding. There are many excellent examples of good practice initiatives relating to services, which deal with alcohol misuse. Some of these are early intervention strategies; preventative strategies and so forth are well founded but not well funded. There are also probably many strategies and examples of good practise that can be learnt from drug misuse initiatives – again successful outcomes are likely to come at a cost.

At the Carers Centre in York, we do see young carers as being vulnerable to the consequences of alcohol misuse. Currently there are no services for the young age groups in our area, which are provided by alcohol teams, we see this as an omission in provision.

We do see objectives to be achieved as including awareness raising, and we do feel that such initiatives need to be realistic and acknowledge the fact that young people do drink.

We certainly see parents as a target group for information and communication, which should both, inform their own life style and inform their parenting. We do feel that schools, colleges and universities are very important and such communications also need to adopt an approach of ‘realism’.

We find that effective approaches on many issues emanate from those who have experienced problems themselves.

I am sorry that this response is so heavily focussed on young carers, and not on general carers themselves, but again would reiterate that this is because we have only been made aware of this document this week and are concerned to meet the deadline. Nevertheless many of the issues covered in effective communication training and awareness also apply to generic carers, who need support, information, effective advice and services in caring and supporting people with alcohol problems.

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