

# Effecting multilevel change through dialogue: experiences of teenage project leaders in the AlcoLOLs project

**Dr Magda Pieczka and Emma Wood, Queen Margaret University**

**SHAAP/SARN 'Alcohol Occasional' Seminar  
Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2014, The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh**

**Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) and the Scottish Alcohol Research Network (SARN) are proud to support the lunchtime 'Alcohol Occasional' seminars which showcase new and innovative research on alcohol use. All of the seminars are run in conjunction with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. These events provide the chance for researchers, practitioners and policy makers and members of the public to hear about new alcohol related topics and discuss and debate implications for policy and practice. The current theme for the seminars is "Alcohol and Young People". Briefing papers, including this one, aim to capture the main themes and to communicate these to a wider audience. SHAAP is fully responsible for the contents, which are our interpretation.**

Pieczka and Wood started their presentation by stating that although they would be focusing only on the AlcoLOLs project, their work is part of a much wider interdisciplinary academic research on communication and alcohol at Queen Margaret University. The project was piloted in 2010 with pupils from Portobello High School, and that phase included the production of resources such as a film which is still being shown and discussed in current project sessions. So far, the project has reached around 1,500 pupils.

They described the AlcoLOLs project as a dialogue-based peer-led project that attempts to combine small group learning with large scale impact with school peers, family and community. In AlcoLOLs sessions, the researchers explained, young people receive training, including facilitation skills. They also listen to presentations by guest speakers, such as experts from NGOs and the Government. The intention is that they will then pass their knowledge on to their peers, through workshops which they run themselves in their schools.

They suggested that a dialogue-based peer-led approach can be contrasted with other communication tools, such as those used by social marketing, which focus on persuasion and manipulation of behaviour. It is intended that the learning dynamics in the project are set and managed by young people themselves, without teachers or other professionals in the workshops. Young people can have group conversations and presentations which are focused on collaborative learning and openness to other perspectives and experiences, with use of critical reflection.

During the discussions with the SHAAP audience, Pieczka and Wood explained that the AlcoLOLs sessions also provide an opportunity for young people to explore attitudes to – and perceptions of – alcohol use, such as those portrayed in

advertisements and in social media. They acknowledged that drinking is a social and cultural practice, and that young people's drinking behaviour is influenced by the behaviour of others within their social world. However, the researchers argued, the social processes underlying this influence cannot be reduced to simple ideas of peer pressure.

In the discussions, Pieczka and Wood were praised for carrying out their project under such heavy marketing of alcohol from industry actors. The audience also commented that the dialogues taking place in the project seem to be very different from those taking place on Facebook, where young people typically portray themselves as having a lot of fun with alcohol and as being very confident.

Discussants commended the researchers' enthusiasm for the project. Pieczka and Wood said that their enthusiasm is also shared by the young people running the workshops, who make sure that they make the sessions enjoyable, even though they are dealing with a very serious issue.

The researchers explained that they normally recruit around 22 pupils from a school and might end up with 12 participants. They argued that when participants drop out, it is hoped that they will still have gained something valuable from the project, such as information and presentation skills.

The researchers suggested that their experience with the AlcoLOLs project challenged some common gender stereotypes, such as the idea that young men can find it more difficult to self-organise than young women. The young men in the project have been very efficient in running administrative tasks. Most young people have been running the project enthusiastically, independently from their gender or social background.

Comments from the SHAAP audience included questions regarding the wider impact of the project on the community. The researchers explained that they had heard very positive

remarks from parents and from the schools. For example, they had heard that the project participants had become much better communicators and also that their school attendance had improved. There has been a reduction in local alcohol related incidents with young people in Portobello since 2010; however, it is of course difficult to relate this causally to this project.

Project participants have been telling the researchers that while in the past they had motivated each other to drink, now they are becoming confident enough to say that they do not want to drink alcohol at all.

The researchers argued that young people participating in the project have been realising that drinking is not necessarily a norm to which they must aspire. They also argued that the skills which the young people have gained by taking part in the project can help them with other aspects of their lives.

Further information about the AlcoLOLs can be accessed through this link: <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/mcpa/CDial/AlcoLols.htm>



Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

# SHAAP/SARN Alcohol Occasionals

## We are planning a series of events for 2014/2015 on alcohol and mental health.

If you are interested in presenting your research, please get in touch with the SHAAP Policy Officer at [shaap@rcpe.ac.uk](mailto:shaap@rcpe.ac.uk) with a short proposal\* and an indication of your availability.

\*no more than 300 words

**Alcohol without the Hangover**  
**Professor David Nutt**  
 SHAAP/SARN Alcohol Occasional 5<sup>th</sup> Seminar  
 Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) and the Scottish Alcohol Research Network (SARN) are proud to present SHAAP/SARN Alcohol Occasional 5<sup>th</sup> Seminar, which will focus on the topic of alcohol and mental health. The seminar will be held at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014. The seminar will be held in the afternoon from 1.30pm to 4.30pm. The seminar will be held in the afternoon from 1.30pm to 4.30pm. The seminar will be held in the afternoon from 1.30pm to 4.30pm.

**Dr Carly Lightowers, Liverpool John Moores University**  
 SHAAP/SARN Alcohol Occasional 5<sup>th</sup> Seminar  
 Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013, The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

**Drinking patterns and violent behaviour amongst young people in England and Wales, secondary analysis of the Offending Crime and Justice Survey**

Lighowers argued that young people have different drinking behaviour from a range of influences, including the peer environment. She suggested that we should consider how and why people drink, not just whether they do. This is important because it is not just the amount of alcohol consumed, but the context in which it is consumed that is important. This is why we need to consider the social and cultural context of drinking, as well as the individual characteristics of the drinker. This is why we need to consider the social and cultural context of drinking, as well as the individual characteristics of the drinker.

**University of Glasgow: 'You want have a fun life: The role of alcohol entry creation on Facebook.'**  
 The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

As to young women, Lighowers found that they were more likely to be involved in violent behaviour when alcohol had been consumed. This was particularly true for young women who were also involved in violent behaviour when alcohol had been consumed. This was particularly true for young women who were also involved in violent behaviour when alcohol had been consumed.