

About Bottletop.info

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Bottletop is an exciting and highly innovative project developed with 16-19 year olds in Herefordshire and designed to engage with an age-group that has received less focus in alcohol awareness during this critical period of achieving adulthood. It taps in to *their* creativity and experiences in developing an innovative approach of peer-led alcohol awareness education.

The context

The population of the entire county of Herefordshire is just 178,000 people, and over 2,000 young adults attend further education colleges in the market town of Hereford.

As England's most rural County, Herefordshire might be expected to be a world away from the 'binge drinking' headlines so frequently in the press.....

According to Director of Public Health's Annual Report *Health in Herefordshire* report published in December 2007¹, generally the reported position on alcohol drinking in Herefordshire is not far off national and regional averages: 36% of 18-34 year olds reported that they had drunk at binge drinking levels on one day in the previous week (lower than the national average), and alcohol-related recorded crime rates are relatively low. and

In 2007, the Director of Public Health concluded that it was perhaps not surprising that 17% of adults in Herefordshire exceeded sensible levels of drinking, given a lack of awareness of safe drinking limits found by the West Midlands Adult Health and Lifestyle Survey (2002). Only 14% of men in Herefordshire identified the "safe" maximum number of weekly alcohol units correctly, and in total two-thirds of male respondents either didn't know the weekly limit or thought it to be greater than 21 units. For women, 16% knew the correct maximum limit, but again almost 70% either didn't know the weekly limit or thought it to be greater than 14 units."

¹ available <http://www.herefordshire.nhs.uk>

In the younger age groups there are some particularly concerning indicators: The Teenage Lifestyles Survey (2006)², looked at 11-15 year olds in Herefordshire and found that 26% of young people reported that they had drunk at least one alcoholic drink in the week before the survey, highest in 15 year old girls (48%) – and 25% of those girls reported that they had got drunk in the last week. More recently, the Every Child Matters in Herefordshire survey (2009)³ reports that 13% of 11-15 year olds said they have been drunk in the last 4 weeks, and 42% of over 15 year olds. The report indicates a fall in reported drinking in the period 2006 to 2009.

Alcohol specific admission rates for males under 18 years old are also relatively high in Herefordshire and although the numbers are small there was a big increase between 2002 and 2006 in admissions for both boys and girls aged under 16 years old. This was confirmed in the Annual Report on Herefordshire in 2008, which reported an immediate concern about the high rate of alcohol-specific hospital admission for under 18 year olds, which is well above the national and regional average.

In February 2008, we enlisted the help of student volunteers to conduct a short survey to get an small insight into attitudes to alcohol amongst 16-19 year olds at the three further education colleges in Hereford. This found:

- 75% of students questioned considered that they had been 'drunk' in the previous two weeks
- 63% said that what they had enjoyed most in the last two weeks involved drinking
- 32% were concerned about someone's drinking
- 80% failed to estimate the government's daily drinking limit correctly
- 36% said they didn't know where to go to find out more about the misuse of alcohol

A repeat survey of 131 new college students in 2009 found similar results: 49% considered that they had been drunk in the previous two weeks, 26% were worried about someone's drinking and 37% wouldn't know where to go to find out more about misuse of alcohol. A worrying 78% of the students overestimated the number of bottles of WKD that could be consumed before exceeding the recommended daily amount of alcohol.

² Summary available

http://www.thevsa.org.uk/files/teenage_lifestyle_survey_2_03_07_1.pdf

³ Summary available

http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/community_and_living/young_people/23165.asp

Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, the issues found in young people and adults in Herefordshire appear to be in very sharp focus in the 16-19 year old age group and safe drinking messages just do not appear to be reaching them.

The Bottletop project

Initial project development

The project began as a partnership between drama in education specialists The Play House, Herefordshire-based sustainable development charity the Bulmer Foundation, vibrant local web designers Infinity Unlimited, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and the three further education colleges in Hereford – Hereford Sixth Form College, Herefordshire College of Technology and Hereford College of Arts. The development work was funded by Scottish and Newcastle UK Ltd, now Heineken UK. Scottish and Newcastle, the Bulmer Foundation and The Play House received an investment from Arts and Business to develop their creative partnership. The A&B Investment Programme was funded by Arts Council England, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Scottish Executive.

The project followed a number of successful pilot collaborations in Herefordshire between public agencies, Scottish and Newcastle and the Bulmer Foundation, including an Alcohol Arrest Referral Scheme that has been operating since 2003, and an Alcohol Liaison Nurse at the County Hospital that started in 2008. The overall effectiveness of these interventions, and long term outcomes continue to be evaluated.

The Bottletop project followed on from the *Out of It* theatre in education workshops run by The Play House. Out-of-It was commissioned by the Primary Care Trust, and worked in schools and pupil referral units in the County to explore the use of alcohol, its effects and consequences and strategies for its safe use with children, focussing on the 14-15 yr age group. Scottish and Newcastle supported this project by funding the development of a website to capture the workshop materials and information.

From discussions within the Out-Of-It steering group the concept of the Bottletop project emerged.

There was a growing recognition that whilst this excellent drama-based work was taking place in schools, young adults aged 16-19 years old had received little attention at what is a critical time in their development, when alcohol was already playing a part in their lives. We recognised that a different approach was required for this age group and decided that a way to focus activity would be to ask 16-19

year olds to develop content for a website on alcohol awareness for their peers in Herefordshire (and beyond). If government messages are not even getting through to many Herefordshire adults, who better to speak to younger people about a healthy relationship with alcohol? A website was a way to make the project inclusive, since people of all skills could be involved using whatever media they wanted. The resulting information would also be widely accessible through the web, particularly important in a rural county. However, just as crucial as the final web site was the process of engagement and facilitating young people to explore these issues. The young people who volunteered to become involved in the project benefited from the experience – as one said “Keep getting people our age involved with stuff like this!” All the partners have learned a lot during the project which we have seen as being a pilot for a new way of engaging with young people; reflection and evaluation has been critical throughout.

As a practical way to get this pilot project started, we decided that it was simplest to approach 16-19 year olds on the campus of the three further education colleges in Hereford. The project received strong support from management at the Colleges, who recognise the importance of engaging with their students in creative ways at a time when they are starting to make their own lifestyle choices.

Engagement

Using a variety of new media and word-of-mouth methods of engagement, students at the Colleges were alerted to a series of amusing theatrical episodes taking place around the Colleges that acted as a stimulus to excite and provoke interest. These allowed information about the full nature of the project to subsequently be revealed and students' participation invited.

Facilitation

Participating students were given the opportunity to explore their experiences, stories and perspectives in relation to the issue of alcohol use and misuse, through drama. This stage of the process enabled the students to identify potential areas of interest which formed the basis of their activities which would ultimately be shared on the website. Students were supported in this process by drama practitioners from The Play House. The students who chose to work with us on the project had a range of interests and backgrounds and their enthusiasm, energy (generally outside college hours), and commitment to this project has been truly exemplary.

It was also very useful for the future development of the project to observe that where individual members of staff at the Colleges became engaged too, the student numbers in their areas rocketed. Indeed, whilst most of the participants interviewed had seen the initial drama-based engagement, and found it interesting or enjoyable, nearly all of those that actually participated in the project came through the involvement of a member of staff. We must here particularly celebrate the enthusiasm of two members of staff in particular, Adelaide McLaughlin who teaches Health Studies at Herefordshire College of Technology and Bonnie Simpson, head of drama at Hereford College of Arts for recognising the opportunities that the project offered to their students and for supporting them through their activities. Due to timetable and site logistics, groups from each college generally worked independently.

During the process, students looked at the existing web-based guidance and the overwhelming reaction was that the sites were unrealistic, too "preachy" and had too much writing to engage young people.

"Some of the stories written were really unrealistic as it used language that younger people don't tend to use such as 'square', it had unrealistic consequences of drinking such as death, pregnancy, STIs etc. These things don't always happen due to drink – people could choose not to use contraception when drunk or sober."

"Unrealistic, was obviously not done by young people and from their point of view. It made me think of a bunch of business toffs sat round trying to send a message across, but was so obviously not young people, boring/too much writing, not always clear the sites where to go and where to access what information. Not worth looking at, wouldn't spend the amount of time needed to look at it all – Hours!, judgemental – 'unwanted babies'."

"Dull, unrealistic, out of touch."

This said, they picked up useful information from the sites, particularly on alcohol units.

Production

It was our hope that students would want to work on different aspects of the alcohol story, and in a range of media, to allow the website to be as broadly accessible as possible. We were not prescriptive about the form that the web-based content would take as it was essential that the students create something that will live for them and their peers, and allow them to apply a number of disciplines to promote alcohol awareness.

When we set out, we thought that this might include streamed videos of drama workshops, storyboards, technical innovation showcases, interactive resources and sources of support. As you can see on the site, the range of media is excellent and the content reflects the backgrounds of the students who became involved. The students have done an amazing job, and Chris Preece from Infinity Unlimited has expertly pulled their work together to present the students' work in exciting ways.

The desire from College of Arts students to develop and produce an epic film – *Empties* - we had not foreseen, and this part of the project took a lot of resources and time from everyone involved.

All of the content that was produced for the website came through facilitated student activities and are their own ideas and words on the subject. As a result, the site may not be to everyone's liking or always be "on message" but we believe that it is essential that Bottletop is true to the genuine student's voice. There were however certain ground rules that were agreed by the partners and students throughout the process:

- During rehearsals and filming no alcohol is consumed by anyone under 18.

- Any representation of drinking or alcohol misuse in any part of the film is acted, not real.

- Any perceived alcoholic drinks are 'dummies', i.e. liquid in bottles being filmed must be water or similar.

- No brand labels are to be visible during final edit of film.

- If any under 18's are involved in filming, explicit permission received from teachers and parents.

Bottletop: Phase 2

The second phase of Bottletop, in 2009/10, was funded by Safer Herefordshire, the statutory community safety partnership that aims to make Herefordshire an even safer place. Learning from the experience of the initial development, this phase aimed to develop links with staff at local organisations that already engage with groups of young people, primarily in the 16-19 year old age group.

The idea was to explore ways that their young people could become involved in the Bottletop project within their existing group objectives to mutual advantage. The aim was to enhance the learning experience in these groups, both on personal awareness and other skills, whilst at the same time continuing to explore fresh aspects to alcohol misuse and personal safety for sharing with their peers through the Bottletop website. This approach required relationships to be developed with potential organisations and to consider how the model could work for each of them but within an overall vision.

Project vision

Bottletop.info is a website about safe drinking, made in Herefordshire by young people for young people.

The aim of Bottletop is to provide young people with relevant, up to date and non-judgemental information about alcohol that gives them the opportunity to make safer choices when drinking.

The website contains many 'bottletops' that can be clicked on to display different messages, produced by different groups of young people in different media.

Our vision is that Bottletop will evolve and develop, working with new groups of young people and dealing with those alcohol issues that affect them.

Every year we want groups of young people to create a bottletop or two for the website. We envisage a youth worker facilitating the first two sessions to discuss alcohol and empower the young people to come up with new ideas for the website. Then, depending on their ideas, they would work with professionals who can help in using the media that they choose to work with, to make their ideas come alive and be showcased on the website.

We want Herefordshire young people from all social backgrounds and of all skills and abilities to have the opportunity to take part in the project to make it interesting and relevant for all.

We envisage that those young people involved in creating a bottletop will learn the most about alcohol and its effects, but that their contribution to the website will also raise awareness in other young people who subsequently visit Bottletop.info.

Project specification

A general engagement specification was developed to provide guidance for new partners.

Look at the existing site www.bottletop.info. Each bottletop contains work by groups of local young people. Consider the media that have been used and the messages that other young people have made on the site.

What aspects of drinking that are important for you have not been covered, or what messages do you think that you could put across in more powerful ways? You may want to look at the recent government publicity and websites on alcohol and think about how to make these relevant to Herefordshire. Record your findings so that you can report back to the project team.

We want you to produce one or more pieces that can be added as bottletops onto www.bottletop.info. Think about using different media to catch young people's attention such as dance, mime, interviews etc. Each piece should be short with a clear message about safe drinking or being safe when drinking. It must be relevant to young people in Herefordshire.

Here are some ideas from the project team, just to get you started: Are you still drunk the morning after a party?; walking drunk in Commercial Road; irrational arguments and fights; making crap decisions; casual sex

It is fundamental that the work is relevant to the young people involved. However, it was also important for the sustainability of the project that consideration be taken of the key local strategic priorities so that the project could at least focus some of its attention upon problem areas where Bottletop might be able to make a real difference.

A review of the current local priority indicators suggested that the Bottletop project could have a role in addressing priorities across five of the local Policy and Delivery areas:

Priority	Indicator(s) including those from national indicator set (shown with a *)	Bottletop
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE		
Increase access to and participation in learning and development at all levels in order to raise achievement, address worklessness and improve workforce skills	NI152 - Working age people on out of work benefits*	Students introduced to new skills: -project management -team working -effective health promotion
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
Encourage and enable children and young people in Herefordshire to achieve their potential and participate in positive activities	NI110 - Young People's participation in positive activities (local indicator)	Commitment of the students to the project Encouraging others to participate Attention on the public good
Improve participation in, and achievement for, young people in education, employment and training post 14	NI117 - 16-18 years old who are not in education, training or employment (NEET)*	Engage with groups that work with NEETs
STRONGER COMMUNITIES		
Encourage thriving communities where people are able to influence change and take action to improve their area, regardless of their background	NI1 - % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together*	Working in groups to a common goal Web-based format allows contributions from people with all skills
Encourage thriving communities where people are able to influence change and take action to improve their area, regardless of their background.	NI4 - % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality	Young people take responsibility for health promotion
Encourage thriving communities where people are able to influence change and take action to improve their area, regardless of their background.	NI6 - Participation of regular volunteering	Commitment of the students to the project Encouraging others to participate Attention on the public good
HEALTH AND WELL BEING		
Encourage and promote a healthy lifestyle with particular attention to: Reducing smoking, reducing levels of obesity and Avoiding excessive consumption of alcohol.	NI 39 – Alcohol harm related hospital admission rates (local indicator)	Focus of attention on alcohol misuse and personal safety in a language genuine to local young people
SAFER COMMUNITIES		
To further reduce the low levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the	NI21 – Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime	Focus on drink driving Emphasis on personal safety

county and to reduce any disproportionate fear of such.	issues by the local council and police*	Taking responsibility for own actions
To further reduce the low levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the county and to reduce any disproportionate fear of such.	NI19 Rate of proven re-offending by young people	Focus on drink driving Emphasis on personal safety Taking responsibility for own actions
Improve safety for road users in the county.	NI47 people killed or seriously injured*	Focus on drink driving Emphasis on personal safety Taking responsibility for own actions
LOCAL		
Improve the availability of sustainable services and facilities and access to them.		Young people take responsibility for health promotion Strong promotion of the website Signposting to specialist services on the website

Initial work began by working again with health studies students at Herefordshire College of Technology due to the very clear fit with the subject that they are learning. In consultation with the students, it was decided that this class would focus upon drink driving, with groups working through different aspects of the problem that were directly relevant to them. Drink driving is a real concern in a rural county, and countering the problem is relevant all the Safer Herefordshire priorities shown above. By providing a young person's perspective, Bottletop can complement the good work that is already being undertaken in this area.

Adelaide McLaughlin, who teaches at Herefordshire College of Technology says "Bottletop has caught the imagination of my students and brought the syllabus to life. They have thought deeply, learned new skills and had some amazing experiences". The exercise required the students to think deeply about the issues, so that they could convey powerful messages to others through the site. It also brought them a new range of experiences, from real health promotion to project management and film-making. This is borne out by the comment of some of the students participating in a film shoot "It was amazing to get the police involved which made it so realistic when we were filming, and to hire real actors for some parts. It's been an awesome and exciting experience for all involved."

West Mercia Police gave invaluable support to this work, in sharing with the students their experience of the real impacts of drink driving.

The students are immensely proud of the results

“When I saw the finished film I thought OMG and I thought it was pretty cool”

“When we saw the finished film it gave me goosebumps”

“We might never know whether we saved lives, but we’re proud of our bottle top. And we would be really proud if we did save lives.”

Two classes at Hereford College of Arts participated. Through the efforts of their teachers, Bonnie Simpson, Dan Brown and Rachel Lambert students studying Performing Arts and Media Arts developed work within their syllabus. The short Bottle top adverts, which focus attention on the Bottle top ‘brand’, were completed by Media Arts students who were given seven days to produce the pieces to a specific client brief. This gave these students a real glimpse of the type of way that they might be required to deliver in the outside world. Feedback from these students is that it was interesting to take part in a live brief. All the respondents enjoyed the experience and recommend other students to get involved. As one of them put it, “It’s fun, and you get grades for it”.

The project looked to widen involvement during the year and the process has started.

We were joined by 2XL Youth Projects, who provided content for Bottle top by young people that they engage with. Bottle top is seen as complementary to the work that they have been doing in delivering creative workshops in schools and colleges across Herefordshire to raise awareness of the risks of binge drinking and to promote safe and sensible drinking.

We were also delighted that Worcestershire and Herefordshire Youth Offending Service have started to participate in the scheme. As part of his referral order, one local young offender was encouraged to share his experience of getting into trouble through alcohol. His story tells first hand of the stress and waiting involved in the judicial system and the effect on his family.

“I then went to court for a hearing which was just by myself which I felt happier about because all I’ve done is let people down so far, The hearing was just to be told I had to come back a month later for my sentencing, which meant more waiting.

I later then had to go to court for my sentencing after a long and excruciating wait. My dad came along this time who also had to stand up in court, which made me feel inadequate to deal with own problems and suffer the consequences from my actions and put my dad under that misery for standing up for his criminal son. I felt equally guilty that he had been dragged in this mess amongst the whole of my family, including my little brother who used to look up to me an awful lot.”

We want to do more work to share real but everyday experiences like this.

Finding the right groups to work with locally is time-consuming and to an extent relies on serendipity; finding that member of staff who can see how the project might fit with their personal or organisational objectives. This is a slow process which can only really fruit when the time is right. The role of the project is to make the connections, increasingly to work with statutory agencies who can steer people in the direction, and to promote success.

To date, 80 Herefordshire young people have been directly actively involved in producing bottletops.

Website

The website was developed by Infinity Unlimited with a small student advisory focus group and is designed to change over time. There are many engaging ideas that remain to be explored. Attention has been focused on the rich site content rather than, at this stage, high interactivity. During the second phase of development, a project steering group comprising representatives of partner organisations was established. The steering group, which both meets and engages electronically, represents the range of stakeholders involved. Participants represent the colleges, the Bulmer Foundation, Infinity Unlimited, Safer Herefordshire, the Primary Care Trust, Healthy Schools, Youth Offending Service, SHYPP and 2XL.

A careful watch is taken of the number of visits to the website. Since launch in November 2008, the site has received 2,440 visits, of which 1,849 are new visitors and the site receives visits day in, day out. This is a massive achievement. And a new visitor on average looks at 3 pages of the site, so they are exploring a bit. The objective is to attract local people to site at least once, so that they know what is there and can return should they need to. Just knowing where to come if the need arises is particularly important. Web statistics also allow us to see how sensitive site traffic is to promotional events and publicity. As would be hoped, there are clear spikes following promotion, so the message is getting through.

Promotion

As the genuine voice of young people, talking to other young people, Bottletop is a really different approach. Thanks to the offices of the Director of Public Health, this reached the ears of Government when the project was featured in the 2010 Parliamentary Yearbook as an example of innovative partnership working.

The young people launched the site to the key representatives of local agencies at the end of 2008 and spoke about the project at Herefordshire's Health and Wellbeing conference in 2009. They are the strongest advocates for the power of their work.

Locally the project has featured in newspapers, in the *Herefordshire Matters* magazine and is promoted on other sites, such as the Safer Herefordshire homepage.

In December 2009 the project worked with Safer Herefordshire to produce a series of posters putting a local perspective on the government campaign "You wouldn't start a night like this, so why end it that way....". These were very widely distributed around the County.

The site is also marketed using business cards, key rings and t-shirts. In particular, key rings (1,000 issued) and t-shirts (of which 150 are being worn by young people who have helped the project) help to keep the website visible to young people.

Young people are helping us to target promotion even more effectively.

Evaluation

We are working to fully understand the value of this type of early intervention project in raising awareness and engagement with the topic of alcohol misuse within the 16-19 year old age group and the role of being part of fun, drama-based facilitation in achieving this. In particular the Bulmer Foundation are working with Herefordshire Primary Care Trust to assess the costs subsequently saved by public services in preparing the youngsters engaged in the project, and who use the resulting website, for a healthy relationship with alcohol throughout their lives.

We believe that this is the first time in the UK that anything of this nature has been attempted with this age-group and all the students and the partners in this project should be proud of the excellent result that we have achieved.

What the students say they have gained from involvement in the project

In their own words:

"An awareness of the effects of alcohol"

"I found out things I didn't know about before"

"Found it fun and enjoyable"

"I was impressed with how I managed each task"

"How to be safe when drinking"

"The amount that I drink is a little much"

"More confidence to do something like that again"

"Being aware of what I look like when drunk"

"The damage it does to your body"

"I now understand a lot more about alcohol limits"

"How to be safe on a night out"

"I don't think I realised when it started how significant it would be"

"Great experience"

"It was great to work in a group and to work so well together"

"It's a great experience using our individual creativity to make a difference".

And in some cases (but by no means all), students report that involvement in the project has already changed their attitude to drinking:

"I always make sure that I have money left over to get food and a taxi."

"I think about drinking a lot more after working with Bottletop. I often work out what units I'm drinking and how long its going to be in my body for."

"I have learnt loads myself about alcohol through being involved in the project."

And of course what each student now has absorbed from their involvement in the project is some information that allows them to be more aware of the implications of what they are doing when drinking, and this in itself should make each one safer.

The messages students want the Bottletop website to communicate to their peers

In their own words:

"Creating an awareness of the pros and cons of alcohol in society without enticement."

"Informing people in a laid back fashion.....approaching the issue with positivity...not always associating alcohol with negativity"

"Showing that the 'Information is there if they need it'."

"Providing useful facts and things that will help people on a night out."

"It was really exciting to be doing something for other young people. I think we're probably the best to know how to put the information across as we are the same age."

"Drink and have a good time, just do it safely. Don't let it ruin a good night."

"Be safe while drinking but having a good time, make them aware of possibilities, how to have a good night without it going wrong."

"To drink if you want to, but the website provides advice, tips and information on what could happen and if it does how to deal with it."

"That if you are going to drink, be aware of the affects so you have a good night, not end up having a night you regret..."

"Drinking is fun but staying safe while drinking is very important."

The content and feel of the site that the students have spent so much time developing with the team is:

"Bottletop: Top info 4U about alcohol 'n' drinking"

The Future

Under the management of Herefordshire Primary Care Trust we hope that the site will continue to develop in future years and the new groups of students will also have their opinions heard and have the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the Herefordshire community. What this project shows above anything else is that when young people are engaged in creative ways, there are no bounds to their enthusiasm and positive energy. The students genuinely wanted to share with others some of the issues that they have explored themselves, and indeed to help others to learn from some of their experiences to develop a sensible relationship with alcohol.