



"Leading efforts to achieve a healthier, happier and safer Aberdeenshire, free from harm due to alcohol and other drugs"

Alcohol and Drug Issues Affecting Young People in Aberdeenshire

Feb 2010

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1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing on the extent of drugs and alcohol issues affecting young people and which communities are affected in Aberdeenshire.
- 1.2 We are fortunate that in Aberdeenshire, there is an extensive range of sources of data available to paint a picture of youth alcohol and drug use. These are summarised below.

2 2009 Viewpoint Survey

- 2.1 The May 2009 Viewpoint survey on community safety concluded that of the 892 responses received (73% response rate), 50% indicated from a list of 11 options that their biggest community safety concern was 'underage drinking'. Next was controlled drugs (47%). This figure doesn't significantly vary across the 6 areas of Aberdeenshire.

3 Grampian Youth Lifestyle Survey 2007

- 3.1 The fifth Grampian youth lifestyle survey was carried out in 2007, sampling 10% of pupils from years 1 to 6, covering all secondary schools in Grampian. The self-completion questionnaire included questions on a number of areas including alcohol and drugs. 1127 pupils from Aberdeenshire responded with a response rate of 73%.
- 3.2 Given the size and quality of the response, the data gathered provides a powerful and accurate statistical measure of young people's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. These data relate to Aberdeenshire as a whole. We are in the process of seeking permission to disaggregate into the 6 localities and this will be provided when available.

Attitudes to Drinking Alcohol

- 3.3 Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a list of statements, to determine young people's attitudes towards drinking alcohol. Responses were as follows.

	those who agree	
	Aberdeenshire	Grampian
	%	%

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Drinking too much alcohol can cause health problems	89	89
One drink with the family is OK	85	84
Alcohol can make people take chances, ie drinking & driving	84	83
Drinking alcohol makes people lose control of themselves	71	70
Alcohol is expensive	70	70
Drinking alcohol can lead to unplanned pregnancy or catching sexually transmitted diseases	69	69
Drinking alcohol is sociable	57	55
Drunk people are unpleasant	54	54
Drinking alcohol is enjoyable	53	52
Drinking alcohol makes people violent	53	54
Drinking alcohol helps people forget their worries	42	42
Drinking alcohol helps people relax	40	40
Once you start drinking you are unlikely to stop	39	40
People under 18 should be allowed to buy alcohol	24	25

Alcohol Consumption

- 3.4 Of the young people in Aberdeenshire 70% had taken an alcoholic drink compared with 69% of everyone surveyed. As would be expected this figure varied by school year ranging from 30% for 1st year pupils in Aberdeenshire to 95% for 6th year pupils.
- 3.5 In order to establish the quantities of alcohol consumed by pupils, those who had taken alcohol in the seven days prior to the survey were asked to detail what they had consumed. This was then converted to units of alcohol.
- 3.6 Out of all the responses, 265 (48%) pupils had consumed alcohol in the seven days prior to the survey. For these, the mean consumption level was 16.5 units for Aberdeenshire pupils compared to 18.5 units in Grampian.
- 3.7 Mean units of alcohol consumed in last seven days

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	Aberdeenshire	Grampian
Males	17.6	19.7
Females	15.4	17.5
Average	16.5	18.5

Frequency of drinking alcohol

Aberdeenshire						
	Given up	1-2 a year	< 1 a month	> 1 a month	1-2 a week	3+ week
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Year 1	6	54	25	12	0.0	4
Year 2	4	38	34	15	8	1
Year 3	1	34	20	29	16	1
Year 4	2	15	21	39	20	3
Year 5	2	14	13	48	22	2
Year 6	0	9	12	36	39	4
Total	2	24	21	33	19	2
total	4	27	21	30	17	3

- 3.8 When compared to the overall 2001 figures it is evident that young people now drink more often, with higher percentages in categories 1-2 a year, <1 a month and >1 a month.
- 3.9 Young people from Aberdeenshire were most likely to drink alcohol at parties (88%). The second most popular place was at home with family (70%), while 42% of young people admitted to drinking in the street and 36% to drinking in pubs/night-clubs.
- 3.10 The average age for first drinking alcohol is 12 years old and when respondents first got drunk is 14 years old.
- 3.11 Respondents were asked if they had ever been really drunk and how often in the last month they drank 5 or more drinks

How often in last month drank 5 or more drinks?

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	Males %	Females %	Total %
4 or more times	16	15	15
3 times	12	12	12
Twice	15	20	18
Once	18	17	18
Not had 5 or more drinks	22	18	20
Never had 5 or more drinks	18	17	17

3.12 Nearly 40% of respondents had never had, or not had 5 or more drinks in the last 30 days. Having 5 or more drinks 3 times in the last month was 12%, once and twice was 36% and 4 or more times was 15%.

Have you ever been really drunk?

	Males %	Females %	Total %
No never	34	28	31
Yes, once	15	24	18
Yes, 2-3 times	24	27	26
Yes, 4-10 times	13	15	14
Yes, more than 10 times	15	10	12

3.13 Of those who consume alcohol, 11%, of young people from Aberdeenshire would like to cut down on the amount of alcohol they drink. These young people drank an average of 16.5 unit of alcohol in the seven days prior to the survey, a decrease of approximately 2 units since the 2001 survey.

Sources of Help

3.14 When asked what would help them to cut down on alcohol intake responses were as follows:

	Aberdeenshire	Grampian
	%	%
Leading a less stressful life	63	63

Advice and support from family and friends	62	37
More recreational facilities available at reasonable prices.	49	50
Information from Healthpoints	38	39
Meeting a new group of friends	31	37
Advice from an alcohol advisory group	29	30
Advice and support from teachers	23	23

3.15 There has been a little change in respondents who say more recreational facilities at reasonable prices would help them cut down their alcohol intake since 2001.

Reasons for Drinking

3.16 Young people gave many reasons for drinking alcohol. Some of these were as follows:

	Aberdeenshire	Grampian
	%	%
Like the taste	87	85
Like the way it makes you feel	69	71
It helps you relax	62	63
It helps you talk to people more easily	68	69
Want to get drunk	44	46
It helps you forget your worries	37	39

Results of Drinking

3.17 Young people were asked if anything had happened to them as a result of drinking.

	Never %	Once %	Twice or more %

Alcohol and Drug Issues Affecting Young People in Aberdeenshire

Had an argument	64	21	15
Had a fight	83	10	7
Visited a hospital A&E department	97	1	1
Been admitted to hospital overnight	98	1	1
Had an injury that needed to be seen by a doctor	95	3	1
Been taken home by police	93	5	2
Stayed off school	90	7	3
Been sick (vomited)	55	23	22
Tried any drugs	86	7	7
Been in trouble with the police	88	7	6
Had unprotected sexual intercourse	93	3	5

- 3.18 The two highest percentages of things happening as a result of drinking are, being sick 45% and having an argument 36%.

Drug Use

- 3.19 This section of the questionnaire was used to determine young people's attitudes to drug taking and also the extent of drug misuse in Grampian. For the purpose of the questionnaire 'Drugs' were defined as those substances that had not been prescribed by a doctor or pharmacist for medical reasons. (These substances did not include alcohol or tobacco).
- 3.20 A third, 34%, of young people surveyed had been offered drugs and 14% of respondents had tried drugs. As would be expected, older pupils were more likely to have taken drugs.
- 3.21 Respondents who had never taken drugs were not required to complete any further questions and percentages given in the following tables are based only on those who had taken drugs.
- 3.22 Respondents were asked to give information on the type of drugs that they had used and also how often these drugs are taken. This was done by asking them to complete the table shown below. In order to ensure that the information provided was accurate, a 'dummy' variable was included in the list. Pupils who claimed to have taken the dummy variable were excluded from the analysis.

Percentage of drug users who had taken the following
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Alcohol and Drug Issues Affecting Young People in Aberdeenshire

	% never taken	% taken 1-2 times	% taken monthly	% taken 1-2 days / week	% taken 3-7 days / week
Cannabis	17.8	42.0	22.1	6.1	12.1
Magic Mushrooms	91.8	6.5	1.7	-	-
Amphetamines	89.7	6.9	2.5	-	0.9
Ecstasy	82.0	12.1	4.2	0.8	0.9
Diazepam (valium)	95.6	1.7	1.7	0.6	-
Cocaine	81.6	12.4	5.2	-	0.8
Temazepam	97.4	1.7	0.9	-	-
LSD, Acid	92.3	3.4	1.7	-	-
Unprescribed 118's,	98.2	1.8	-	-	-
Methadone	97.1	2.9	-	-	-
Heroin	96.6	0.9	2.5	-	-
Gas/Glue – other solvents	75.0	13.3	9.1	1.8	0.8
Poppers (Amyl Nitrate)	78.5	11.6	8.1	0.9	0.9
Crack (rock, stone)	94.0	5.2	-	0.9	-
Anabolic Steroids (roids)	100	-	-	-	-
Methamphetamine	94.7	3.5	1.7	-	-

- 3.23 The results show cannabis is used more commonly than any other type of drug. This is also true for Grampian as a whole.
- 3.24 The higher than expected prevalence of self-reported volatile substance abuse and ongoing use was highly concerning. Given the explicit dangers inherent from experimental use of solvents, and this exacerbated by the evidence of a high percentage of continued use, it was clear that a specific and targeted VSA campaign was required. This was delivered via intensive multi-agency training on VSA in March 2009 and a month long radio campaign in August under the banner of “Not to be sniffed at”.
- 3.25 The following key messages were developed:
- 3.26 Prevalence: To challenge the perception that solvent abuse could be considered ‘a thing of the past’ (particularly the view of 70s/80s ‘glue sniffing’) across the Grampian area and thus challenge the

stereotype. The specific evidence for local prevalence had been collated from both the SALSUS and Youth Lifestyle Surveys.

- 3.27 Complexity: Acknowledgement that over 2000 licit products can be abused with limited controls over sale/ownership. Solvent abuse is often a hidden activity and the household is a key risk that parents would be given further information in order to fully appreciate and understand risks.
- 3.28 Risks & Dangers: Sudden Sniffing Death (SSD) which is unique to solvent abuse and can happen at 1st or 1000th episode of abuse. Clarify and explain this and other risks/dangers inherent in solvent abuse.
- 3.29 Awareness & Education: Breaking the cycle. The methodology of the campaign was to address solvent abuse through increasing awareness of risks and educating parents to 'get the facts', and thus feel more confident to discuss the issue with their children. Thus the link to the 'Know the Score' parents campaign message was adapted, as this had prior extensive exposure, and parents would be then more able to understand and contextualise solvents within the wider message. Further information, helpful tips about talking to children and sources of support also made explicit

Reasons for Taking Drugs

- 3.30 The following reasons were given for taking drugs:

	Aberdeenshire %	Grampian %
Drugs help you relax	53	53
You like the way drugs make you feel	55	51
Drugs help you to talk to people more easily	33	35
Drugs help you forget your problems	34	31
You like drugs	33	32
You don't want to feel the odd one out	17	18
You feel forced to take drugs	5	8
Drugs make you dance better	19	19
Taking drugs is a mature thing to do	7	5
You need drugs to feel 'normal'	6	5
You feel unable to stop even if you wanted	9	8

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Ease of acquiring drugs

3.31 Respondents were asked how easy it would be for them to get illegal drugs, results were:

	Aberdeenshire %	Grampian %
Very easy	38	40
Fairly easy	38	37
Fairly difficult	5	7
Very difficult	5	3
Impossible	2	2
Don't know	11	11

3.32 All respondents were given a list of statements about drugs and asked to agree or disagree. Responses are outlined below highlighting the difference in responses when comparing drug users with non-users.

Attitudes towards drugs

	% who agree with statement			
	Aberdeenshire		Grampian	
	Drug user	Non drug user	Drug user	Non drug user
Taking drugs not prescribed by a doctor can cause health problems	72	78	72	77
Once you start taking drugs you are unlikely to stop	57	83	62	83
Taking drugs makes people lose control of themselves	67	84	73	85
People who take drugs are unpleasant	23	62	32	64
Taking drugs is sociable	27	9	24	8
Some drugs that are illegal should be made legal	57	18	56	20

There is a safe limit for taking un-prescribed drugs	54	22	53	22
Drugs are safer than alcohol	16	4	15	4
Taking drugs is good for my image	7	3	6	3

- 3.33 Clearly there is a difference in views between respondents who have tried or regularly take drugs and those who have never taken drugs. Among the most noticeable was that 62% of those who have never taken drugs think people who take drugs are unpleasant in contrast to 23% of those who have taken drugs. Over half, 57%, of those who have taken drugs feel that it should be legalised. This is compared to 75% in 2001, a difference of 18%. However there is an 11% decrease in non drug users who think some drugs should be made legal.
- 3.34 The majority, 88%, of drug users have gained their knowledge relating to drugs from friends.

4 Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey 2006

- 4.1 The Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) was established by the Scottish Executive to provide a broad-based approach to the monitoring of substance use in the context of other lifestyle, health and social factors. In 2006 – the latest year of the localised survey – a total of 23,180 pupils in Scotland took part, of which 1,133 (5%) were from Aberdeenshire schools. In Aberdeenshire, 65% of schools agreed to take part and provided a response rate of 87%.
- 4.2 SALSUS provided some intelligence into the alcohol and drug user patterns of 13 and 15 year olds in Aberdeenshire.
- 4.3 In Aberdeenshire, 61% of 13 year-olds and 88% of 15-year-olds have had an alcoholic drink at some point in their lifetime, which is slightly **higher** than the Scotland-wide findings. 7% of 13-year-olds and 31% of 15-year-olds reportedly consumed alcohol at least once a week (with no significant differences noted between the sexes), which is **lower** than the Scotland-wide findings (there was no ESPAD equivalent). The majority of these pupils stated that their families did not mind their drinking, and believed it was 'OK' for people of their age to consume alcohol 'to see what it was like'.
- 4.4 At first glance, and in its simplest form, this would suggest that the 'culture' of alcohol consumption among adolescents and their families in Aberdeenshire is one of inquisitiveness or experimentation on the part of young people and acceptance or at

least acquiescence on the part of their families. These attitudes

Figure 4 - % of respondents who have ever consumed alcohol

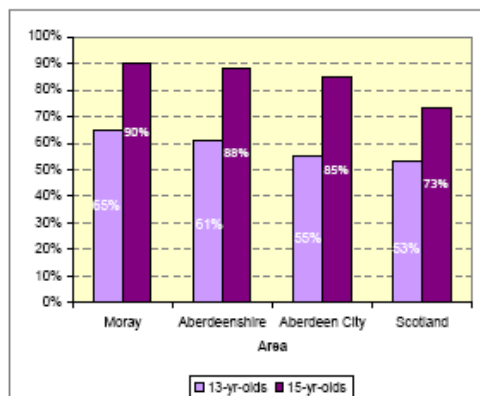
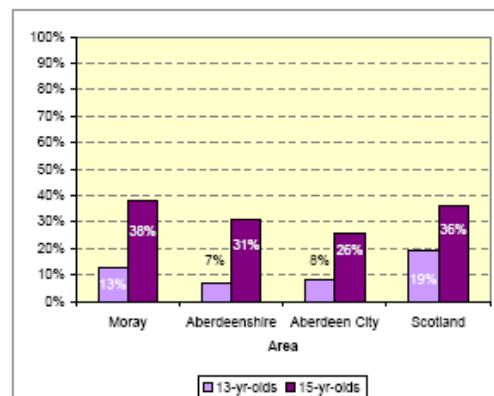


Figure 5 - % of respondents who consume alcohol at least once a week



were similar to the Scotland-wide findings.

- 4.5 Marked, too, is the difference that age has on the drinking patterns of adolescents. Age of initiation is important for at least two reasons. First, research in the US has found that the earlier the age at which people begin drinking, the more likely they are to become alcohol dependent later in life. Those who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence at some time in their lives compared with those who have their first drink at age 20 or older. Those who begin drinking in their teenage years are also more likely to experience alcohol-related unintentional injuries than those who begin drinking at a later age. Adverse effects of the early onset of drinking may be shorter term as well: research has found a younger age of initiation to be strongly related to a higher level of alcohol misuse at ages 17 and 18.15

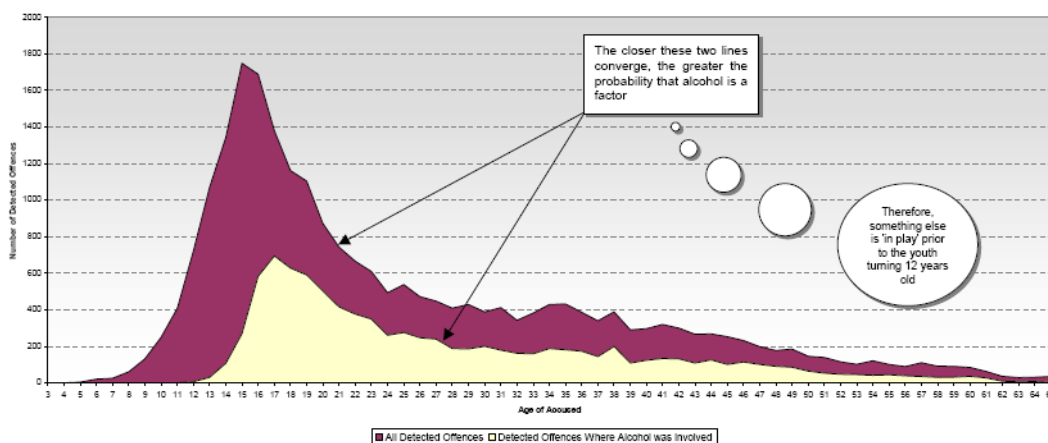
5 Aberdeenshire Community Safety Intelligence – Vandalism, Breach of the Peace and Petty Assault (2004 – 2008)

- 5.1 Historical criminal data pertaining to a sample of Aberdeenshire youth (predominantly male) suggests that in many cases antisocial or deviant behaviour *precedes* alcohol (mis)use. The graph below, which measures all detected crimes of Vandalism, Breach of the Peace and Petty Assault (2004 – 2008), supports this observation. We can see that, cumulatively speaking, alcohol did not become a factor in criminal behaviour until the youth attained the age of 12, as demonstrated by the yellow area in the graph. Prior to this, alcohol was deemed *not* to be a factor in 97.3% of the total number of detected offences. Indeed, alcohol only really became a factor when the youth turned 16, at which age approximately 34% of the detected offences involved alcohol. And this figure was set to

rise in subsequent years. Between the ages of 17 and 27, at least half the total number of detected offences committed by this age group involved some degree of alcohol intoxication – a relationship that was to be maintained throughout most of the subsequent age groups (give or take a few percentage points).

- 5.2 Please note that the recording of an accused's sobriety status was not mandatory pre-2007/08. Therefore the yellow area in the graph could be in reality much higher.

Figure 7 – Total Number of Detected Crimes of Vandalism, Breach of the Peace and Petty Assault in Aberdeenshire, and the Relationship to Alcohol (2004 – 2008)



- 5.3 Figure 7 – Total Number of Detected Crimes of Vandalism, Breach of the Peace and Petty Assault in Aberdeenshire, and the Relationship to Alcohol (2004 – 2008)

- 5.4 The closer these two lines converge, the greater the probability that alcohol is a factor

- 5.5 This suggests that the relationship between criminal behaviour and underage drinking is not as clear cut as was perhaps first thought. Alcohol appears to have no immediate part to play in the few years prior to the accused turning 12 years old (that is, no immediate affect as a result of their alcohol intake: alcohol (mis)use by parents and peers and all the related consequences stemming from that may have a part to play).

- 5.6 Analysis of the period 2004 – 2008 has shown that those who committed crimes in their mid-teens whilst under the influence of alcohol had also committed crimes at younger ages whilst sober. It appears, therefore, that antisocial behaviour is perhaps a substantive cause of, or predisposing factor to, underage alcohol (mis)use. In other words, deviant behaviour and alcohol consumption is part of a sequence of delinquency first exhibited in early youth.

6 Current Youth Offences Relating to Alcohol and Drugs

6.1 Liane producing

7 Parental Attitudes Survey

7.1 Given the ADP's concerns around prevailing parental attitudes towards underage drinking, a short intelligence gathering survey was used with parents attending the Parental Involvement Conference held at Oldmeldrum Academy on 30th October 2009.

7.2 24 parents completed the questionnaire asking about their attitudes to underage drinking.

7.3 Of the 24 completed questionnaires 83% of respondents stated that underage drinking was OK under certain circumstances (such as special occasions). The greatest worry for parents in terms of underage drinking was that their child may end up requiring medical attention, after that followed the worry that their child may be involved in anti social behaviour and thirdly, that their child's academic performance may suffer.

7.4 When asked 'at what age is it appropriate to begin talking to a child/young person about underage alcohol use', 65% of respondents stated that information and education about alcohol should be given to the under 12 age group and 35% felt it should be delivered to 12/13 year olds.

7.5 When asked 'at what age was an acceptable age to consume alcohol under the age of 18 in certain circumstances, i.e. supervised', 16.7% felt that age 14/15 was an acceptable age, 41.7% felt 15/16 year olds was an acceptable age and 41.7% felt 17 is an appropriate age.

7.6 When asked if parents would be 'interested in attending information sessions in relation to alcohol and/or other drugs within their community network' 87.5% stated that they would like to attend with their child, 33.3% would attend without their children and 8.3% stated they would not like to attend sessions.

7.7 Although this was only a small sample of parental attitudes it is somewhat worrying none the less than there were a small number of parents who consider 14/15 years old as being an acceptable age for consuming alcohol. These findings would seem to reflect the information taken from the SALSUS which informed that Aberdeenshire would seem to have a higher than the national average number of parents who tolerate (and possibly support) underage alcohol use.

- 7.8 However, encouragingly a high percentage of parents who completed the questionnaire would like to attend sessions along with their child to learn more about alcohol and other drugs.

8 Child Protection Intelligence

- 8.1 Children can be referred to the Children's Reporter under Ground J '...has misused alcohol or any drug, whether or not a controlled drug within the meaning of the Misuse of Drugs Act '71'. The following numbers have been referred under Ground J in recent years in Aberdeenshire:

- 2006/07 73
- 2007/08 113
- 2008/09 105

- 8.2 When interpreting these numbers, it is worth bearing in mind that under the Children (S) Act '95 the overarching principle is to undertake work to best meet the needs of a child. Voluntary work is always preferable so statutory involvement is only when a young person or family do not engage with services to the detriment of the best interests of the child.

9 Current priorities for Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership

- 9.1 The Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP), currently chaired by Colin McKenzie, are committed to bringing together partner agencies to address the issues that arise from alcohol or other drug use amongst Aberdeenshire's young people.
- 9.2 Overall, the figures do seem to show a reduction in availability of drugs and the number of children and young people who have used them. Alcohol figures have also reduced; this is both locally and nationally. This could be contributed to continued work by both voluntary, statutory and health projects that have aimed to educate our school children around alcohol and drug use.
- 9.3 However, concerns must be raised in the reported figures in respect of parental attitudes to both alcohol and drug use. In the survey parents fell below the national figures when it came to being concerned about their child's alcohol and drug use.
- 9.4 The ADP Education Sub Committee have commissioned Create Consultancy to carry out a Mapping exercise on Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco Education within Schools, Community Learning and Development and the Voluntary Sector in three selected areas in the Aberdeenshire. The purpose of the research is to determine

how effective the information is in changing behaviours. Further work will be undertaken to ascertain the views of young people and parents as to the effectiveness of information in relation to alcohol and other drug use. A final report on the findings of the group is expected in July 2010 with recommendations as to the next steps.

- 9.5 The Buchan Alcohol Project is focusing on Alcohol and Young People within the Buchan Area with a view to identify young people and the communities' attitude towards the issues relating to young people and alcohol use. The first stage of this project has been completed which resulted in the Buchan Alcohol Project Report being written which identified the views of young people and those living and working in Buchan. The second stage of the project is focusing on using a logic model approach, identify which services and activities are available at local level to reduce alcohol consumption amongst young people. Mapping local activity will help identify if there are any gaps in provision of services for young people and consultation with partners and young people will help to facilitate planning at a local level.
- 9.6 Aberdeenshire Council and the ADP commission a number of specialist services to support children and young people affected by parental or their own use of alcohol or other drug use.
- 9.7 Alcohol Support offer a counselling service to those children and young people who are affected by their alcohol use or affected by their alcohol use. This project is currently offering support to 40 children/families. Work undertaken by this agency involves individual sessions with children/young people to build on their resilience and self confidence to enable those children to reach their potential despite facing adversities in their home life.
- 9.8 Barnardos Gemini project offer specialist support to young people who are having difficulties as a result of their own alcohol or other drug use. 22 young people are currently engaged with this service.
- 9.9 Evidently, it is crucial we focus on the effectiveness of the education and services that we offer to young people who have used either a drug or alcohol to best help them address their substance use before it becomes problematic and possibly habitual in their adult life. At a time of working under the principles of Getting It Right For Every Child it is essential we continue to work towards every child in Aberdeenshire reaching their full potential as individuals and contributing to their communities to the best of their abilities.
- 9.10 The last SALSUS survey told us that Aberdeenshire had a higher than national average figures for parents who 'don't mind' their 13 and 15 year olds consuming alcohol. Factors such as these, that may have a bearing on discharge rates in years to come, are the issues that we need to address now.

- 9.11 Mephedrone along with Methyldone and other Cathinones are class B drugs attracting a potential prison sentence of up to 5 years and/or unlimited fine for possession and up to 14 years and/or unlimited fine for supply
- 9.12 There are growing concerns about the availability of so called legal highs information from Grampian Police suggests that like many other areas in Scotland, the prevalence of NRG1 is increasing. It appears to be used mainly by younger people, including those of secondary school age and students. Anecdotal accounts from users suggests that it's lack of regulation and therefore 'legal' status makes it more appealing as there are no punitive ramifications.

Key Messages:

The recent emergence of so called 'legal highs' is a cause for concern:

- Legal highs are *readily accessible and we have anecdotal evidence that local young people do have knowledge regarding the existence of 'legal highs', although we do not have accurate information as yet regarding the prevalence of use*
 - *The legal position of any substance should not be confused with its safety. There is a concern that many recreational drug users (and some young people in particular) are taking the view that legal = safe*
- Using Legal Highs can lead to unpredictable effects on the individual and very little is known about both the short and long term effects on human health.

The contents of this paper were provided by:

- Wayne Gault, ADP Lead Officer
- Val Arief, ADP SDO for Children Affected by Substance Misuse
- Craig Watson, Partnership Analyst, Community Safety Partnership
- Liane Riddoch, ADP Information and Performance Analyst
- Linda Watt, ADP Health Improvement Officer