

Alcohol Forum

Hi my name is Julian Canny and I am the current chair man of the Kalgoorlie Boulder Youth Council. Basically for all of you who don't know the Youth council is a sub committee of the council to strictly cater for the needs of youth in the city,

I was invited here tonight to talk about youth and alcohol. When I was first approached by Natalie I thought what can I know about alcohol that a big room of people would want to know about. Well I haven't studied the statistics of alcohol and youth and I certainly would not be able to reel off all the facts about what effects alcohol has on the body.

I also want to just make it clear that I am only 18 so I have only had a small amount of exposure to alcohol.

HOWEVER this does put me in a great position to talk about Youth and exposure to alcohol.

Now apparently there is an epidemic in this country. More and more people are turning to binge drinking at an early age.

Which in Kalgoorlie...I would agree with that

SO THE BIG QUESTION ON EVERYBODYS LIPS IS WHY? Why are more teens binge drinking?

Why Is binge drinking a issue? What's the issue with binge drinking ?

What is it that compels young people to get shoved into the back of a taxi with a pizza box tied around there neck reading "hi my name is Sam and I live at 83 Egan St" and not remembering any of it the next morning.

Why is it that young people quite often go beyond that line where a enjoyable night out drinking gets stupid?

Now everyone has different reasons for doing so but there is a couple I want to discuss tonight.

- Social Drinking
- Lack of respect for drinking

Now a reason which will crop up in any health education class is social Drinking. Now social drinking which most people would talk

about is ok and the responsible way to use alcohol. But it is also important to understand that social drinking is a lot different for younger teenager under 18.

Yes that means that teens under the age of 18 are drinking. At this moment right now there is probably a bunch of 17 year olds in a backyard having a small party, where some hopelessly drunk teenager is trying to hold a drink in one hand and the other hand holding his baggy jeans up while dancing. But it is happening everywhere in Kalgoorlie. Younger Teenagers are taking up social drinking. The youngest I have seen is 13.

Can I just have a nod, smile or a thumbs up from everyone to show that they understand that there are lots of teenager in lower secondary school who are starting to drink? Just so everyone understands.

Now in these younger groups social drinking is not about having a beer and kicking back with mates. It's about alcohol as a drug itself. Teenager will go out with the sole mission to find alcohol and drink of much of it as they can. For a number of reasons.

- It becomes a socially accepted practice in the youth community to go out to a party and get blind drunk. With the simple term referred to as "going out" At school all week news gets around where that weekends party is at, how many people are going, who's going ... so that everyone can just have the pride to say "I am going out this weekend" Then its BAM there street cred goes though the roof.

Now these parties normally start as someone knowing someone and then that person invites someone else. And it escalates from there. Now at these parties there is a normal procedure. You rock up, looking nervous and lost at a stranger's house. There is normally an older brother or an older guy standing out front just having a smoke while watching the house. Then you go down the side fence to the back yard where you get hit with a wall of music and alcohol. Everyone has some form of drink in their hand. If you happen to be the one who is doing some driving and you have chosen not to drink I can guarantee that within twenty mins you will be out of there with the amount of eyes looking at you.

But if you have a drink in your hand you are safe.

Right so just to re cap so far on how it works ... If you're at a party and you have rocked up and you have a drink in your hand you are on your first step to socially drinking as a teen. Secondly what you have in your hand is highly important.

Now it is true that teenagers often will buy the Alco pop brand of drinks. And recently the government realised this, hence our new Alco pops tax. What they really didn't take into consideration is that most people will just fork out the money to buy them. Or do what is oddly more socially expectable and get some thing stronger and mix it yourself. Which I am sure is what the Tax was intended to do.

SO if you're a teenager and you are at a party, you have your cruiser ..if you're a girl and maybe a Jim bean can if you're a guy. Now you're looking cool. Just because you're there holding your drink. Now as people start to down their drinks its like watching a reality TV show where every move is being watched.

Every one is watching everyone because they can all see that everyone is getting drunker by the hour. And they are waiting till one of them trips up and has too much to drink, then does something stupid that they regret the next morning. Who will be the hot topic of the next week with their act of stupidity? How they will get taunted at school for not being able to handle the alcohol.

Unfortunately in schools you will find that the guys are always having to show off and prove themselves to everyone else that they are the "alpha male" unfortunately instead of being just on the sports fields and in the class room there is a huge almost craving for younger people to take huge amounts of alcohol. On Monday morning I guarantee that the back row of the class room the group of boys a conversation will start like this.

"Hey guys far out I got so wasted on Saturday night. I drank 6 bottles of Teds."

The next one will turn and go "Well I polished off a carton of Jim Beam".

And the third one will say "Well I almost polished off that whole 1.25 litre bottle of alcoholic liquids that we mixed up".

So now they have established the pecking order it almost becomes a challenge next week on how "hard core" they all are and just sets the bar for the next weekend.

So after every weekend back at school on Monday the same gossip goes around about who did what ... the boys sit down talking about how each one of them drunk more than the other. And how hard core they were.

So the problem goes on and on in this similar fashion often unknown to parents and teachers.

Now the second main point which I want to bring up is Respect for alcohol. Or lack off it.

Right from a young age almost everyone is confronted with alcohol. Most probably the first encounter most people have with alcohol is things like the Simpsons for example. Homer drunk on the couch or down at Moe's is just a example of where we start to learn about the culture of alcohol.

It's then learnt from from people around us. Our parents mostly (if they are drinkers of course) start to teach us the concepts of alcohol. Whether it be through observing the adults around us or them directly teaching kids at a young age about the effects of alcohol. Everyone soon grasp the concept of it fairly quickly.

It's only around the teen years that things start to change. All of a sudden alcohol is presented to teens as a forbidden fruit... something that they could quite easily get there hands on ...but is still illegal.

But the problem doesn't lie there. The problem is in the way that society's addresses alcohol and who is allowed it and who isn't.

The best way to explain it is this way.

Pretend I am an adult member of the community.

No, you can not have any alcohol you're too young. Don't touch a drop of the stuff otherwise you will be punished. If you wait until you're 18 which is really not far away you can have all the alcohol you like.

Its like telling a kid that he's is not allowed any candy for three months... what do you think is going to happen after three months is up?

What do you think happens and is apparently extremely acceptable when someone turns 18?

That's right... hello, Liver you have been training well these past years. Let's put you to the test.

The respect for a good night out drinking and an enjoyable time is lost.

Now there is programs in schools, libraries, TV, all sorts of places to try to get through to young people that alcohol can be a enjoyable drink in moderations. But the one main part where educating our culture fails and succeeds is at home. With so many parents who have different opinions on how to teach their kids about alcohol it gets harder and harder to get a consistent stream lined lesson.

Some parents will teach

- the hard way
- be involved with their drinking
- or completely remove the substance from existence

All have there pros and cons. But the one thing that the second point does address is the issues of respect for alcohol. No teen knows alcohol like an adult would. Use your knowledge and pass it down. Whether it would be passive or influencing. Do you want your kids to really be drowning themselves in alcohol with out you knowing it? Just open up. Talk about alcohol as just another thing in life, so that when they reach that age it's not a forbidden fruit. To many of my friends can't even remember there eighteenth birthdays. Where others, who respect alcohol, have had the most enjoyable 18th birthdays.

Parents ... when your son or daughter comes to you and says.

"Mum , Dad ...there are these other kids at school who are allowed to drink at parties.

Don't just answer with a big fat NO .. cause I can guarantee what will happen. Ask about why they are asking if you want. It will probably scare them off drinking.

But make the effort to explain about alcohol and respect for alcohol. Explain why you don't want them drinking alcohol. And I can tell you now that when it comes to the point in there life when they are legally allowed to kill brain cells, they will have that awareness that you have taught them. A respect for alcohol which is so easily taught. But it is also something that can so easily be learnt the hard way.

Thank you