Sub21

**Overview**

This award-winning social marketing project aimed to reduce underage street drinking and antisocial behaviour in North Tyneside.

Research with young people and off-licences identified three main drivers for underage street drinking: lack of suitable alternative activities; cheap, easy supply of alcohol; and social norm of young people drinking on the streets. Proxy sales of alcohol were also a particular problem.

From these findings, a two-pronged approach was developed, under the brand Sub21. The intervention provided a rolling programme of out-of-hours activities designed by and for local young people as an alternative to street drinking. Alongside this, a campaign was developed to support off-licences in reducing illegal and proxy alcohol purchases.

**Results:**

- Reduction in the most harmful types of drinking among females, including binge drinking, drinking to the point of being sick, and drinking on the street or other outdoor locations
- Among male respondents, there does not seem to have been much change in behaviour, but findings suggest they experienced greater difficulty accessing alcohol in the area, post intervention
- Most young people surveyed had heard of Sub21 and a third reported attending Sub21 activities

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**Topic:** Alcohol

**Organisation:** North Tyneside PCT; Lamerton Swales

**Location:** North Tyneside (North East)

**Dates:** March 2007 to March 2011

**Budget:** £64,000

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Heavy and harmful drinking patterns have increased among young people in the UK, who experience the highest levels of binge drinking and lifetime drunkenness in Europe. Youth drinking trends in North Tyneside reflect the national picture – a survey conducted for the North Tyneside Children and Young People’s Strategy found that about two-thirds of young people drink alcohol and more than half drink at least once a week. Among 10- to 17-year-olds, girls regularly drink more alcohol than boys (73 per cent versus 54 per cent), a finding that contrasts with the rest of the UK. Alcohol is generally easily obtained from parents or purchased in corner shops, either by themselves or older members of the community.

As a consequence, North Tyneside had some of the highest rates of hospital admissions for under-18s due to alcohol-related causes and the teenage pregnancy rate was significantly higher than that for the rest of England. Alcohol-related crime and disorder, as well as residents’ fear of crime, was also on the rise in North Tyneside, a significant proportion of which was associated with under-17-year-olds.

Subsequently, North Tyneside’s Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy Group identified the need for work to be undertaken to reduce street drinking in under-18s. Following conversations in 2007 between the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy Group and The NSMC, it was decided that the emerging project would become one of The NSMC’s 10 learning demonstration sites.

**Target audiences**
Based on preliminary research, it was agreed that the main target audience would be young people aged 13 to 17 in the areas of Wallsend, Battlehill and Howdon attending the three local colleges. This was because:

- Young people began to take up street drinking on a regular basis and as a leisure activity from the age of 13, continuing up until they became legal consumers at 18
- The areas of Howdon, Wallsend and Battlehill had a particular problem with antisocial behaviour and alcohol-related incidents. Local authority data showed that Wallsend had the highest levels of binge drinking in the Borough, and this area covers some of the most deprived wards in the country. Consultation for the Sustainable Communities Strategy showed concerns from residents in this area, particularly a perception that young people were drinking on the streets and contributing to a fear of crime. The preliminary research also showed that there were few facilities for young people in the area, which seemed to compound the issues

The secondary audience was identified to be local retailers in the same area who sold alcohol.

**Stakeholder engagement**
A steering group was set up to guide the project and relevant stakeholders were identified and approached. These included representatives from:

- Churchill Community College and Burnside College
- Healthy Schools Initiative
- Trading Standards
- Licensing
- Northumbria Police
- Transport providers, Nexus
- Local retailers who sold alcohol
- Wallsend Boys Club

Trading Standards and Licensing became fully engaged as the programme could easily fit into their targets to reduce illegal and proxy sales of
alcohol to minors. Unfortunately, at the start the project team struggled to gain buy-in from Youth Services, so the team approached Wallsend Boys Club who were already delivering youth activities within the pilot area to become a partner and help to deliver the project.

Multiple stages of research were carried out during the scoping and into the development stages to ensure the interventions developed were tailored for the target audiences of young people and retailers. Customer orientation was an iterative process – the target audiences were frequently returned to throughout the project whenever further insight was needed or when it was identified that there was a potential risk of making assumptions about behaviour and attitudes.

**Scoping research (2007 to 2008)**

Following an initial phase of desk-based secondary research carried out by The NSMC, research agency Isis Green Ltd was commissioned to conduct:

- Ten interviews with youths picked up by the police for drinking on the streets
- Ten interviews with parents of those youths interviewed
- Four interviews with local shopkeepers
- Four interviews with local residents
- Interview with North Tyneside trading standards lead
- Two participant observation sessions on Friday evenings in Whitley Bay and Wallsend with underage street drinkers
- Audit of out-of-hours youth provision (i.e. affordable and accessible groups and facilities) in the local area

The aims were to:

- Investigate the motivations, patterns and possible exchange for street drinking behaviour in the target group
- Gather observational and pragmatic data from youths engaging in street drinking, particularly their motivations for 'hanging out' in a particular place
- Explore attitudes among local shopkeepers regarding young people's access to alcohol
- Explore attitudes regarding youth behaviour among members of the local community
- Create an 'asset map' of local community resources and their possible contribution to creating a behavioural exchange
- Engage with representatives from trading standards to gain baseline knowledge of local partnerships and initiatives

**Comparative reviews (2008)**

Interviews and desk-based research was carried out to identify good practice elsewhere, find out what works and what does not and draw on the experience and expertise of those working on similar projects.

Comparative reviews showed that youth activities were important components and the most successful youth activities had a developmental element to them, rather than just providing drop-in facilities. Young people responded well to activities that taught them new skills, were structured and developed their knowledge over a series of sessions. Involving
young people in the selection and design of activities was vital if they were to take ownership and interest. However, too much responsibility in the planning and delivery can make them feel pressured, so a fine balance of involving young people with adult guidance and leadership was important.

Youth activities
Desk-based research identified a number of successful projects providing exciting and successful participation programmes for young people. A mix of phone and face-to-face interviews were held with Camden Roundhouse Studios, Bolton Boys and Girls Club, the Salmon Club and Mobex North East.

Illegal and proxy alcohol sales
Desk-based research was undertaken to identify schemes that were successful in reducing underage illegal and proxy alcohol purchasing. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with Cleveland Police, Saltburn Police, St Neots Police and Radcliffe-on-Trent police. Cleveland Police attended a meeting with retailers to share experiences of their successful scheme.

Feasibility study
Following the comparative review on other schemes, a further study was conducted on the feasibility of introducing a scheme to tackle illegal and proxy alcohol purchasing in the pilot area. This included interviews with licensing and trading standards and desk-based research.

A common theme that emerged was the option to ban alcohol sales to under 21-year-olds as a method of tackling proxy sales. This took the ‘Challenge 21’ type schemes to a new level. Schemes were most successful when communities came together and strong partnerships were formed.

Consultation and focus groups with retailers (September 2008)
A focus group was held to garner views of local retailers towards a proxy sales intervention, based on the comparative review findings and the feasibility study. This involved investigating retailers’ perceptions and attitudes towards existing and similar interventions in place in the UK, and the merits and drawbacks of each approach.

Retailers were supportive of introducing a ban to under-21s, but felt strongly that all retailers (including supermarkets) must participate for it to be feasible. They also felt a regular police presence would be vital in supporting them.

Workshops and focus groups with young people (December 2008)
A series of workshops and focus groups were held with young people from Churchill Community College. The aim was to investigate their attitudes, beliefs and views about themselves, their community and alcohol, and to find out what kind of activities would appeal enough to compete with street drinking.

These revealed that young people had a strong affinity with their local area and pride in being a ‘Geordie’, but young people felt alienated by their own community. Performing arts and music were less popular activities than vocational and leisure based ones. There was a strong leaning towards urban and street based activities, such as graffiti, street dance and skateboarding.

Motivators for street drinking
For young people the motivational drivers of street drinking in North Tyneside were complex and varied, incorporating psychological, familial, social and cultural factors. Feelings of
boredom are common in adolescence, but for the target audience they were exacerbated by a dearth of affordable and accessible out-of-hours recreational facilities and social spaces specifically for young people aged 13 to 19.

Street drinking was the most frequently reported recreational activity amongst those interviewed. The main motivational drivers of this behaviour were:

- **Lack of out-of-hours leisure provision**
  The perception that there was nothing else to do and nowhere else to go was held not just by young people, but also by most parents interviewed. This perception was verified by an audit of local youth services, which revealed that youth provision fell by two-thirds at the weekend and there were almost no dedicated places for young people to hang out.

- **Normalisation of drinking and importance of friends**
  Street drinking was perceived as a routine leisure activity and synonymous with ‘being with friends’. Most young people did not associate drinking with harm or danger. A minority of youths reported engaging in other recreational activities, mainly football, which reduced their street drinking.

- **Cost and availability of alcohol**
  Easy access and low cost of alcohol, along with high levels of proxy purchasing, contributed to the numbers of young people street drinking.

**Behavioural goals**

- **Young people** – Reduce (not eliminate) the number of young people drinking alcohol on the streets, the amount they were drinking and the number of attempts to purchase alcohol illegally for the duration of the intervention. An additional aim was to reduce the number of young people involved in incidents of antisocial behaviour and crime caused by alcohol during this period.

- **Retailers** – To implement a ban on alcohol sales to under-21s on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights

**Competition**

- **Young people** – Sophisticated marketing of alcohol to young people is a major competitor. Drinks like Bella and Lambrini are clearly targeted at young people with their price and packaging. Cheap alcohol deals at well-known supermarkets make proxy purchasing particularly easy. The lack of alternative youth activities meant there was no competition for Sub21 activities

- **For retailers** – Lack of time and enthusiasm was a competing factor for retailers, as was the lack of commitment and persistence from the local authority

**Theory**

As the research was undertaken and as the key insights emerged, a thematic qualitative analysis was undertaken to develop a behavioural theory that would inform the interventions.

A key element of this theory revolved around the symbolic meaning of drinking with friends. The excitement of meeting in a large group on a Friday evening lifts young people’s spirits and creates a celebratory atmosphere symbolising free time and the start of the weekend. Adults engage in similar rituals to mark space and time – for example, the end of the working week is symbolised by ‘going down the local’ with friends. Understood within the wider social context, young people’s behaviour is therefore not unusual. The problem arises, however, when young people congregate in public spaces in large groups drinking alcohol.
Subsequently, it was decided that if the programme could provide young people their own place, space and activities to celebrate coming together, then it could attempt to recreate that ‘Friday feeling' without involving drinking on the streets.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory was also used in the development of a proxy sales intervention. Recognising that different individuals adopt new behaviours at different rates and that retailers are more likely to join the scheme if others do so, it was decided that early adopters of the intervention would be recruited as ambassadors to persuade others to join.

Consequently, a two-pronged approach to reduce underage street drinking was developed. The campaign was branded Sub21, which resonated with both target audiences of young people and retailers.

1. Youth activities
A 10-week rolling programme of out-of-school activities was designed in consultation with young people to be offered on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The youth activities were designed to appeal to different segments of the target audience, like nail art and street dance for girls, skateboard ramp building and cyberchaos for boys. The activities took place in a range of locations across the borough, with most taking place at Wallsend Boys Club. In addition to the Club’s existing popular offer of football, activities included:

- Graffiti
- Bike workshop and ramp building
- Skateboarding
- BMX skills
- Street dance
- Cookery and BBQ skills
- Film making
- Nail art
- Cyberchaos (i.e. computer gaming)
- Bodyfit

2. Proxy sales
A package of support measures was offered to retailers to help them tackle illegal and proxy alcohol sales:

- Dedicated 24-hour Crime Line
- Dedicated Licensing Line
- ‘Off-Watch’ membership with monthly meetings to share information, views and ideas
- Training sessions for staff on conflict management, resolution, intimidation and how to authenticate ID cards
- At least two weekly police visits per week and full police support when needed
- A Charter Mark sign to display membership of the scheme to the public
- A member’s pack, containing advice, guidance, information and posters and leaflets to display in-store to promote the youth activities
- Regular updates on local issues and news

In return, retailers were asked to implement the following actions, with the support of the local police, licensing and trading standards:

- No alcohol sales to anyone under 21 years between 5pm and closing time on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and bank holidays
- Sparkling wine and Perry drinks to be sold behind the counter and not promoted
- Report any illegal and proxy sale purchase attempts immediately to the 24-hour Crime Line
• Report any irregular behaviour to the Licensing Line
• Support fellow members by reporting incidents, sharing information and ideas
• Promote the Wallsend Boys Club and its activities to young people entering the premises by displaying posters, fliers and publicity events

The scheme was promoted through shop visits by the police, trading standards, licensing and young people from Wallsend Boys Club. A local retailer was also appointed as an 'ambassador' to encourage other retailers to sign up. The 'Big Four' supermarkets, plus local branches of national chains were approached, but with the exception of Aldi all refused to engage or participate, so the majority who signed up were small, independent family-run businesses.

Exchange
For young people
In exchange for the thrill and recreation of drinking alcohol and spending time with friends on the street, the youth intervention offered young people a dedicated place they could go with their friends to take part in urban and street activities. For those drinking to alleviate boredom, the programme of activities offered them something different and exciting to do.

Sub21 was heavily promoted to young people through presentations in assemblies by the programme coordinator, in a fun, exciting and compelling way.

All activities were free for young people and in local, easily accessible venues.

For retailers
Implementing the under-21 ban involved exchanging initial short-term profit by refusing sales of alcohol to 18- to 21-year-olds with reduced proxy purchases, vandalism, theft and intimidation outside their shops. Retailers benefitted by attracting more customers, who had previously avoided the shop due to intimidation by young people, and increasing their sales and long-term profits.

In return for implementing the under-21 ban, retailers also received the support they desired from the police, trading standards and licensing.

Methods mix
1. Control
Legislation and enforcement exist around illegal and proxy purchasing of alcohol, yet it was still a problem in the pilot area. Existing enforcement controls, such as bottle tagging and test purchasing, were seen as 'antagonistic' by retailers. The support offered to retailers as part of Sub21 included a voluntary ban on alcohol sales to those under 21 on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and bank holidays. This would give retailers and enforcement officers an additional method of control.

2. Design
With the existing lack of adequate youth provision, it was clear young people wanted activities to fill that void. If they were to participate in activities as an alternative to drinking, it was vital they played a lead role in designing and creating the programme and felt a strong sense of ownership. They also needed activities to cost little or nothing, and a place and space that was theirs, easily accessible and close to where they lived.

3. Support
Research indicated that retailers found the current approach of enforcement 'antagonistic'. They wanted support and help to work together with police, trading standards and the community. Sub21’s support package included twice weekly visits from the police to assure retailers they were not alone, and membership to an 'Off-Watch' scheme, where they could share news and issues with each other.
4. Inform
Inform was the least important element to achieve the desired behaviour change. Research showed that young people had a low perception of harm or risk in relation to alcohol, and were well aware it was illegal to purchase it, either themselves or by proxy. Lack of information was not a key driver of street drinking. Therefore to focus on education and promoting anti-alcohol messages would have been a waste of time and money.

Marketing mix
1. Product: A rolling programme of out-of-hours youth activities, in tandem with measures to support off-licences in tackling illegal and proxy alcohol sales
2. Price: Free to all participants
3. Place: In schools, on the high street, shops, clubs and local community premises
4. Promotion: Face-to-face, school assemblies, off-licence visits, viral marketing, SMS, website, Facebook page, posters, flyers, PR, press and TV coverage

The programme was launched by Newcastle United and England Football star, Peter Beardsley at the Wallsend Boys club in May 2009.

The PR was very successful for both strands of the intervention and there was regularly press and radio coverage of the scheme, including primetime coverage on local BBC TV. This helped add value to the project and motivate young people and retailers to join Sub21.

The proxy sales strand of the programme was led by Trading Standards in partnerships with Northumbria Police, while the majority of youth activities were delivered at Wallsend Boys Club with assistance from the Sub21 team at North Tyneside Primary Care Trust (PCT). A full-time coordinator worked with all the partners to ensure that all elements were being delivered cohesively, and progress was reported regularly to the steering group, the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy Group and to The NSMC.

As the programme was rolled out, certain youth activities were found to be more popular than others, to the surprise of the project developers, and thus schedules and activities were amended.

“We didn't foresee which activities would be the most popular. Some of the cheapest activities were the most popular, so they could have been delivered for greater numbers. The most expensive activities, like cyberchoas, weren't necessarily very popular, so we wouldn't have delivered those in hindsight, when nail art costs very little and people were queuing at the door for that.” (Jan Thompson, Public Health Specialist and Sub21 Lead)

Engagement with key stakeholders enabled youth activities to be supplemented at no or little added cost, most successfully through engagement with a Chief Inspector in the Wallsend area who provided unclaimed bikes to the project.

“The police came up trumps with giving unclaimed bikes to the Wallsend Boys Club, and then boys and girls were taught how to
Other activities that were added to the programme as it was implemented included the trial of a 'night club' to attract 11- to 13-year-olds, and radio Sub21, which is an internet-based community radio station where young people can hone their DJ-ing, presentation and interview skills with their own half-hour shows, which has proved to be very popular.

To assess progress made by the intervention in reaching its objectives, young people aged 13 to 17 attending 2 schools in the target area were surveyed before and after the intervention was launched. The first survey took place in April 2009 (n=208) and the second survey took place 6 months later in October 2009 (n=147).

The evaluation measured self-reported behaviour with regard to drinking and purchasing alcohol (including street drinking and proxy purchases) and prevalence of negative consequences associated with alcohol consumption. Binge drinking was defined as drinking alcohol at least once in the last month and feeling ‘very drunk’ at least once during that time.

Results
In the four weeks prior to interview:

- Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to report binge drinking (71.1 per cent and 47.1 per cent respectively). Post intervention, the proportion of female respondents reporting binge drinking fell from 71.1 per cent to 60.5 per cent, although this reduction was not statistically significant
- The most commonly reported negative consequences of drinking alcohol were being in an argument or fight (reported by 17.6 per cent of male and 21.7 per cent of female respondents) and vomiting (reported by 13.7 per cent of male and 39.7 per cent of female respondents). Post intervention, there was a striking reduction in the proportion of female respondents reporting

The banning of alcohol sales to under-21s on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights also had many successes, with over 25 stores signing up to trial the voluntary ban. For instance, Rose and Sangheer Khan who run H and S stores in Wallsend signed up to the scheme and found that while some people did moan at first and sales did initially dip, it meant that young people quickly learnt they would not sell them alcohol and subsequently stopped hanging around outside of the store. This led to less vandalism and broken glass nearby and more customers began to use the store. On the basis of this success the Khans introduced the voluntary ban throughout the week, not just at the weekends, and added the sale of cigarettes to the ban as well.
being sick through alcohol (from 39.7 per cent to 14.0 per cent, \( p=0.003 \))

- Kerbside drinking was reported more frequently by female than male respondents (28.2 per cent and 15.7 per cent respectively). Post intervention, the proportion of female respondents reporting drinking on the street was half that of the pre intervention level (from 28 per cent to 14 per cent, \( p=0.075 \))

- A similar pattern was seen with drinking in the park and other outdoor locations (15.4 per cent among female respondents pre intervention and 4.7 per cent post intervention, \( p=0.077 \)). However, female respondents were significantly more likely to report drinking at home post intervention (up from 39 per cent to 65 per cent, \( p=0.008 \))

- Pre intervention, 21.7 per cent of respondents reported buying alcohol in a shop and 15.5 per cent in an off-licence. Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to report buying alcohol from all sources. There was a reduction in the proportion of female respondents reporting buying alcohol in off-licences (from 19.2 per cent pre to 7.5 per cent post), \( p=0.093 \)

- Post intervention, participants were significantly more likely not to have asked anyone to buy alcohol for them. Of those who did ask someone to buy alcohol for them, both male and female respondents most commonly reported asking a friend; there was a significant decrease in the proportion doing so post intervention (from 31 per cent pre to 18.8 per cent post, \( p=0.050 \))

The post survey also measured a number of intervention-related impact indictors:

- Over half the sample agreed that there were ‘more things to do around here now’, although a third indicated that the project was ‘not for someone like me’
- A third of the sample (36.5 per cent of male and 30.9 per cent of female respondents) had attended Sub21 activities

The youth activities implemented by the Sub21 programme are frequently assessed. The uptake and costs of the different activities are continually monitored, and activities and schedules adapted where necessary to ensure the programme is delivering what young people want and cost effectively.

At the end of 2009, Sub21 was awarded a £5,000 grant to stage a learning demonstration day to share and discuss the insights, ideas and experiences of reducing kerbside drinking using social marketing. This took place in February 2010 at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle. Over 100 public sector professionals and other key stakeholders from across the UK attended, including young people who had been involved in the programme, and Rose and Sagheer Khan who run H and S stores in Wallsend.

Prior to the completion of the pilot, the Sub21 team successfully bid to the Pfizer Foundation
for £42,750. This allowed them to continue the project from the end of the pilot phase until March 2010. As the programme grew from strength to strength, the initial difficulties engaging with certain stakeholders were overcome, as they could see how successful the programme was.

“It really took a successful project to engage partners – once they saw that it worked, once they saw that it wasn’t threatening, once they saw the benefits, and when the profile of the project rose and it was perceived as something that was a national success, everyone wanted their name there.” (Jan Thompson, Public Health Specialist and Sub21 Lead)

These positive results attracted further funding within the region, including a £35,000 grant from Extended Schools and £10,000 from the Youth Services to continue implementing the programme until March 2011. Funding options to continue to implement the programme beyond this time are currently being explored.

The North Tyneside Sub21 programme has been extended into the North Shields area, and a Sub21 programme was also set up in Northumberland at the end of 2010.

Lessons learned

Product
Get the product right and all else will fall into place. Social marketing is not about using insight to inform the promotion – it is about offering people something they want, like and can easily use. Behaviour change does not come from posters – it comes from people. There is no better promotion than word-of-mouth from your target audience.

Research
A preliminary phase of primary research is invaluable – it helps build information networks, provides cultural familiarity and helps refine research and intervention goals. Researchers should constantly talk to, engage and interact with their audience(s), as this will reap rich empirical findings. Do not be tempted to cut corners on research – it is vital in shaping a relevant and effective intervention.

Process
Be clear from the start who will deliver the project at the front line and have sign up from those partners at strategic level. Recruit your steering group before embarking on the project and use this process and their input to align the behavioural goals and outcomes to strategic targets for their organisations. This means those involved have ownership and a vested interest in achieving success. Investment in a dedicated person to drive and deliver the project is invaluable and will reap quick wins and long-term results.

Partners
Think wider than your own organisation when recruiting partners – choose those who can deliver on the ground. The strategic lead for a project often does not have jurisdiction for operational delivery. Do not waste time and effort persuading reluctant and unsupportive partners to participate, even if there is a strategic and organisational fit. Move on and invest time and energy encouraging those who are enthusiastic and committed.

Intervention development
Ask and listen, inspire and illustrate, listen again. Involve your audience from the start in creating and promoting the intervention, share ideas, be open to change, take some risks, celebrate success and do not be afraid to fail.
sometimes. Do not compromise or give up if things get tough – there is always a solution.

**Marketing**

Think creatively about what tools you need to promote your intervention – do not fall back on agencies and creative media and advertising. Think about the sustainability required to achieve behaviour change – design and use promotional tools that do not have a sell-by date. If you do require printed promotional materials, commission templates and insert your own messages, rather than pre-printed posters that have a limited shelf life.

**Sustainability**

Securing long-term funding should be a core objective of stakeholder engagement as soon as positive results come in. Work with potential budget holders from the earliest opportunity to align strategic objectives and targets into the long-term outcomes.