



Report on the consultation with children and young people in the Fitzroy Valley about alcohol

August 2017

Background

Excessive alcohol use in households and the community has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people including 'modelling of poor drinking behaviours, family arguments, injury, neglect, abuse and violence'¹.

To address alcohol-related harm, communities in the Fitzroy Valley introduced a variety of strategies including restrictions of the sale and supply of alcohol.

The first restrictions on liquor sales were established in 1992, and the current restrictions have been in place since 2009.

In 2016, the Commissioner for Children and Young People Colin Pettit visited Fitzroy Crossing and other communities in the Fitzroy Valley to speak with children and young people and the people who work to support them.

As part of this visit the Commissioner attended the Fitzroy Valley District High School swimming carnival where young people had prepared a photo board of their views on alcohol use in the community and the impact this has on them and other children and young people.

In speaking with the young people on that day it was clear they had more to say on this subject and the Commissioner commenced planning for a more detailed consultation.

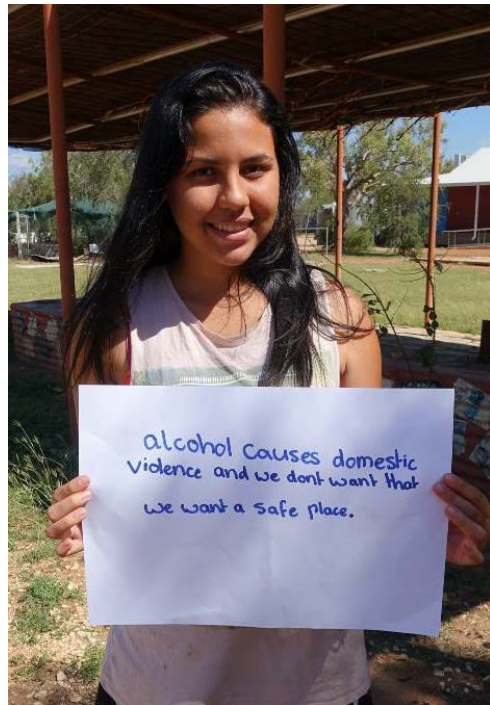
¹ Laslett, AM., Mugavin, J., Jiang, H., Manton, E., Callinan, S., MacLean, S., & Room, R. (2015). The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families. Canberra: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

The consultation

The Commissioner invited Nindilingarii Cultural Health Service to undertake a consultation with children and young people in the Fitzroy Valley.

This method of working with community organisations to run consultations helps to give children and young people a voice by ensuring they are comfortable talking to local staff who they already know, and by creating consultation methods that are appropriate and interesting for the children and young people involved.

Local staff ran 11 workshops in Yakanarra, Muludja, Yiyili, Yirramalay Studio School, Fitzroy Crossing, Kurlku Cultural Camp and at youth drop-in centres.



More than 190 children and young people participated in activities to talk about what affect alcohol had on their lives. Sixty-one children and young people developed posters to communicate their concerns about alcohol and their ideas for keeping their communities safe places for kids.

What children and young people had to say

How does alcohol affect people who drink?

The children and young people who participated in the activities had a lot of knowledge about the effects alcohol has on the body and also about the broader impact of alcohol.

“Alcohol can change your brain” – boy, 13 years

“Alcohol can kill your body” – boy, 13 years

“You might lose your life when you are drunk” – girl, 15 years

“Alcohol will give you diabetes” – girl, 9 years

“Alcohol can ruin your health” – boy, 16 years

“When you drink alcohol you will get in a fight and hurt yourself” – girl, 8 years

“Alcohol affects your unborn baby” – girl, 14 years

“You can lose your baby if you drink while you are pregnant” – girl, 15 years

"Grog – make the kids sad, people go mad, fighting, make old people worried" – boy, 14 years

"Alcohol affects all your life" – boy, 14 years

"Alcohol is a big consequence in the community and it can affect younger children and also can destroy your health" – girl, 13 years

"Alcohol causes more crashes. Alcohol can breakdown communities and families, less safe in houses, schools, homes. Alcohol causes diseases and death. Alcohol causes madness and weakness. Alcohol causes heart failure. Alcohol causes brain damage." – boy, 10 years

How does alcohol affect your community?

The report of the Commissioner's previous consultation with Aboriginal children and young people across WA, *"Listen to Us"*, noted the importance of family and community to children and young people's wellbeing.

Through the Fitzroy Valley consultation, children and young people spoke about how excessive alcohol use impacted significantly on their family life and the broader community, and how they were better cared for when the community was alcohol-free.

"Alcohol brings depression/stress to our community. And makes you do silly things to yourself and to others" - girl, 17 years

"When people drink alcohol they will get wild and jealous" – girl, 14 years

"Drunk people fight and bust bottles" – girl, 11 years

"Drunk people slide cars" – boy, 11 years

"Walking around drinking and punching and fighting their wife" – girl, 10 years

"Alcohol costs this community lots of money" – girl, 13 years

"Grog will make this place no good" – boy, 8 years

"When grog came into community make people fight" – girl, 9 years

"Alcohol can ruin the environment" – boy, 15 years

"Alcohol brings more trouble to the community" – boy, 16 years

How does alcohol affect children and young people?

A number of significant themes emerged from children and young people's comments on the effects of excessive alcohol use. The most common was the effect it had on their safety – that they did not feel safe when alcohol was in their communities and

they were sometimes scared and frightened at home when excessive alcohol was being consumed.

“Some people go through my house and I don’t feel safe” – boy, 9 years

“People fight and I feel low” – boy, 8 years

“When there is more grog in town I don’t feel safe” – girl, 9 years

“I don’t feel safe when I am in a car and the driver is drunk” – girl, 7 years

“Some people do swear at home and they are they at the street wailing. Some people do dead some kid” (hurt some children) – boy, 9 years

“Alcohol causes arguments amongst families” – boy, 15 years



The consultation also identified that children and young people were often neglected as a result of alcohol and this affected their attendance at school and learning.

Research has highlighted that every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child’s learning and academic achievement.

Children and young people of the Fitzroy Valley clearly described how attending school is made more challenging by excessive alcohol consumption.

They said they found it hard to sleep or had to sleep in other places when there were alcohol-fuelled, loud parties. This meant they sometimes missed school or were too tired to learn if they did go.

“When your parents get drunk you will be worried all night when you sleep and you will be crying” – girl, 10 years

“The kids will have trouble learning, having energy, sleeping, feeling safe, hunting and running” – girl, 12 years

“It gives you bad sleep when you wake up from sleep in the morning” (when people are drinking in community) – girl, 11 years

“It makes you deaf when your parents put the music loud and you get headaches” – girl, 12 years

Children and young people were also aware of the high cost of alcohol in Fitzroy Crossing, with many noting that the money spent on alcohol could be better spent on healthy food and clothing for them.

“Alcohol isn’t good because kids see their parents fighting, yelling and all sorts of stuff. People are actually spending money on alcohol rather than spending it on food which is a waste of money. It can also affect people’s health” – girl, 14 years

“When someone drinks, I feel sad because they don’t look after me” – girl, 7 years

“More money wasted on alcohol, less money spent on healthy food” – girl, 15 years

What is it like when alcohol isn’t in the community?

Fitzroy Valley children and young people were able to describe many ways the community and children and young people benefited when excessive alcohol was not being consumed.

“Living in an alcohol free community is happy” – girl, 10 years

“Our alcohol free community is safe” – girl, 10 years

“Drinking while pregnancy effects unborn babies, keep Fitzroy FASD free” – girl, 14 years

“Alcohol free homes are safe!” (child lives in a Section 152 alcohol restricted home) – girl, 13 years

“Alcohol causes domestic violence and we don’t want that, we want a safe place” – girl, 17 years

Views on alcohol restrictions

During the consultations children and young people were asked directly about the current restrictions, what they thought about them, whether they should be changed and how their lives would be affected if they were changed to allow sale of mid-strength beer as takeaway.

Similar to the broader community, not everyone agreed that they should remain in place although most thought the restrictions were a good thing.

Many of the children and young people said there would be more trouble in communities if the restrictions were lifted and that people were better off with the restrictions remaining in place.

"Families will be better off with no alcohol and drugs and better future for the children and have a job"

'Good – because it stopped most people from drinking'

'I think the alcohol restrictions isn't really helping'

'We want to keep safe'

"There will be more trouble in town and communities" (if the laws change) – girl, 13 years

"Even if alcohol is lifted they will still go to Derby or Broome and bring back alcohol to sell because alcohol cost too much in Fitzroy"

"No alcohol in Fitzroy because there will be more violence more drink driving more abuse more break-ins."

"Also there will be more young mums drinking and more kids with alcohol syndrome."



Some young people had ideas for making a difference and reducing the impact of alcohol on their community.

"Lodge and the Crossing Inn have to work with the old people to have better run pub and police better and have no kids hanging around the pubs lift the age higher for drinking alcohol."

"Choose sports not grog." – boy, 13 years

"Alcohol is killing our people, so stop doing alcohol people, stop doing it" – boy, 10 years

What the Commissioner has done with this information

Children and young people have clearly stated that excessive alcohol consumption makes them feel unsafe and reduces the ability of parents and communities to nurture children and young people and support their healthy development.

This information matches the findings of research and feedback from service providers in some communities that indicates alcohol sale restrictions reduce violence and other alcohol-related harm.

Therefore the Commissioner supports maintaining take-away liquor sale restrictions that reduce the availability of alcohol and improve the safety of children and young people.

The Commissioner has used the views of children and young people to inform his submissions about take-away alcohol sale restrictions in specific communities.

The information will also help guide his continuing advocacy on alcohol-related harm, including future submissions.

For more information, visit the Commissioner's website at www.cyp.wa.gov.au.