AN ALCOHOL-FREE BAR FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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‘Cheers’, the alcohol-free bar in Yate, Bristol, opened last June after almost three years of discussion and planning. The outcome of the CAFE (Creating an Alcohol Free Environment) community project, it represents the efforts of local people from various backgrounds who were concerned to establish a social centre for young people where they can learn to enjoy themselves without the need for alcohol but in a sophisticated environment comparable with the local nightspots.

The rationale behind the project can be summed up as follows:
- Young people are at risk from the consequences of careless and excessive drinking.
- Young people generally lack awareness of possible risks of drinking. In a New Society survey, for example, only 12% of 16 year olds thought that alcohol could be harmful.
- Young, inexperienced drinkers have a lower tolerance of alcohol than do adults. After drinking just small quantities of alcohol their judgment and control are affected.
- Under-age drinking is common. In one group of 17-year-olds, 91% of the boys and 61% of the girls admitted drinking illegally in public places. In another group of 15-year-olds, 35% of the boys and 26% of the girls reported drinking in pubs.
- Convictions for drunkenness amongst juveniles has shown a dramatic rise in the past twenty years.

The aims of the project
The aims of the CAFE project were, therefore:
- To provide an alcohol-free bar and lounge open to the community of Yate, particularly to attract the 15-25 year old age group.
- To offer a wide range of non-alcoholic drinks in order to widen drinking choices.
- To educate people informally and indirectly by providing an atmosphere and environment where they can learn how to socialise without depending on alcohol.
- To inform people directly about sensible drinking by the provision of leaflets, advice, and counselling.
- To involve young people in the creation and management of their own environment.

Beginnings
Inspiration for the project came from the Parrot and Palm Cocktail Bar, Worthing, the first alcohol-free club in the country, which was visited in July 1986. Similar schemes are now running elsewhere as a positive approach to the problems of alcohol misuse, and to dispel the attitudes reinforced by advertising and the media, that alcohol is essential for enjoyment and socialising.

To test the feasibility of the scheme, young people circulated 400 questionnaires to schools, youth centres, and individuals to publicise the project, gather ideas, and estimate the likely attendance. The results were encouraging, showing a high level of interest.

In July 1987, after discussions and public meetings convened by Yate Town Council in association with the Youth Service, a management committee was formed to advance the project. Initially the YMCA premises were considered, until building estimates of £33,000 were received! However, by November 1987 a draft agreement to rent premises at St Mary’s Youth Centre had been drawn up, and fundraising and promotional schemes began. Young people were approached for their ideas on the interior design, and in March 1988 volunteer groups began work on structural alterations. The major work was done by building and shopfitting firms. Money was raised by suitable sales, jumble sales, plugs in the local press and on the radio, a stall at the Yate Festival, and a Street Fair.

The bar opens
‘Cheers’ opened its doors on 9 May 1989 for a full house of young people, and has been successfully operating on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday evenings since, with an average nightly attendance of 35. A core staff team is made up of part-time paid youth workers and young volunteers. It has already been the setting for a TSW alcohol documentary.

Although work on the project has been steady rather than rapid, due to the major hurdles of fund-raising and finding suitable premises, we have in fact been able to take short cuts through research and finding similar schemes – we have learned from their experiences, and benefited from their contacts. There will now be an opportunity for liaison with other agencies in connection with the educational side of the project: some youngsters have already expressed interest in learning more from the youth workers about ‘sensible drinking’. Any referrals that are necessary for counselling and treatment will be made through the appropriate agencies.

The project is overseen by a management committee which includes youth workers, parents, and young people, supported by the police, HEOS, teachers, and others. The committee meets regularly to report on progress, plan future developments, and decide on policy issues, and individual members have taken on specific responsibilities and activities. However, now that the bar is in operation the committee’s function is becoming more advisory, with the staff team actually running the project.

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Reviews

Food science and technology by Anita Tull. 1989: Oxford University Press, 96 pages, semi-stiff cover, £2.95.

This is a well-illustrated ‘user-friendly’ little book which is easy to read and understand. Although it has been produced for Lower School pupils it would be useful for 4th and 5th-year pupils on GCSE food courses.

The book is clear and concise, providing good ideas for extension work for the more able pupil. Each topic covered suggests a variety of activities which can be covered by an individual pupil or by a group.

I like the way the author makes good use of the investigational process throughout the book. A set of these would be useful in any Home Economics, Science, or Technology department.


This is a nicely-presented, well-illustrated and colourful book which adopts the problem-solving approach throughout. Although presented in units, it is possible to break each unit down to suit a modular curriculum. The topics have been carefully chosen to be relevant to the 11-14 age group, and although written primarily for this group it is equally suitable for the 14-16 age range. The topics in the latter half of the book would be applicable to pupils on Home Studies, Child Development, and Lifeskills courses.

I particularly like Unit 4, management, organisation, and problem-solving, as it has been particularly well done, providing pupils with the opportunity for reflection on their own ability to organise and evaluate.

The ‘active’ learning strategies and problem-solving approaches used in the book would be applicable to the philosophy underlying GCSE examinations – Marjorie Crowe-Smith.