



The Young People and Alcohol Forum and NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003 Report by Young Delegates

Intro

In May, the NSW Government announced it was going to hold an Alcohol Summit, and asked the Commission for Children and Young People to make sure that the voices of young people in NSW would be heard loud and clear at the Summit.

So, before the Summit, the Commission asked young people to tell them about their experiences with alcohol and what they think is important about alcohol for young people, for their families, and for their communities. Young people suggested ways that harm caused by alcohol abuse could be prevented or reduced.

This included the Commission talking to some young people who have had bad alcohol experiences themselves - like drinking too much, having alcoholic parents, having a drink spiked, driving when drunk or being beaten up or sexually assaulted by someone who's had too much to drink.

All this information was discussed at a Young People and Alcohol Forum the day before the Summit began.

On Monday 25 August, the Commission hosted a Forum with 58 young people which looked at way to reduce harm caused by alcohol abuse.

First off, the young people had breakfast at Parliament House, hosted by the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People. Everyone got to eat breakfast with a politician! The Minister for Youth, Carmel Tebbutt, and the Minister for Juvenile Justice, Di Beamer, were there, as well as the Summit's Joint Chairs, Neal Blewett and Kerry Chikarovski.

After breakfast, everyone got a bus to the Commission's office in Surry Hills. Minister Della Bosca, responsible for co-ordinating the Alcohol Summit, spoke to the Forum, as did Gillian Calvert, the Commissioner for Children and Young People. See below for more on the Forum.

The Summit ran from Tuesday 26 August to Friday 29 August and was held at Parliament House in Macquarie St, Sydney. Delegates came from many different organisations and groups. There were Ministers, local members of parliament, Aboriginal elders, alcohol company representatives, social workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, and most important of all, young people.

The entire week was a great success and all the young people involved believe that the adults really listened to what they had to say.



The Young People and Alcohol Forum

The Forum's 58 participants were aged 13 to 22 and came from all over NSW. They broke into groups to discuss different issues and ideas. These ideas were then turned into 67 resolutions that were tabled at the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse the following day.

The Dramathetical

Peter Slattery presented to the Forum a "dramathetical". A small group of Forum participants were chosen to take part in a scenario that involved a group of young people at a party. It also showed the aftermath of the party and the effect it had on the young people and their parents. Everyone had lots of fun playing their parts!

The Resolutions

Forum participants were broken up into five working groups which discussed the following topics:

- Treating dependence; Treating disease;
- Helping the community understand the impact of alcohol; Preventing abuse & harm;
- Reducing injuries and accidents; Alcohol-related problems in families;
- Crime & anti-social behaviour; Police, courts and the justice system;
- Responsible ways to advertise, sell and serve alcohol.

These groups came up with resolutions that were tabled at the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse. Some of the resolutions young people came up with were:

- To put health warnings, similar to those on cigarette packets, onto alcohol bottles and cartons;
- To investigate the idea of safe drinking areas where people under the age of 18 can drink alcohol under supervision;
- To tighten laws on alcohol advertising, especially "ready to drink" pre-mixed cocktails which appeal to teenagers;
- To introduce a "dollar for dollar" program whereby any company that spends one dollar on advertising has to pay one dollar to alcohol-related rehabilitation or harm minimisation programs;
- That young people be involved in the implementation of all resolutions after the Summit.

The Atmosphere

It was very important for the Commission to provide an environment that would let the young people feel comfortable enough to express their views and tell their stories. For this reason, the Commission chose Julie McCrossin, a television and radio personality, as the MC for the day. Julie was fantastic. She was able to make the delegates laugh without removing the seriousness of the topic.



Here is what some participants said about the Forum (and Julie):

“The Forum was a great opportunity for young people from across NSW to not only voice their opinions, but also engage in the political process.”

“Julie was such a great MC, she was really funny!”

“I had so much fun at the Forum. Everyone listened to my ideas and I feel as if I have made a difference.”

“The Forum was good because, as a Summit delegate, I got to see what young people in NSW really wanted done about the abuse of alcohol.”

“The atmosphere at the Forum was amazing. I felt very comfortable talking in front of all the people there and I felt as if they listened to what I had to say.”

“The Forum was a great way for me to express my views and opinions. I loved it. The environment was awesome! Julie McCrossin was GREAT!!!”

“This Forum was a chance to meet and interact with other young people who share a want to help others.”

The Forum was a great success and every participant made a difference.



Lisa and Matthew



*Barbara Perry, Member for Auburn, Sui
and Rajevshanth*



*Guy, Virginia Judge, Member for Strathfield,
and Minister Carmel Tebbutt*



Nicole and Julie McCrossin



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The NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse



Representing young people in NSW The Summit delegates

Back: Kristina, Sarah, Brent, Jay, Nathan

Middle: Michael, Zeah, Emily, Sui, Bob Carr, Kaila, Ahmed, Josh

Front: Rohan, Dorian, James, Shannon

Tuesday

The Summit started with an Indigenous Welcome to Country by an elder of the Eora nation. Then the Premier and the Opposition Leader welcomed all the Summit delegates and special guests.

After lunch there was a closed session that only delegates could attend and it was kept anonymous. One of the young people who had been at the Young People and Alcohol Forum the previous day, Reyne, gave a speech on his personal experience with alcohol abuse and rehab. Reyne blew everyone away with his frankness, honesty and incredible willpower.

During the afternoon session, Zeah and Rohan were called upon to table the resolutions that came out of the Young People and Alcohol Forum. The two delegates spoke to Parliament about some of the resolutions that the young people came up with at the Forum. Tabling the resolutions at the beginning like this meant that the Summit delegates had to refer to them in the working groups over the next four days.

The young delegates were arranged into working groups similar to those at the Young People and Alcohol Forum. These working groups were to come up with the Summit's resolutions.

Later on Tuesday, Dorian gave a speech about Australian drinking culture, what young people in a rehab had told him about, and the importance of harm minimisation when treating young people with drinking problems.



Wednesday



Kristina in a working group

On Wednesday several young delegates had the opportunity to present young people's views to the Summit.

- Shannon spoke about what it was like growing up on a tiny Aboriginal community on the NSW-VIC border, and the kind of alcohol problems he sees working at the Aboriginal Medical Service;
- Zeah spoke against the idea of imposing curfews on young people. She discussed research into the effectiveness of curfews that had been done in the United States which showed that they did not reduce juvenile crime.

The delegates also met the Premier, Bob Carr, who encouraged them to continue to voice their opinions at the Summit.





Thursday



Josh and Emily speaking to the Summit

On Thursday morning, Josh and Emily spoke about ways to inform and engage the community about issues relating to alcohol and young people. This speech was well accepted by the Summit delegates. More young delegates spoke on Thursday afternoon:

- Ahmed gave a really interesting speech about the history of alcohol and perceptions of alcohol in the Islamic community;
- Kaila supported the idea of harm minimisation.

A dinner for all delegates was held on Thursday night at Parliament House. The resolutions that the working groups came up with were discussed and amended after dinner. Debate on the resolutions also began. The delegates didn't leave Parliament House until 11:00 pm! Two young delegates argued their case late into the night:

- Dorian defended the proposal for safe drinking spaces for under-18s;
- Ahmed said that the alcohol industry should be responsible for the harmful effects of its advertising. Here he is:





Friday

The last day of the Summit was a short day. Friday was dedicated to debating and voting on the resolutions that the working groups came up with. Dorian spoke again, supporting a resolution that the Government should think about creating safe drinking spaces for under-18s. The last words to the Summit from a young person were therefore:

“I do not understand why we can have sex at the age of 16 but we cannot drink.”

By the end of the Summit, the delegates felt a mix of different emotions. They were sad to say goodbye to each other but excited to be going home. Most of all they were happy that they got the chance to attend the Summit, to have their say and to make a difference. All the delegates had a great time at the Summit and it was fantastic to see how Parliament worked. The support that the delegates received over the week was amazing. Other delegates commented on the young delegates’ professional approach to the Summit and their dedication to their peers. Well done, guys!

What delegates said about the Summit

Here is what some of the summit delegates had to say about the week:

"The Summit was a frightening and exciting experience, it was great. I met many interesting people; from the Premier to school teachers. I learnt a great deal about the problems associated with alcohol in NSW and the many different approaches to reducing harm that people are taking. I just hope the Government acts on the resolutions produced by the Summit so that we can further reduce the harm caused by alcohol abuse in NSW."

James, Blue Mountains

"The NSW summit on Alcohol Abuse was an amazing experience that enabled young people to have an extensive input into the democratic processes that governs this country. I feel privileged to have been involved in such an important event in NSW history. Alcohol abuse is a major issue, particularly affecting young people, and it was great to see an extensive amount of emphasis being placed on harm minimisation amongst young people. It was great to be listened to, but what was more important was the fact that our opinions were actually valued. The Alcohol Summit was an incredible experience that I am sure I will remember forever."

Kaila, north-western NSW

"The Summit experience demonstrated how enjoyable and effective young people's participation can be at the highest levels of decision making. The positive contribution we made should not have necessarily surprised the Summit. The Summit outcomes aimed at young people would certainly have been deficient had we not participated in the way we did."

Dorian, western Sydney



“It’s great that the Summit allowed young people to speak. Emily and I had the opportunity to speak for 20 minutes in front of a group of highly respected members of our community. The Summit gave us the chance to tell them what the young people of NSW think about alcohol.”

Josh, Snowy Mountains

“The Summit was a real eye opener. It was great to see young people working along side politicians, employees of the alcohol industry and experts in alcohol related issues for the good of our community. The young people’s resolutions were fantastic, and the fact that 66 of 67 resolutions were passed by Parliament proves how professional they were. I was delighted to be a part of the Summit.”

Nathan, northern beaches

“I really enjoyed myself at the forum and summit. It was a wonderful experience to voice my opinion and ideas on alcohol abuse. The time spent at Parliament House was a real insight into how NSW is run. I also met many new people and made some great friends. At the summit and forum I believe we achieved a great deal. The youth of NSW should be really proud.”

Sarah, western Sydney

“It’s important that people from the country were listened to at that level because we normally aren’t. Also, the politicians weren’t putting on a front – they actually did listen.”

Michael, south-western NSW

“The NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse gave the youth of NSW the opportunity to table their ideas and concerns about the ever increasing problem of alcohol abuse and misuse in the community. On a personal level I will be able to take a lot of information from the Summit back to my community and my place of employment (local bottle shop). The experience would not have been as enjoyable without all the help and support of the staff from the Commission. Thanks for the opportunity.”

Brent, northern Sydney

Young delegates got up and spoke to the Alcohol Summit a total of eleven times. The young people of NSW couldn’t have had 16 better representatives. Congratulations!

To read the speeches that the delegates made at the Summit, follow this link:

http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/calendar/1055723496_14373.html

To read the Summit Communiqué containing the resolutions that were passed, follow this link:

<http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/communique>



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The young delegates in Barbara Perry's office. Everyone would like to thank Barbara Perry and also Minister Carmel Tebbut for letting us use their offices



Sui, Kristina, Kaila, Bob Carr, Zeah, Emily, and Sarah.



Young delegates preparing speeches in a foyer at Parliament House.