

## Q2. What are your responses so far to what you have heard here tonight?

**MORE OPTIONS FOR YOUTH:** there needs to be more options for young people. Not all kids want to go to sports or youth clubs and some of the feedback was that the young people who are engaged in anti social behaviour would not access the sports or youth clubs anyway.

**PARENTS ROLE:** It was agreed that parents have more influence on children than anyone else and there should be an emphasis on creating good parent & child bonds from a young age. Parenting courses can be helpful with this

**REGIONAL PLAN:** members were given a snapshot of some of the actions from the Regional Alcohol Plan and the main feedback was (1)it is a good plan and happy to support it (2) how is it going to be resourced (3)would have liked more time to read the plan prior to meeting(4)some of it is very practical and could work well like the drinksmeter 'app' (5)with so many 'hotspots' in Balbriggan there needs to be more investment in the area

**SMOKING IS NOT COOL – WHY IS BEING REALLY DRUNK OK?:** people talked about how successful the health promotion campaigns to reduce smoking tobacco had been in making smoking 'uncool' and how great it would be if a similar approach was used to make being really drunk uncool.

**DISTANCE SALES;** people were shocked about the 'Dial a Drink' and internet sales of alcohol which means strong alcohol can be purchased 24hours a day by young people

**SPONSORSHIP:** people talked about the possibility of getting non drinks sponsorship for young sports teams such as the larger supermarkets etc

**AVAILABILITY:** there was a feeling that it is just too easy to get alcohol

**LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:** Local people are experts in their own area, people present liked that they were being included in and driving their own local plan



## Q3. Are we missing anything.... New actions?

1. **GARDA RESOURCES:** the Balbriggan CAF needs to advocate for an increase in community Gardai to enforce the law, reduce crime and build positive relationships with the community
2. **MORE OPTIONS FOR YOUTH:** with such a large youth population people wanted more youth work and also different groups for those who don't like sport or more mainstream activities (for eg: art or film etc)
3. **PUBLICANS RESPONSIBILITY:** 'health promotion charter' or 'QMark' for publicans if they can prove they have good health promotion alcohol practises (safe server training, ceasing the practise of running 'tabs', prominently displaying anti-drink driving messages, etc)
4. **HEALTH PROMOTION;** people talked about getting the message out to the community of the 'social cost' of binge drinking and other problem drinking and the need to promote a healthier approach to alcohol consumption. The Drinksmeter 'app' should also be pushed to support this
5. **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:** people noted that there are some fantastic organisations in Balbriggan who collectively could achieve a lot if they collaborated and that there needs to be a structure to support them to work in partnership with each other. Even though the CAF is about a specific issue it was seen as a good start to get partners working together on an issue of common concern. Many representatives present offered to support initiatives that may come from the local Balbriggan plan
6. **NIGHT TIME ECONOMY:** people wanted more work done on managing the 'night time ' of Balbriggan which should be a partnership between the community , services, Gardai, Fingal Co Council and pubs/clubs and event organisers
7. **POSITIVE MESSAGES & ACTIVITIES:** People wanted to promote how great Balbriggan can be to live in and wanted to reinforce that it should not be anti drink but more 'pro' health promotion
8. **WORKPLACE INVOLVEMENT:** people wanted something developed to support employers and employees with alcohol issues in the workplace
9. **PARENTING SUPPORTS:** people wanted an emphasis on prevention & early intervention and supports for parents
10. **SPONSORSHIP:** people wanted to look at targeting some of the really large retailers as part of their corporate responsibility to sponsor clubs

"This feedback is taken directly from the community roundtable discussion held in Balbriggan on 15th June 2017 and represented the views expressed by the 47 community representatives who attended the event'. If you wish to get involved in or would like more information about the Balbriggan Community Alcohol Forum or any other initiatives of the North Dublin Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force please contact [brid@ndublinrdtf.ie](mailto:brid@ndublinrdtf.ie)"



# Balbriggan Community

## Alcohol Forum

15th June 2017



## Introduction

"In 2016, the North Dublin Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force applied to be an implementation site for the National Community Action on Alcohol Programme. This new 'community mobilisation' model appealed to the Task Force because the community inform, lead and implement the programme. Secondly it is not 'anti-drink' and it recognises that many people drink alcohol for pleasure, leisure and relaxation. The aim is to develop a regional action plan to reduce alcohol related public harm. More importantly to us however is that the task force also plan to develop local plans in Skerries, Swords and Balbriggan so we will have our own Community Alcohol Plan. I am delighted to chair the Balbriggan Community Alcohol Forum and look forward to working alongside the many great organisations and groups in our community to do this work. The first part of the process was to have a conversation with the community of Balbriggan about their experience of alcohol related harm. On June the 15th we had our first Roundtable discussion with nearly 50 individuals representing a range of agencies and groups in Balbriggan. This report is the summary of that first conversation about alcohol in our community and will be used to inform our plan. I would like to thank Darragh O'Brien TD for opening the event, Peter Conway for his work on driving the Regional Forum, a huge thank you to the National Lead Paula who facilitated the day and is the force behind the national programme and Brid Walsh Regional Task Force Coordinator for her ongoing support and lastly and importantly I want to thank the many people who gave up their evening and contributed so honestly to such a hugely important conversation.

**Cllr Tony Murphy (Chairperson, Balbriggan CAF)"**

### BALBRIGGAN COMMUNITY ALCOHOL FORUM. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK. ROUNDTABLE 1. 15TH JUNE 2017

We asked... you spoke... we listened... The following feedback is the direct feedback from the Balbriggan community in the discussion groups which was combined with the written notes that were taken by each of the 6 group facilitators on the day. Where specific roads, estates or individuals have been named we have removed them for the purpose of this report. We felt it was important not to problematise specific parts of Balbriggan however we have retained it for discussion at the future Balbriggan Community Alcohol Forum meetings.

#### **Q1. How is alcohol harm experienced by individuals, children and families in our communities? People talked about specific problems in specific areas which can be broadly categorised under these themes**

**PUBLIC HARM:** every group raised the public harm as the biggest issue. The harms people talked about were

**(1)PUBLIC DRINKING:** most people there said this was an ongoing problem with 'gangs' of people buying very cheap drink and getting very drunk and out of control **(2)GANG CULTURE:** this carried a lot of energy for people present and while it was acknowledged that the majority of young people in Balbriggan are not causing problems; there was a reference to 'feral youth'... this was backed up by numerous personal stories within the groups about intimidation, aggression and anti-social behaviour by large groups of young people with an alcohol-fuelled sense of 'invincibility'. **(3)FEAR:** people talked about a very real sense of fear. **Older people:** Estates where there is a largely settled elderly population and people living on their own being afraid at night because of large groups of young people from others estates congregating and binge drinking. **Young families:** also there was discussion about families with very young children feeling afraid in their own communities and young mothers feeling very intimidated having to walk through lanes with their children where there are huge groups of teenagers binge drinking. **(3)litter:** people talked about broken glass, cans, bottles, and huge amounts of alcohol related litter left behind these drinking sessions which not only 'bring down the tone' of the neighbourhood but pose a danger to children. The word 'futile' was used in terms of how hard it is to try and keep the area clean and to have pride in it. **(4) specific events:** leaving cert, junior cert, patricks day, Summerfest and various other events

**VIOLENCE/INTIMIDATION** specific stories were told in the groups about times when the binge drinking had culminated in violence and physical aggression including doors being broken down, acts and threats of violence. People said that although Balbriggan has lovely beaches and some great places to go, sometimes they feel really afraid. Phrases like people 'being isolated in their own community' and 'living on the edge' were used. People said this was exasperated by the lack of community Gardai in the area.

**NIGHTLIFE;** people talked about huge problems inside and outside of night venues like local clubs which it was felt was not helped by a lack of regulation in relation to drunken disorder, 'cheap shots' and drinks promotions and not enough Garda presence outside the venues

**HIDDEN HARMS:** people talked about knowing children who are going to school hungry because either the money for food is being used for alcohol or because the parent is neglecting the children due to alcohol use. People feedback that it can really impact on the quality of life for children and others in the home if someone else is drinking heavily. People talked about how it can break down relationships with children, partners and others. The 'Ripple' effect of one persons drink problem to people around them was talked about. This was linked to Foetal Alcohol Syndrome too where the harm that is being done to the unborn child is not seen but can have a lasting effect. Domestic violence and child to parent violence was also talked about as issues that can be hidden by closed doors

**LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES:** throughout the evening, community members talked about how difficult it is as a community to deal with some of the public disorder and gang binge drinking culture problems with so few Gardai. Some people reported long waiting times for a Garda response and sometimes Gardai not turning up and in general a lack of a visible Garda presence in the community. Indeed, although invited, the Gardai were not in attendance at the consultation and so were not in a position to give feedback to the community on the many Garda related issues that were raised. The need for more Garda enforcement, visibility and numbers in Balbriggan was a theme throughout the group discussions and written feedback. People did not blame the Gardai specifically and cited garda staff shortages as the real issue. People talked about 2 Community Gardai that had been particularly effective but are now gone from Balbriggan



**NORMALISATION OF DRINKING;** people talked about the difficulty of trying to reduce problem drinking when it is such a normal part of everyday life in Ireland and is 'normalised'. People talked about how so many events are celebrated in pubs even when it is a child's celebration like a communion, christening or confirmation.

**CULTURAL INTEGRATION CHALLENGES;** it was noted that among foreign national populations in Balbriggan where drinking alcohol is not part of their culture, it could make it more challenging for young people to fit in with their Irish national peers where drinking alcohol is very common

**HARMS TO INDIVIDUAL:** (1)Physical harm to health – liver damage and damage to developing brains in young people (2)mental health challenges caused by heavy drinking

**'SUPPRESSOR OF DREAMS';** one community member used this phrase to describe the impact of alcohol on ambition and drive for problem drinkers particularly in relation to their educational progress. People also talked about how alcohol use can sometimes be used to cover up feelings about not reaching potential

**EMPLOYMENT ISSUES:** it was fed back that employers that had traditionally been in the area years ago are gone and would have provided job opportunities for many people. In an area with a hugely growing population this has impacted hugely on employment opportunities for many leaving people with no purpose and vulnerable to alcohol issues. Feedback was that until relatively recently it was a village where employment was linked to it being a fishing village. Many young people left school and took up employment in the fishing industry. They didn't require third level qualifications, so when those employment opportunities dried up many families didn't have a tradition of supporting young people through third level and, therefore, many young school leavers may have turned to alcohol ...

**ROAD ACCIDENTS;** caused by drink driving adults who are willing to take the chance and also by joyriding young people

**ALCOHOL MARKETING AND YOUNG PEOPLE;** there was extensive conversations about the impact of tying sports which is such a healthy activity to alcohol through sponsorship and marketing. Also discussed was how 'clever' the drinks industry is in creating really cheap alcohol that tastes like soft drinks specifically designed to be attractive to young people. Also discussed was how cheap low quality alcohol can be bought now. It was seen as too easy to get alcohol with so many places to get it and it costing so little to buy a lot of it. Sexualisation of young people was seen as an issue that went hand in hand with alcohol use

**Pre drinking (PRINKING):** People talked about the culture of drinking heavily before going out. Years ago the drunkenness would have been delayed because you would not start drinking until you got to where you were going.

**SELF MEDICATING;** people talked about how alcohol use can be used by people to mask loneliness, social anxiety and mental health problems like depression or mood disorders and might even work for a while but then becomes a huge problem. It was also noted that sometimes people only see the drinking which is masking the real problem and then it never gets recognised or treated

**ALCOHOL & WORK;** people talked about people not being absent for work or going to work and unable to perform because of alcohol problems

**POPULATION ISSUES;** people said that one of the problems is that Balbriggan can be a lovely place but the population has exploded in recent years. Not only that but there is an majority of kids are well behaved, even a small percentage of such a big population can cause a lot of problems and there hasn't been an increase in services and resources to match the huge increase in population.

**PRICING:** although evidence shows that increasing the price of alcohol reduces overall consumption some people felt the issue was a cultural one and was about our 'attitude' to alcohol not a price issue and that is something that is a general problem in Ireland.

**FEELINGS:** although it might be seen as unusual to capture 'feelings' in a consultation summary, it is important in the context of this feedback to be true to the feedback that was given. People talked about feeling 'frustrated, 'worn out', 'ignored'- when it comes to services and supports,