

newsletter

Three cheers for Stacey

A report* published last autumn says UK girls have the highest rate of binge drinking in the industrialised world. And more and more of the young women we see at our centres tell us that they drink to get drunk. Drinking often masks other problems like difficulties at home or lack of confidence. Girls are taking serious risks with their personal and sexual safety, their immediate and long-term health and may get involved in alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour.

Stacey, aged 20, who goes to YWCA in Northampton, says: *"I used to drink a lot, it was the cool thing to do with my friends. I used to feel left out if I didn't have my own story of how drunk I had got."*

"One time I was at my friend's house. We made cocktails and played drinking games. I ended up so drunk that I just collapsed in the garden and couldn't move. I wet myself and my uncle had to carry me home. When I woke up I felt so embarrassed and guilty. I realised that getting that drunk isn't fun or cool, it's just unpleasant."



Stacey and some of the other girls at YWCA made a leaflet about the dangers of binge drinking which they are distributing to other girls to warn of the dangers. She says:

"Information about drinking needs to be out there in a way girls understand. We'd rather listen to people closer to our own age. I know I drank mainly because of



"Girls need to know about the dangers of drinking too much alcohol"
says Stacey

pressure from my friends and now I know that this wasn't right. Young women need to know that it isn't cool to drink. And if young people had other ways to pass their time, this would help. It shouldn't be cheaper to get a few drinks than to go to the cinema or to go bowling."

"We're not saying girls should stop drinking" continued Stacey, *"we're just saying do it safely and within limits. The media and government always focus on young people drinking being a disgrace, when they should be saying that it's actually really dangerous. There are groups of men who drive around in cars and prey on drunken girls. Girls need to know about these risks and the horrible consequences of drinking."*

Thanks to your support we can tell young women about the dangers of drinking and help them to change their behaviour.

* OECD (2009), *Doing Better for Children*
www.oecd.org/dataoecd/21/6/43590251.pdf

Facts

- A third of 15- to 19-year-old girls regretted having sex that happened when they had been drinking.
- Alcohol-related hospital admissions of under 16s are increasing, and are doing so faster for girls than boys.

FREE eCARDS – SEE PAGE FOUR FOR DETAILS

Sobering thoughts



Thanks to the generosity of people like you, at YWCA we educate individual girls about the risks of excessive drinking, but we need long-term national solutions. So in October we hosted a conference about young women and binge drinking. It brought together experts from the medical profession, the police and representatives from the retail and drinks industries. They painted a stark picture of the scale of the problem on public health, policing and society. They were joined on the platform by a number of girls from YWCA centres including Stacey (see page one).

The girls expressed their confusion and dismay at seeing drinking condoned as a cultural norm, but when they drink they find themselves demonised as bingers and anti-social nuisances. They said how susceptible they felt to the glamorisation of drinking in celebrity culture and called for positive role models who could challenge the distorted views of alcohol they see in the media.



Lorna, 15, (pictured) who lives in a village in South Wales, agrees: *"You see a lot of famous people getting drunk in magazines and stuff. You tend to look up to them. And if you see them drinking, you think it must be OK. It's a bad image for kids our age. We go out and do it because we think it's cool."*

Both speakers and delegates at the conference recognised that combined with peer pressure, at the heart of the binge drinking problem are boredom and a lack of activities. Lorna's experience bears this out: *"There isn't really much to do around here so sometimes me and my mates have a drink round each other's houses."*

The findings from YWCA's own research into girls' binge drinking were published at the conference.

They show that despite a startling rise in the amount girls drink, which is leading to serious consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and rape, there is precious little research into the underlying causes of the problem and few attempts to find solutions designed specifically for young women.

The conference called for more financial support from the drinks industry which spends about £800m a year on advertising alone.

Of course there is no simple answer to this complex problem; it needs schools, health services, the police and the drinks industry to come together. The recommendations and ideas from our conference have been added to the research we conducted on girls' drinking to produce a report which will be presented to government.

Your continuing support of YWCA is already helping to make a difference. Thanks!

Let's talk about sex



Lindsay, YWCA Bristol

It's not always easy for girls to find reliable, relevant information about sex, relationships and contraception and many don't know the facts about safe sex. That's why a group of young mums from YWCA Bristol developed a sex and relationships peer education programme. *Did you know?* examines healthy and unhealthy relationships, peer pressure, staying safe, sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. The programme allows young men and women to talk about sex freely and openly. One young woman said: ***"I've learnt not to worry about saying no, and not feel pressured to do anything I don't want to."***

Lindsay, who became pregnant at 18, agrees that young people need to be able to talk about sex without feeling squeamish. ***"With YWCA's support, I teach students about sexual health and relationships. It's so important to teach it in a way young people will get. I want to make sure that they learn about all the stuff that I didn't."***

Young women tell us that the sex education they get in school is too scientific, too little, too late and doesn't consider relationships. With your generosity, as well as peer education, we offer practical sexual health support like inviting nurses to speak at young women's groups, distributing condoms and offering pregnancy and chlamydia testing.

Run (or walk) for YWCA

We have some super events for you in 2010, whether you're an experienced runner, a beginner or would simply prefer to walk:

The **Llanelli Waterside half marathon** in March is for all levels of runner and takes place in a beautiful coastal park near Swansea.



At the **Peak District FSI Challenge** in June, run or ramble 4km or 10km through the stunning scenery. There's fun for everyone at this event, so why not ask your friends, family and colleagues to join in?

The **Adidas Women's 5km Challenge** in September in Hyde Park is a chance for women of all ages and abilities to get fit and have fun together.

Our old favourite, the **Royal Parks half marathon** in October, passes some of London's top sights and you'll meet runners of all abilities challenging themselves for a good cause.

Find out more at www.ywca.org.uk/supportus/events, or call us on 01865 304205.

Your legacy to young women

A gift in your will allows us to make real and lasting changes to young women's lives and provides girls from poor communities with vital chances and long-term support. Of course you'll want to make sure your loved ones benefit from your will, but please consider leaving a gift to YWCA after your other concerns have been taken care of.

YWCA supporter Alison says: ***"Sorting out my will was an important thing to do and a big relief and was much easier than I thought. I will be able to make a real, meaningful contribution – perhaps more than would be possible at any other time – without feeling that any of my friends or family will miss out."***

For more information or to request a copy of our free legacy guide, call us on **01865 304205** or email supporters@ywca.org.uk.

News in brief



Welsh arts group visits London

Girls from the arts group at YWCA Cwmafan enjoyed an art trip to London. The girls in the group use different art forms to explore the issues that affect them. They produce artworks, graffiti walls, films and choreograph various dances.

The two-day visit for the 12- to 16-year-olds gave them lots of ideas and included two hours of private tuition at Tate Modern where they produced their own artwork. They watched street performers at Covent Garden and toured London on an open top bus to see the architecture.

The girls were inspired. *"It was just brilliant. We learned so much"* said 15-year-old Charlotte.

YWCA Cwmafan's manager Sian Tones said: *"The girls were extremely excited. Most of them had not been to London before and many had not been out of Wales. The generosity of YWCA supporters gave these girls a fantastic chance to have their eyes opened to many different art forms and cultures."*

Free ecards

Now you can send ecards from our website. There are designs suitable for all occasions. There's no login, no catch and no charge – so what are you waiting for? Send someone a nice message today! Go to www.ywca.org.uk/ecards



Say it with charity flowers



If you're sending flowers this Valentine's Day, Mothers' Day or Easter, show you care about disadvantaged young women as well by ordering blooms through Charity Flowers in aid of YWCA. Charity Flowers is the only charity-owned flowers-by-post service in the UK, and for every beautiful bunch you send, we receive a percentage of the price. Order online at www.charityflowers.co.uk or call **08705 300600** and choose YWCA as your charity.

Do something chocolately

This April we're encouraging supporters to **do something chocolately** and raise funds for YWCA's vital work. Any sum you raise – no matter how big or small – will go to help young women.

Make your favourite chocolate cakes and invite friends round for a charity chocolate morning, or take your cakes to work and sell them to colleagues. They won't be able to resist. You'll find more chocolately fundraising ideas and resources to help you run your event here: www.ywca.org.uk or call us on **01865 304205**.



YWCA England & Wales Head Office
Clarendon House
52 Cornmarket Street
Oxford OX1 3EJ

To make a donation call **01865 304205**
email supporters@ywca.org.uk
or visit www.ywca.org.uk



give with confidence

YWCA is a registered charity number 217868