

THE AlcoLOLs PROJECT

FINAL REPORT
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THE AlcoLOLs AN INTRODUCTION

The AlcoLOLs project was co-created by Portobello High School pupils along with academics at Queen Margaret University. The pupils, who call themselves The AlcoLOLs, co-designed a way of breaking down the barriers which constrict teenagers from being able to discuss alcohol in a meaningful way. The approach has been further developed over 3 years with AlcoLOLs at 6 Edinburgh high schools. To date it has involved some 3000 pupils in dialogue groups which means talking together in a safe space (with no adults involved) about Scotland's drinking culture to decide for themselves whether to drink or not to drink.

We believe that the AlcoLOLs approach works because it helps teenagers realise that that they don't need to make isolated judgments governed by how they think things are (social norms), but together can critically reflect on how their reality is constructed and can decide to change it.

OUR CO-CREATORS THINK:

“We're not going to drastically lower the rates of underage drinking in Scotland – That's not realistic. But I think people will be a lot safer in the choices they make, they'll know why they're making their decisions and they'll make informed decisions instead of just doing it blindly.” (MP*)

“It's a really great tool for youngsters to help each other navigate themselves through adolescence. The AlcoLOLs was a jewel in the crown. One of the best projects I've been involved in in my educational career. For me what was exciting was knowing that almost every young person in the school had had an involvement.”

(Peigi MacArthur, head teacher with 37 years' experience teaching teenagers)

* To protect the anonymity of the teenage AlcoLOLs they are cited throughout the report using initials only.

WHY DIALOGUE?

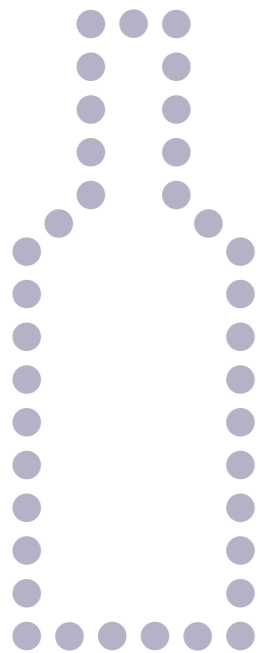
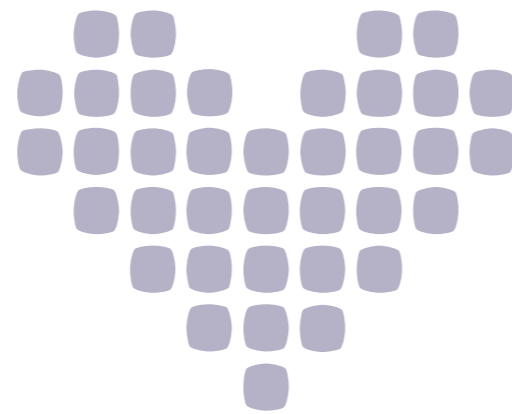


“You don’t understand what you’re feeling – so it’s difficult to talk about it.”

“You can’t speak properly because you might be judged.”

“Popular people drink... you want to be like the older ones – get invited to parties... everyone does it, you feel left out if you’re not.”

“You’re swag at school – only talk about the good things.”



“Drinking is seen as cool – people exaggerate and lie on social media, you pretend to be drunk to be normal.”

*comments written on tablecloths during AlcoLOL world café events at QMU



Head teacher, Peigi MacArthur, describes adolescence as “a torrid troubled time [when] sometimes you’re crippled with fear about the judgments you make or have to make”. The AlcoLOLs report that teenagers are able to talk about things that are funny because “That’s not awkward”; but they acknowledge that it’s “hard to tell people serious stuff”. (AlcoLOL comment, World Cafe 2015).

So it’s easier to joke about drunkenness than say they’re worried about drinking.

AlcoLOLs also describe what we interpret as a caste system in operation within their schools and can map the different groups (labelling them as *Popular*, *Geek* or *Sports Kid* for example).

The divisions between groups means it’s difficult for teenagers to appreciate different perspectives on drinking. The perception is that popular people drink and non-drinkers don’t talk about not drinking.



HOW IT WORKS

“The AlcoLOLs breaks down barriers. Now I know how to talk to anybody – even groups who I wouldn’t normally feel I could talk to.” (JT)

“If it was just talking about alcohol and what it does, the facts, it wouldn’t go in or have an effect. People get more interested when they can put in their own opinions, their own take on it.” (EP)



AlcoLOLs aren’t the ‘usual suspects’ – confident teenagers routinely selected to represent their school. They are a diverse group from across the high school caste system. Their role isn’t to teach, but to have authentic, credible conversations with their peers.

They don’t tell people not to drink; they listen to opinions, share stories and discuss insights. The groups aren’t scripted and every session is different – the AlcoLOL facilitators learn from the younger pupils and vice versa.

The AlcoLOL role models discuss their uncertainties and strategies in an open way and involve the participants in the discussion. This dialogue approach enables AlcoLOLs and their fellow pupils to break away from the usual mode of talking at school (feeling judged and being careful to say the right thing). It shows them how to share in a more authentic discussion where their real views are listened to, valued and, importantly, not ‘judged’.

It’s a better model for decision making.

THE AlcoLOLs MODEL OF CHANGE

The AlcoLOLs approach is designed to enable young people to effect change at different levels within their communities. The following quotes illustrate some of the impact we've witnessed in our research.

"What a torrid troubled time adolescence is... you have to make so many judgements and you're at a stage where sometimes you're crippled with fear."

"Now I'm more confident – I would never feel worried about awkwardness any more. We know how to open up a conversation, start a dialogue. That never would have been the case before – I would have had to get drunk to cope."

"It makes us feel so much better... it can take a weight off your shoulders if you are hiding that you are drinking, or if you are hiding that you don't like drinking..."

"There was an exuberance, a signal that something positive was going on".

(Peigi MacArthur, head teacher)

"I had fewer alcohol related incidences to deal with in school... where I'm picking up the pieces of family or pupil relationships... I noticed a positive difference."

(Peigi MacArthur, head teacher)

"The norm is that young people do not want to talk about it [drinking] because of me being a social worker, they close down and this is what was striking... her approach was so different... she knew exactly what she was talking about and was really making choices."

(Edinburgh-based social worker)

"I'm definitely more aware of the risks and want my sister to be more aware of the risks and what to do in situations."

BEFORE THE INTERVENTION

INDIVIDUALS

AlcoLOLs

AlcoLOL GROUP PARTICIPANTS

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

FAMILY

WIDER COMMUNITY

OUTSIDE SCHOOL

"You don't understand what you're feeling – can't speak properly because you might be judged."

"You need to be swag... you can't show vulnerability...it's hard to tell people serious stuff."

"It pushes you to be more open."

"We now know better not to make a joke of something that is serious."

"You can say whatever you want about the topic in a safe environment."

"I would never ever speak to my parents before. I would try and stay away from the topic. Now I'm a lot more open – I always tell them where I'm going, what I'm doing, what I'll be drinking."

"It made a change outwith the groups. More respect and intermingling of the years. It opened people's eyes to younger ones having very valid opinions on things... and that everyone deserves respect."

"There isn't as much street drinking, they seem to be doing it in a house where there's a certain degree of protection instead of getting leathered in Rosefield park which used to happen every single weekend."

(PC Verity Ferry)

AlcoLOL (NOUN):

1. Someone who knows how to talk about drinking so can choose whether to drink, or not drink and knows how to drink 'properly'
2. Someone who is brave enough to speak out so that other teenagers can learn how to talk about drinking and make informed choices for themselves.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

This report evaluates the AlcoLOLs project, funded by the Robertson Trust and conducted in Edinburgh 2013-2015.

The project was designed to tackle the issues alcohol presents for young people and worked by combining insights from dialogue, peer education, and a harm reduction approach. The intervention was co-designed by young people and implemented by them in six secondary schools in the North East of Edinburgh, eventually reaching over 3000 young people. The AlcoLOLs, a name they chose for themselves, were volunteers who experienced dialogue at Queen Margaret University where they received training in facilitation and education about alcohol. Subsequently, the AlcoLOLs ran their own dialogue groups in schools, meeting each group of approximately 15 pupils twice and reaching on average 1000 pupils a year. School dialogue groups were designed to problematize alcohol, question participants' attitudes and behaviours, offer useful knowledge, develop new communication skills to support learning, resilience, and, where appropriate, aspire to change behaviours.

Our approach was: to treat alcohol consumption as a social, cultural practice; to acknowledge that persuasion and information-giving were insufficient communication methods to tackle the issue: and to adopt a harm reduction — pragmatic and non-judgmental — way of working. The AlcoLOLs project, consequently, was designed around dialogue and peer-learning and it demonstrably delivered a range of beneficial outcomes for participants: new skills and knowledge, change of attitudes and behaviours (effective self-regulation), and the promise of a potentially larger-scale cultural transformation.



The AlcoLOLs training day team (August 2015)

The best way to understand the AlcoLOLs is to focus on the space it created for conversations about alcohol that could not easily happen elsewhere and on the way in which it scaled up the intensity and depth of a small group dialogue to whole school populations.

The keystone of the AlcoLOLs was the safe space created so that participants could open their minds and re-think their relationship with alcohol. There were no adults in the room to take control of the conversation and, thanks to skillful facilitation, there was no judgment in the room, no need to perform for social approval or to hide in silence. Instead, there were many stories about drinking and not drinking, some laughs, information to make people think about alcohol in different ways, useful tips on how to navigate drinking and social life, and new communication skills to help reach out to others. There was also curiosity and excitement. And something to eat.



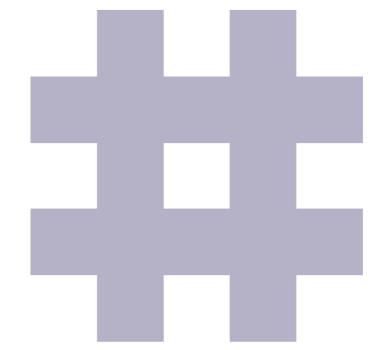
The AlcoLOLs were able to create this experience again and again — in fact, 600 times. They were able to make the same kind of learning happen, yet, they were not scripted. They did not perform the scene; rather their approach was a disciplined improvisation in which a group of three or four facilitators performed together with the participants they had in the room.

“There was nothing ever like this in school.”^(ID)

The way in which the AlcoLOLs worked tackled also another important feature of the school: its informal caste system, such as the popular people who adopt an identity that, among others, value drinking and bragging about it. A school may have a number of castes creating informal but powerful divisions and boundaries that regulate pupils’ behaviour in and out of school. The AlcoLOLs worked to remove such labels and thus demonstrated to all group participants that they belonged to the same community and, whatever their personal circumstances, could contribute to the collective learning and draw personal benefits from doing so.

“It makes you think about stuff in a different way, not just about yourself but about making an effort with different people.”^(HP)

“The AlcoLOLs breaks down barriers. Now I know how to talk to anybody, even groups who I wouldn’t normally feel I could talk to.”^(IP)



FACTS AND FIGURES

Having been piloted in Portobello High School in 2011-2012, the project ran in six Edinburgh secondary schools (see Table 1) over three years, starting in January 2013 and finishing in December 2015. In these three years, the project produced **200** fully trained AlcoLOLs, who ran approximately **600** dialogue sessions in their respective schools, involving **3000** pupils across North East Edinburgh.

TABLE 1 – ALCOLOLS SCHOOLS SIZES (Source: Historical school rolls, 1996-2015. Year 2015.)

SCHOOL	NO. OF PUPILS
Castlebrae High School (CHS)	118
Drummond Community High School (DHS)	352
Holy Rood RC High School (HR)	1043
Leith Academy (LA)	896
Portobello High School (PHS)	1295
Trinity Academy (TA)	793

The original aim of reaching entire school populations was implemented through developing models of working suitable for each individual school. As illustrated in the Table 2 below, in smaller schools, the entire school population was covered in the first two years, while in larger schools the project worked with selected years in each school year (with one exception where logistical difficulties meant that the project could not finish its three-year cycle despite completing the training of dialogue facilitators.)

SCHOOL	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Castlebrae High School (CHS)	✓	✓	
Drummond Community High School (DHS)	✓	✓	
Holy Rood RC High School (HR)	✓	✓	
Leith Academy (LA)	✓	✓	✓
Portobello High School (PHS)	✓	✓	✓
Trinity Academy (TA)	✓	✓	✓

To summarize, in every year of the project the AlcoLOLs engaged nearly a quarter of the combined schools' populations in multiple discussions about navigating drinking and alcohol. This is arguably a comparable, if not more extensive, coverage than that achieved by formal Personal and Social Education (PSE) classes.

The extent of AlcoLOLs' work in schools was made possible by the volunteering of individual pupils and offering them intensive training. Across the three years, there were **35** training sessions involving around **300** pupils. Each cohort of AlcoLOLs received **14** hours of formal training per year, adding up to a total of **84** hours across the six schools. Additionally, the QMU project team delivered around **1200** hours of ad-hoc training and in-school support to ensure that groups were conducted in an ethical manner and using appropriate facilitation tools. Each AlcoLOL volunteered between **30–80** hours to the project.



GIVING & TAKING: The AlcoLOLs and the benefits of the project

The AlcoLOLs, who volunteered and ran the dialogue groups in their schools, were acknowledged by their teachers and peers to be doing something special. It was their commitment, organizational and facilitation skills that made this project come alive. In short, they gave a lot (on average 50 hours in a year), and gained a lot in return. This section of the report talks about the AlcoLOLs.

Out of the 300 pupils who were given the opportunity to experience dialogue at QMU, 200 pupils committed fully to the project and became AlcoLOLs, as described in Box 1: How to become an AlcoLOL.

STEP 1	Experience dialogue at QMU: participate in three 90-minute dialogues with around 15 pupils from your school: learn to talk and think differently (March-June).
STEP 2	If you liked it, volunteer for one-day intensive training with around 60 pupils from other schools who, like you, want to change things (August)
STEP 3	Start planning the schedule of groups in your schools (helped by QMU AlcoLOLs team and a link teacher from your school)
STEP 4	Get ready in 4-people facilitation teams and run the first session using the AlcoLOLs film.
STEP 5	Talk about your groups with other AlcoLOLs; keep mixing facilitation groups; share on your group Facebook page; change what needs to be changed for AlcoLOLs to work in your school.
STEP 6	Get trained for running small-size, high-speed sessions and get them going.
STEP 7	When you have done what you planned to do, meet with QMU LOLs team for a pizza and a chat about what's already happened and what is going to happen next year (January)
STEP 8	Claim your Saltire Award (May/June). And feel good about who you are now!

On the whole, AlcoLOLs saw themselves as being representative of the school's population and its informal caste system, that takes into account factors such as age, academic or other achievement, and "popularity" (celebrity status, attributable to all sorts of criteria relevant to adolescents and specific school) ¹:

We're just like ordinary pupils, We're not like brainiacs... some of us are a bit stupid and We're not all like the most popular pupils in the school either. We're not all the same – That's better..." ^(JT)

BOX 2 – LUCY'S PROFILE

"When Lucy, one of the first AlcoLOLs, came to QMU she was actively pursuing the goal of being voted school's worst drunk in the Leaver's Yearbook "it was like the X Factor – I was like those candidates saying 'I need to be in this, I want so much to win.'"

"We would take pictures of how much we'd drunk and post them on Facebook – people still do, especially for T in the Park and things, they'll take a picture of how much they're going to drink and post it to out do each other."

"The group shattered my view of what I thought was enjoyable. I didn't know that other people didn't drink – and that was so refreshing... I came to see my behaviour as a form of self harm - my energy was spent, from Wednesday onwards every week, on finding a way to get drink for Friday and Saturday. Now I can't remember the last time I got drunk... I still drink but I don't want to get drunk anymore."

"I used to drink to impress people, the group changed my way of impressing people..."

"It's about teaching us social skills – I know how to have a conversation now. It's about getting social skills that, as a teenager, you're not allowed to have. We watch TV programmes like Geordie Shaw and think that's how pretty girls should behave – making a career out of it."

"Talking about the AlcoLOLs is a positive way of raising the issue of alcohol with your parents. It's got high status because it's a university thing and parents like that... Because of The AlcoLOLs I talked to my parents about drinking for the first time. I understood for the first time what my drinking meant for them. I saw things from their point of view ... up until then it had just been me me me."

"As a teenager you can't show vulnerability – that's seen as weak. So being able to show vulnerability at the group was really different. When I was able to show vulnerability was when I started to feel proud of myself... this group was a lifeline. Everyone should have access to it."

1. Brady, P. (2004). *Jocks, Teckers, and Nerds: The role of the adolescent peer group in the formation and maintenance of secondary school institutional culture*. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 25(3), 351-364.

Motivation

Initially, curiosity and an opportunity to dodge the school routine were important incentives for participating in the dialogue training. Later, as the volunteers learned more about the project and experienced its methods, a wider range of motivations kept people involved in the AlcoLOLs: instrumental reasons (CV material); curiosity and pleasure offered by the new experience; sometimes, the relevance of the topic of alcohol to personal or family circumstances; very often, a sense of responsibility for younger pupils in the school; and at times, a sense of duty to the community (school) or a collective responsibility for the future of the "imagined" community ² of Scotland, or maybe just the school, with its problematic drinking culture:

"I took part in a group at school. It was so different – That's what was exciting. It was so different from anything else..." ^(SP)

"I've got a sister in third year and I know exactly what it was like at that age, I remember things change quite significantly in third year... and I want to make sure that she's more clued up about it..." ^(AP)

"We are trying to change Scotland's future." ^(AP)

This range of motivations — initially more instrumental, later on, focused on the group or community — shows that: firstly, the intervention had appropriate incentives to attract different volunteers in any school; and secondly, it encouraged deeper learning and reflection, the latter made clear through the long list of benefits the peer leaders claim to have derived from the project.

What do you get from being an AlcoLOL?

Given their time commitment, intensity of training, and re-engagement with the educational content through dialogue groups, it is unsurprising that the AlcoLOLs saw themselves as profoundly affected by the experience. LOLs developed a range of communication skills, acquired new knowledge, and changed how they think about drinking and how they handle alcohol. The most easily identifiable benefits were developing confidence and a wide range of communication skills, such as facilitation skills, public speaking, presentation skill, listening and also interpersonal skills (described to us as "reading the signs"):

"That's the first thing probably everybody says, you definitely get more confidence... and a bit more self-esteem, especially when you get a group that was so amazing... you feel good about it." ^(DD)

2. Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: reflection on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). London: Verso.



Ice-breaking at the 2014 training day.

“I feel much more confident now discussing things with adults... now I know how to go about it...” (JD)

“Before AlcoLOLs I found group work hard. Now I have the skills I need to facilitate groups – to initiate discussions and continue them... I learned to find enjoyment in working with other people” (RP)

“My mum attributes my job, college place, and volunteering to the AlcoLOLs... At school nothing else went that well...” (RP)

What changed for AlcoLOLs?

If the new skills were easiest to identify, AlcoLOLs also talked about extending their knowledge about alcohol, and changing attitudes and behaviour related to drinking, both their own and others. The **new knowledge** attributed directly to the project includes greater contextual clarity, i.e. identifying risks and consequences of drinking; gaining practical knowledge to underpin personal drink-related strategies; an ability to see alcohol from many perspectives, and as a result to set aside stereotypes. The evidence in our evaluation ranges from straightforward and specific to complex links between acquiring new skills, new knowledge, reinforcing knowledge already possessed, and changing one’s behaviour by putting knowledge into practice:

“The AlcoLOLs helped me talk to people. I learned so much from the older ones that when people started drinking I knew what to do. I’m the sensible one. I help the others. Without The AlcoLOLs I would still have wanted to help my friends when they got into a mess I just wouldn’t have known how...” (LP)

“[At the start, we thought] drinking wasn’t really a big problem. And now I really do see it differently.” (AP)

“I’ve changed my attitude, and the people I hang out with and the parties I choose to go to... Now when I’m offered a drink I just say no and can just tell my friends don’t want to either. We just share a look and all say no.” (HH)

Changing **behaviour** is the ultimate goal of health communication, education and relevant alcohol interventions ³ ; we have, therefore, looked for evidence of behavioural change in

3. Mitchie, S. West, R. Campbell, F. Brown, J. and Gainforth, H. (2014). *ABC of Behaviour Change Theories: An essential guide for researchers, policy makers and practitioners*. Sutton, Surrey: Silverback Publishing.

accounts given to us by the AlcoLOLs, who included non-drinkers, occasional moderate drinkers, as well as problematic drinkers (routinely bingeing or drinking to get drunk). Our evidence indicates that behavioural change directly attributed to training and leading dialogue includes changes in the type of and amount of alcohol consumed, or in the pattern of consumption; managing risks; and, finally, acting with integrity in relation to the AlcoLOLs identity:

“In third year and fourth year if I went to a party I was determined to get as drunk as you possibly could because if you didn’t, it wasn’t a success basically, whereas now I might drink until I’m tipsy, I’ve found my limits... and definitely got better at dealing with other people who are drunk.”^(JT)

“In myself now I can’t see the point in getting drunk... I’m a lot more clued up and a lot more sensible – I don’t drink vodka and I limit myself. I feel a lot more mature about it since I started doing [AlcoLOLs].”^(AP)

“I do drink but I am now a lot more careful... when I’m out with [other AlcoLOLs] we always talk about it... [you] need to... practice what you preach...”^(JD)

In short, given the nature of evidence, it seems fair to put an emphasis on **effective self-regulation** (consumption, risk management, and integrity in behaviour) as the main outcome at the level of behaviour change.

The virtuous circle of change

Each of the individual accomplishments — new skills, knowledge and different ways of acting — is important in its own right, but it is their mutually reinforcing effect that is a more meaningful way of understanding the impact of an extensive dialogic engagement.

The initial dialogue experience and training was designed to seed change by addressing knowledge, attitudes, and communication skills. As AlcoLOLs practiced their dialogue skills, they also improved them and, as a result, gained in confidence and self-esteem. This, in turn, supported positive behaviour, for example, in exercising choice in relation to drinking.

“Now if people ask why I’m not drinking, I don’t make an excuse I just say ‘I don’t want to’... I don’t feel like I have to drink to impress anyone anymore I only drink if I want to.”^(JP)

Similarly, when AlcoLOLs’ knowledge expanded, their attitude changed. Here we can give examples of attitude change focused on alcohol and drinking. However, we can also point at a

wider, personality-level change of becoming a more outward-oriented person: needing to listen, wanting to “gauge opinions” (AP), valuing other people’s opinions, or enjoying working with others. The metaphor of personal change as opening up comes across in relation to being able to talk in more meaningful, reflective ways: but also as being able to learn – as one AlcoLOL put it, “[in dialogue] you open your mind” (RD)

“I thought ‘Well, if everyone else is opening up, it’s OK if I can open up as well,’ and I didn’t feel like I was being judged... and the more I spoke the better I felt...”^(JP)

The nature of this change — encompassing also, as we have shown, the development of self-identity that includes a sense of responsibility to others — is aptly summarized by an AlcoLOL who volunteered for three years, having first done the training at the age of fourteen:

“I look back and think if it wasn’t for the AlcoLOLs I wouldn’t be fully who I am now [...] Going to the groups in school (not even facilitating them) helps you grow as a person”^(LP)

While the seeds of change were sown in the initial experience of dialogue, it was the subsequent retracing of the paths that connected knowledge, feelings, experiences, and ability to communicate that added depth and strength to the process of personal growth. In this sense, being an AlcoLOL became a virtuous circle of learning.



Some of the expert witnesses who share stories and insights with AlcoLOLs (training day 2014)

PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE

There is overwhelming evidence that the AlcoLOLs project had a positive impact on the dialogue facilitators. This section of the report focuses on the impact the project had on approximately 3000 participants in the dialogue groups. The evaluation here is based primarily on 1402 questionnaires administered to group participants in the years 2013-2016. (See Appendix A for details of evaluation methods and data).

Useful, engaging, well-targeted project

The simplest measures of the educational value of the AlcoLOLs groups are their perceived usefulness (76%) and ability to engage participants (78% would recommend participation to others, 76% enjoyed participation).

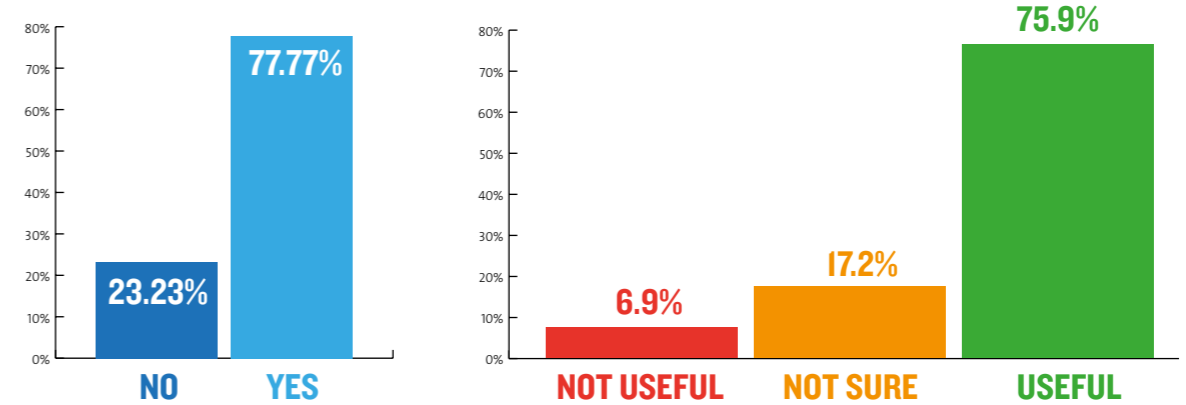


FIGURE 1 – RECOMMENDING PARTICIPATION IN AN ALCOLOLS GROUP (N=1237)

FIGURE 2 – USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS (N=1255)

Additionally, the AlcoLOLs was rated as the most useful source of alcohol-related information out of seven different sources considered (media, school, family, and peers as sources).

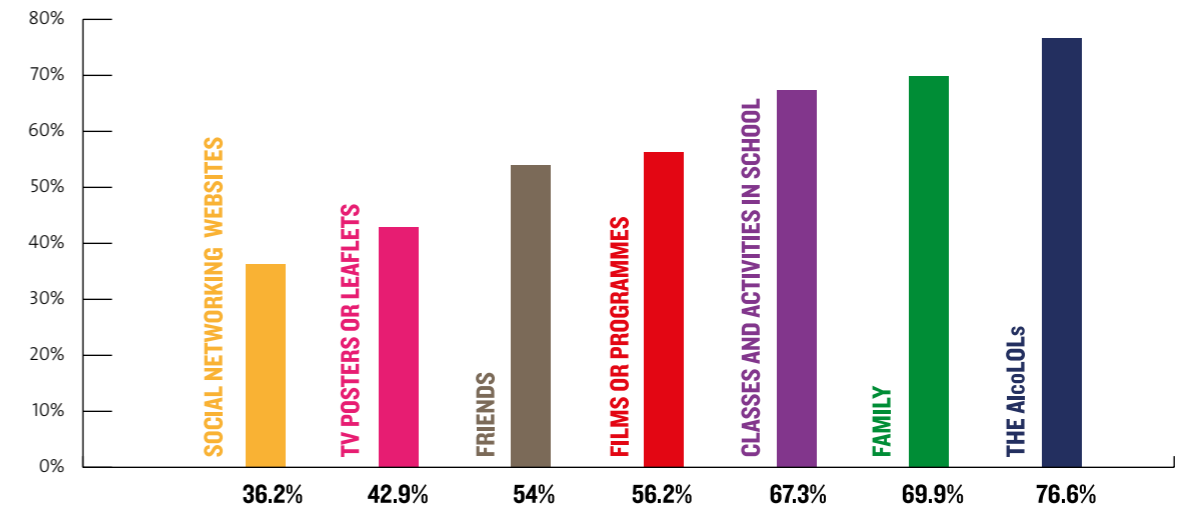


FIGURE 3 – USEFULNESS OF SOURCES FOR ALCOHOL RELATED INFORMATION. (AUTUMN 2015, DEPENDING ON THE QUESTION N=505-513)



Together, the evidence demonstrates that the project was well targeted, useful and enjoyable, suggesting that there is a good chance of good quality learning to follow.

Participants' learning

Before we consider the evidence showing what the project participants learned, it is important to bear in mind the nature of this project. Alcohol was treated as a social and cultural practice that is bound up with performance of interpersonal relationships⁴. The AlcoLOLs as a dialogue project about alcohol focused on collective learning from a diversity of experiences in a group. This put the emphasis on practical (rather than medical) knowledge: knowing what is useful in practice, i.e. specifically, knowing how to navigate alcohol as a teenager who is developing a sense of self-identity through social interactions within (school-based) peer groups. The evaluation questionnaires measured the alcohol-related knowledge and skills obtained through AlcoLOLs groups in ways relevant to the project's approach, as shown below.

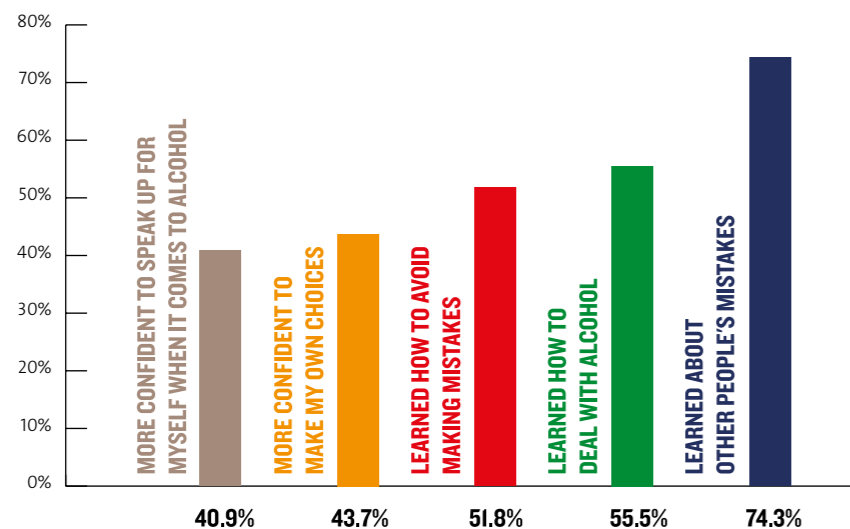


FIGURE 4 – LEARNING FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS (N=1146)

Participants reported that they acquired practical knowledge (how to deal with alcohol, how to avoid making mistakes), they also developed **confidence** (in their choices and in their ability to handle their preferred choices in social circumstances), with most of the respondents (76%) learning about other people's mistakes discussed around the stories told in the groups. In the project we created a bank of stories from those offered in the AlcoLOLs training sessions to be used, for example, by the AlcoLOLs in dialogue groups as a facilitation tool. Stories were personal, memorable for particular narrative reasons, and relevant to the participants — they contained and circulated important practical knowledge. The importance of stories was confirmed through an open-ended survey question, where they emerged as the most striking feature of the dialogue groups (see Figure 10 below).

The pattern of learning from the AlcoLOLs groups (shown in Figure 4 above) was achieved consistently, as demonstrated by the evaluation in three big schools (see Figure 5), thus confirming the predictability of its effects and the project's value as an education intervention.

4. Percy, A. et al (February 2011). *Teenage drinking cultures*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

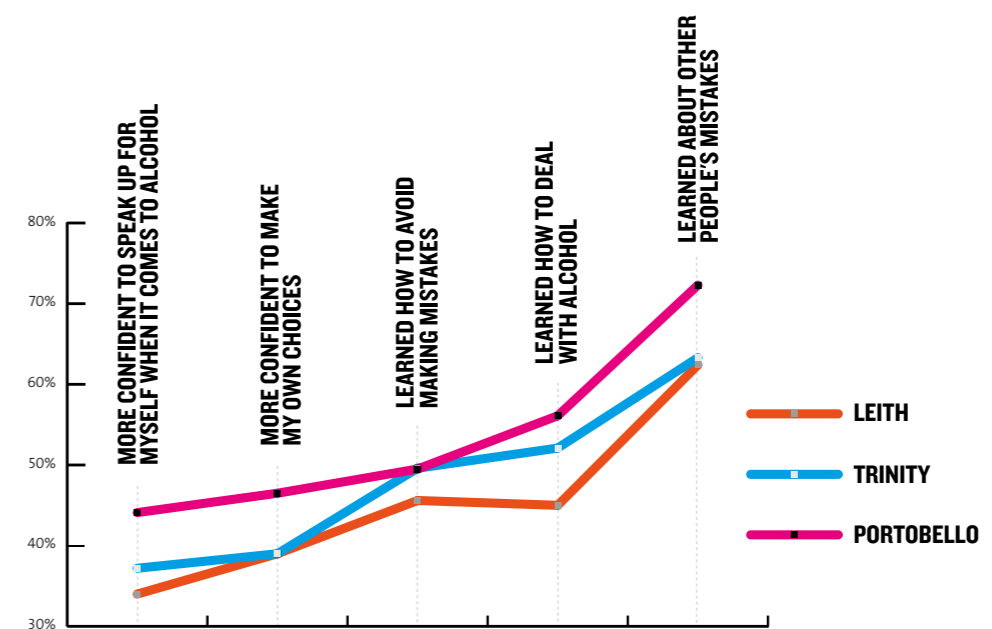


FIGURE 5 – LEARNING FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS SCHOOLS COMPARISON (PHS N=419; LA N=388; TA N=270)

The consistently highest scores of PHS participants could be, at least partly, attributed to the fact that the school piloted the project and, consequently, saw it running for one year longer than any of the other schools. This may suggest that the longer the intervention runs in a school, the stronger the effects on group participants in terms of obtained knowledge and skills.



We can also see the evidence of knowledge, resilience and specific skills learned from participation in dialogue groups emerging from evaluation questions asked in 2015 (see Figure 6). Half or nearly half of the participants gained a combination of: new knowledge, changed views, and new skills making them more resilient. Here again we find an indication of the broad pattern of learning playing out in individual schools, showing that the differences we found can be attributed to school-specific factors (see Figure 7).

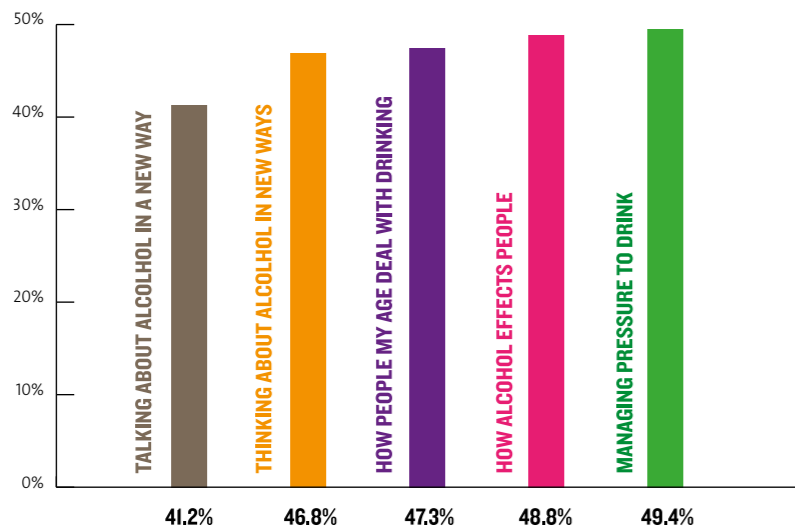


FIGURE 6 – WHAT I TOOK AWAY FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS. AUTUMN 2015 (DEPENDING ON THE QUESTION, N=515-525). THE ANSWERS DO NOT ADD TO 100% AS RESPONDENTS COULD REPORT GAINS IN ALL OF THESE AREAS INDEPENDENTLY.

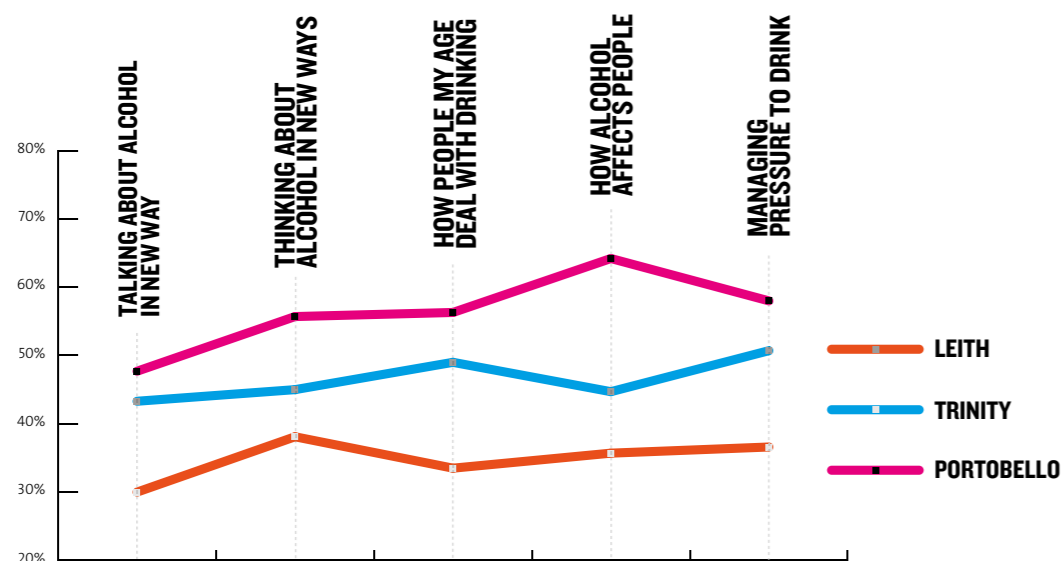


FIGURE 7 – WHAT I TOOK AWAY FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS: SCHOOLS COMPARISON (PHS N=176; LA N=209; TA N=147)

Much effort in the development of the project went into engineering the best possible structure of dialogue groups, with the initial aim of as much variety as possible constrained in practice by logistical factors (timetabling). Age and related factors, such as experience of drinking and confidence, proved particularly challenging for group design; we, therefore, looked for answers in the evaluation questionnaire. When we compared participants' school years, S2s (aged 13) and S4s (aged 15) scored similarly on the knowledge/skills questions, but differed mainly in relation to "Learning from other people's mistakes", "Learning how to deal with alcohol", and "Managing pressure to drink", with younger pupils displaying a much higher level of learning (see Figures 8 and 9). These findings help to validate the timing of the intervention and the need to include S2s in the groups, despite the participation difficulties due to limited dialogic skills, confidence, ability to share, and alcohol-related experience, an issue highlighted by several AlcoLOLs in their interviews.

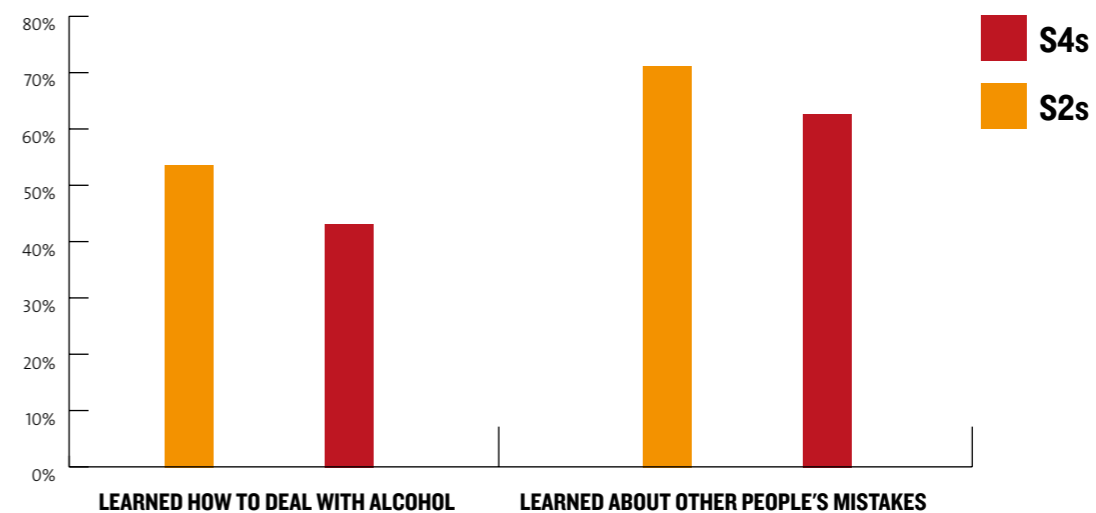


FIGURE 8 – LEARNING FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS S2S AND S4S (AUTUMN 2015.; S2S N= 235; S4S N=192)

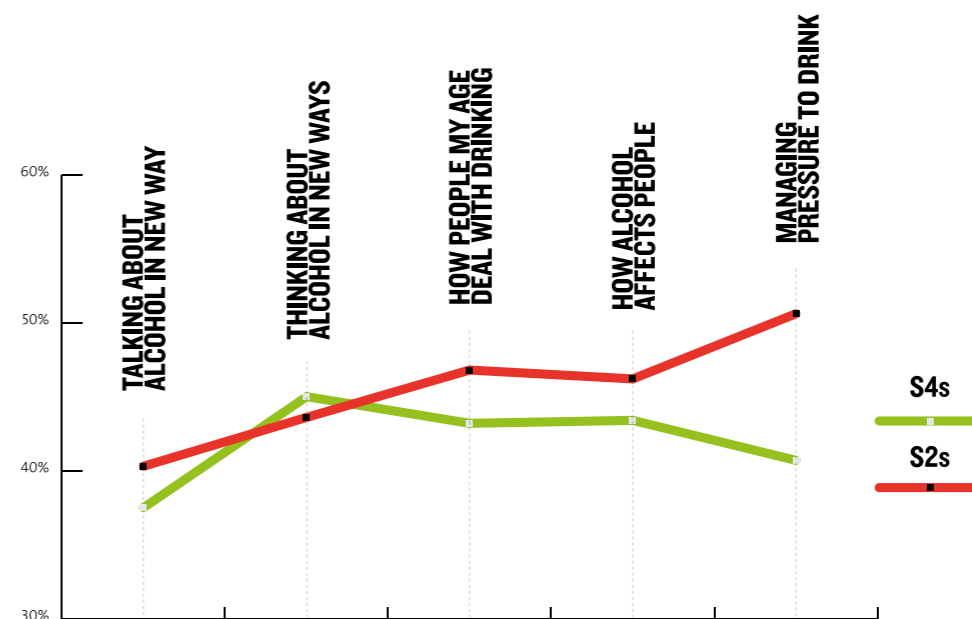


FIGURE 9 – WHAT I TOOK AWAY FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS S2S AND S4S (AUTUMN 2015)

Participants' own voices appeared more authentically through a couple of open-ended survey questions, summarized in Figures 10 and 11 below. Asked about the impression left by the AlcoLOLs groups, participants chose "Stories" as by far the strongest memory, followed by a grouping related to knowledge (facts and stats about alcohol; dangers of alcohol; how to deal with alcohol; scale of the alcohol problem) and the dialogic features of the project (the AlcoLOLs themselves, discussion, scenarios discussion, film, safe space and refreshments).

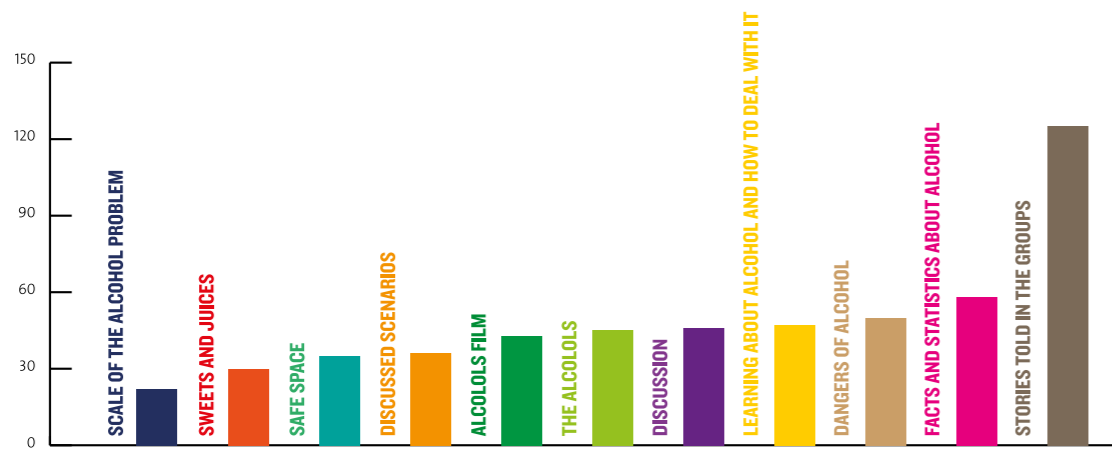


FIGURE 10– BIGGEST IMPRESSION FROM THE ALCOLOLS GROUPS (N=537)

When asked for their opinion of the Alcolols project, participants painted a particularly positive picture: “good”, “helpful” and “interesting” being the most frequent views. Closer scrutiny shows that participants’ opinions reflected some of the main themes discussed in the previous sections of the report, especially **the educational value of the project**, with many participating stressing how much they learned from the groups, e.g. dealing with difficult situations, learning the effects of alcohol, and S4s highlighting the usefulness of such an approach for younger pupils:

“It tells us a lot about the effects of alcohol.” (LA S4)

“It teaches you how to handle drink.” (LA S4)

“It showed that you don’t have to drink and what to do/say if you feel pressured to.” (PHS S2)

“I now know what I can do to limit how much I drink.” (PHS S4)

“It teaches what to do in difficult situations.” (LA S4)

“It gives young people information on alcohol that may help them in future.” (LA S2)

Participants emphasised the **importance of the safe space** created in the groups, referring to it as a space in which people don’t feel judged, talk honestly and where gaps between the years can be closed. The absence of adults was also noted as it helped foster participation in discussion and the educational value of stories coming from credible sources – i.e. people close to participants’ age – was also appreciated.

“It’s a good idea as you get to speak about it with pupils instead of teachers.” (TA S4)

“It’s good that there is no adult in the room when you are speaking.” (PHS S2)

“You can say whatever you want about the topic in a safe environment.” (PHS S2)

“Good way to learn about alcohol in a safe and enclosed environment.” (PHS S2)

“It’s a great idea, it’s nice to chat and relate to older pupils about things.” (PHS S2)

“You can talk of the stuff you can’t normally.” (TA S2)

To sum up, participation in the Alcohols dialogue groups is shown consistently to create practical learning (knowledge and skills) that is needed in order to support behavioural change ⁵.



⁵ Dolan, P., Hallsworth, M. Halpern, D., King, D. and Vlaev, I. (2 March 2010). *Mindscape: Influencing behavior through public policy* [Report]. The Institute for Government and the Cabinet Office.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

The AlcoLOLs project on average reached close to a quarter of the school's population in a school academic year. The report so far has painted a picture of the AlcoLOLs themselves and of the much larger number of those who participated in the schools. This section of the report shows what the project contributed to the school in general, rather than the individual, both as a formal educational institution and as a community.



The AlcoLOL expert witnesses (2015 training day).

BOX 3 – HOW DO AlcoLOLs WORK IN SCHOOLS	
1	Each group of participants meets with AlcoLOLs twice in the space of a few weeks
2	Each group is facilitated by a small team of AlcoLOLs who share jobs of organizing, leading, and contributing to facilitation
3	Each of the two meetings has a different format, purpose and supporting material.
4	AlcoLOLs handle the responsibility for scheduling, information and invitation of participants (supported by QMU AlcoLOLs team and link teacher)
5	Timing of the groups needs to work in ways that do not disrupt AlcoLOLs' own school – based education (there are different models for this)

Alcohol is already part of the school curriculum, covered mostly in Personal and Social Education (PSE) classes; but the interviewed teachers recognized the contribution made by the AlcoLOLs in this respect:

“Highly valued part of curriculum... good, sound alcohol education.”
(TEACHER DT)

“We try to incorporate it [alcohol] into our own PSE programme, give them the facts but it’s... always difficult to get them to see [it] from our point of view.” (TEACHER JH)

However, teachers and youth workers who deliver alcohol education in some schools, also stressed a wider educational context and the project’s contribution in this sense:

“It’s not just about the curriculum now, we’ve got to develop skills for life, skills for work...there is no doubt, they gained lots of skills for life from this.” (TEACHER JH)

“[It] speaks to different aspects of school and life.” (TEACHER DT)

In brief, the project adds to the effectiveness of alcohol education while also creating opportunities for a different type of learning and a different educational outcome: **practical learning** and developing **transferable skills**.

Learning across boundaries

It is clear from our data that to understand how and why the AlcoLOLs project worked, it is important to see the multiple lines of differentiation and division that it had to cross. For example, in the section above, we saw the distinction made between school and life, the inside and outside of the school. Earlier in this report, we referred to school populations as caste systems. Similarly, the formal hierarchies of power – teachers vs. pupils – also come into play by dictating who can speak to whom, what can be said and therefore owned collectively as valid experiences, knowledge, or attitudes. The AlcoLOLs found a way of working across these boundaries.

Our evaluation revealed an important difference of perspectives between schools and pupils on the value of formally offered alcohol education. While schools emphasized the appropriate educational provision, pupils emphasized their own learning and what they perceived, sometimes in extreme terms, as limitations of the way in which schools deal with alcohol:

“...they don’t focus on it too much within schools, they briefly touch on it. I think in second year I had some sort of lesson on units but I’ve forgotten this and we haven’t really touched it since...” (ID)

“If it had just been PSE I would have known zero, absolutely nothing, That’s what it’s like for most people in school – you know absolutely nothing.” (LD)

“Usually in class [when] you give the answer, you say the answer you think you’re meant to give and either it’s wrong or it’s right. Whatever you say here [in AlcoLOLs] people are actually going to think about it.” (GROUP INTERVIEW, PHS)

The value of the AlcoLOLs sessions was identified in the evaluation questionnaires as the most useful source of information, or learning resource (see Figures 2 and 3 above).

There are three factors that may help explain this gap between established adult-led alcohol

education and the peer-led education made possible by the AlcoLOLs. Firstly, there are institutional limitations placed on the nature of conversations about alcohol that teachers can have with pupils:

“[When I talk to pupils] There is a limit...I have to say ‘I don’t want to know what you did’whereas in AlcoLOLs, nobody is going to stop that story.” (TEACHER DT)

“As soon as teachers are there, things that could be said aren’t said. It’s important that there’s no teachers and it’s all pupil led.” (TEACHER JH)

Secondly, unlike formal education, the AlcoLOLs mixed age groups. Referred to by one of our teachers as **vertical learning** (i.e. across age barriers), it is not only an efficient way of transferring practical knowledge from older to younger pupils and improving their personal strategies, but also of chipping away at the school’s caste system. We can show this through the example of age, e.g. where fairly rigid age divisions are institutionalized in schools as the distinction between junior and senior pupils who are separated by academic levels and segregated by timetables:

“As S2 and S5s, there is no way that you really connect with each other, so to have something where you can sit down with somebody you don’t know... it opened your eyes a little bit.” (DD)

It is possible to point to at least two effects produced by the AlcoLOLs erasing of the age barrier: preparing for the next stage of adolescent life (“getting an insight into the social life of those a few years older”, Teacher PP), and developing civility, a recognition and appreciation of the other:

“You get to know them [participants in a group]... then when you walk by the next day, they are like ‘oh, hi’... I see them and I smile. It’s better than walking by them thinking nothing of them... you know they are pretty cool.” (DD)

“One person shares an experience, another person — they perhaps don’t even speak to—gets involved and they share their thoughts and they end up almost creating a friendship... and it works like in a circle...” (LD)

The freedom to speak and the salience of what is discussed in the groups are tied together: the absence of judgment and the ability to choose what is important were recognized by all involved as unique characteristics of the AlcoLOLs groups. In terms of dialogue, this refers to

creating a **safe space** to talk in (the rules of the room, facilitation techniques, and other tools such as the way in which food is used to manage the dynamics in the room:

“If you could see [people] were a bit stumped for what to say, we would throw another question or offer a story about ourselves to say like, ‘This story is probably not what you would tell your parents or your teacher’, but that’s the point, you can talk about what you want in here.” (DD)

The final explanation, and an important contribution the project made, relates to the characteristics of adolescence as a psychological developmental stage. For many, it is a difficult time, filled with turmoil and loneliness. The AlcoLOLs could offer help.

“Some of the people... we spoke to have never spoke about it, even with their friends...they said to us, ‘It makes us feel so much better’... **it can take a weight off your shoulders** if you are hiding that you are drinking, or if you are hiding that you don’t like drinking...” (JD)

“As someone who has worked with teenagers all my professional life I realise what a torrid troubled time adolescence is... You’re crippled with fear about the judgements you... have to make... You’re under so much peer pressure... because you’re just lacking in confidence at that stage in your life and I think what was good about the AlcoLOLs... they heard from other people about the decisions that they’d made... and that allowed them to think about what they might do in a similar situation.” (Peigi MacArthur, head teacher)

To sum up, the AlcoLOLs affected not just a large number of individuals but also the whole school as an institution and a community. The project provided a space for conversations about alcohol that could not happen elsewhere in the school. In this way, it helped to extend the reach and depth of learning about alcohol and drinking. Secondly, working across divisions and boundaries of school castes, the AlcoLOLs project began to soften some of the sharp and hard edges of school life, experienced by young people as alienation. Not only was this beneficial to individual learning, it also enhanced the practice of civility in and outside dialogue groups.

Beyond the school walls

Getting a clear sense of the impact of this project in the community is the most difficult aspect of the evaluation, due both to the complexity of such a task and the focus of this intervention on young people and on schools. However, the AlcoLOLs project from its beginnings was clear about the importance of wider cultural practices: ways of handling alcohol, ways of drinking, and ways of talking about it in Scotland. We worked to build links between the AlcoLOLs and the wider social context in a number of ways throughout the run of the project.

One way in which the project touched people beyond the school walls was by young people talking about it to their families. 33% of group participants talked to their families about their experience of the project. We know from the AlcoLOLs interviews that conversations varied: they tended to be descriptive in nature but some were more reflective and served a specific purpose in the family dynamics, for example, to open the topic of drinking and say what had previously been unsayable ⁶.

A member of the QMU AlcoLOLs team joined the East Edinburgh Community Alcohol Partnership and played “an active role in facilitating the views and experience of the young people to be heard in partnership meetings... [to] inform the development of local strategies” (HOT Opportunities Team, written feedback, December 2015). In this context, it is appropriate to point out that the amount of alcohol seized by police officers from under 18s in the East Edinburgh CAP area has decreased from an average of 8-12 litres most weekends in 2012 to an average 1-3 litres in 2014/15.

The reality of this change for a local police officer schools meant that:

“There isn’t as much street drinking, they seem to be doing it in a house where there’s a certain degree of protection instead of getting leathered in Rosefield park which used to happen every single weekend.” (PC Verity Ferry)

While showing direct cause-effects links between the AlcoLOLs and a community-level impact is hard and beyond the scope of the work planned for this project, we can begin to see the AlcoLOLs ripples created in the community.



6. Pieczka and Wood (2013), Action research and public relations: Dialogue, peer learning, and the issue of alcohol, *Public Relations Inquiry*.



Kenny MacAskill MSP introducing the AlcoLOLs public lecture (September 2014)

CONCLUSIONS

Young people can successfully take control of their own learning about alcohol and the job of educators in this context is to enable, train and support this process.

While not everybody involved in the project responded to it in the same way, our evaluation showed that there are predictable, larger patterns of learning and change delivered by the AlcoLOLs. This could be helpful in designing, implementing or evaluating future interventions.

This project showed that communication matters beyond being a tool for delivering public health messages. The AlcoLOLs learned the skill of dialogue and worked hard to pass it on to their peers. It was not easy and perfect in every single moment, but it opened minds, created confidence and encouraged change.

The AlcoLOLs was about young people and drinking and, as we have shown, the project did a credible job in tackling this issue. It did, however, also show a promise of doing much more – of teaching how to practice **civility**, how to reach out to people not like us and to acknowledge them as partners in the collective business of living as citizens of a school, neighbourhood, or a country.

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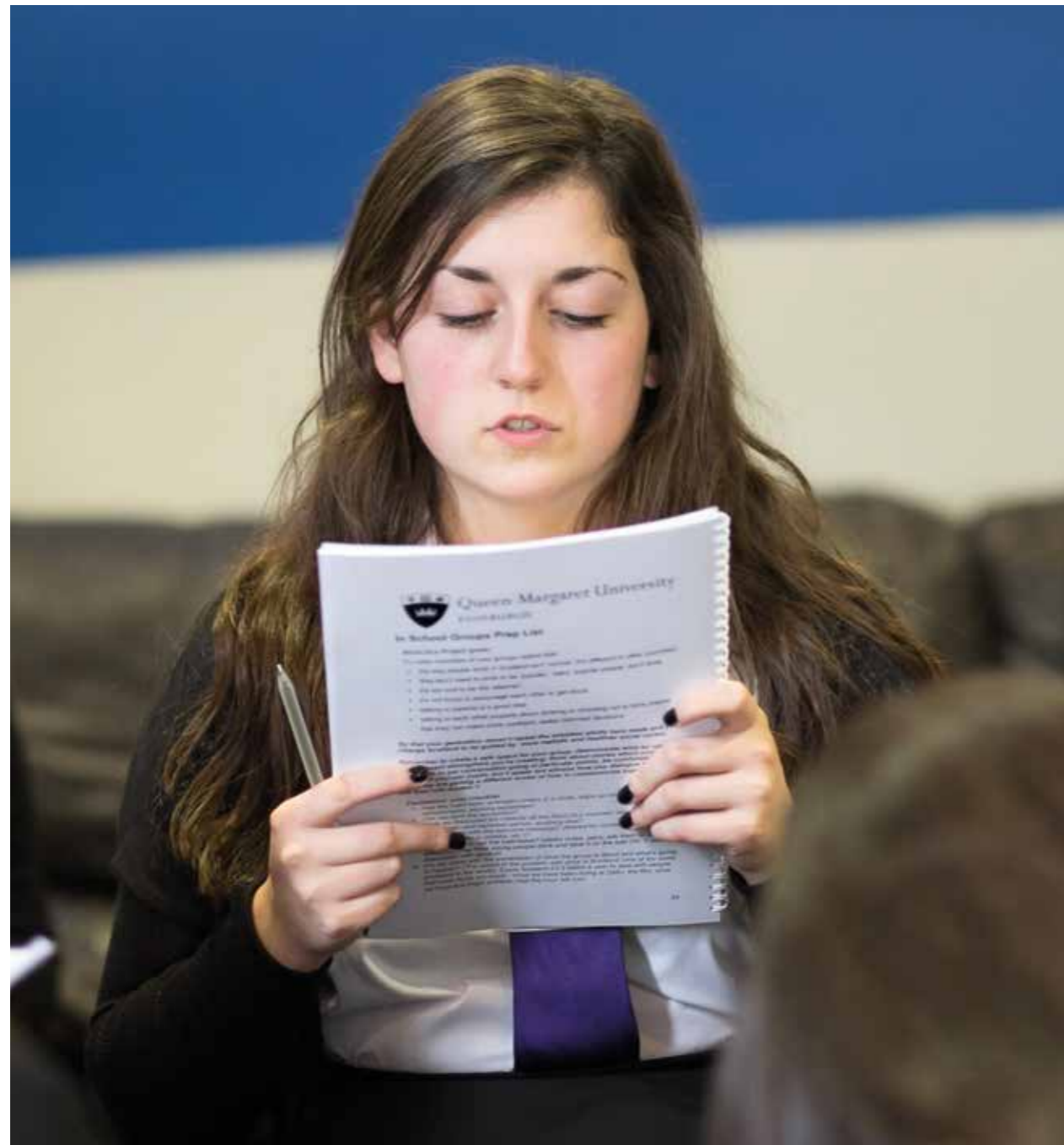
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APPENDIX A: DETAILS OF EVALUATION METHODS AND DATA



MEASURE	DATA	LESSONS LEARNED
MEASURE 1: Participation in dialogue sessions and subsequent training	300 pupils participated in the initial training (planned 360)	The discrepancy of 60 across 3 years and 6 schools is explained by one or two participants expected in each training group not turning up on the day due to personal circumstances.
MEASURE 2: Levels of participation in school based peer led dialogue groups	Some variation, on average groups 12-15 participants Achieved 3000 participants, against planned 4,500.	The measure here reflects the development of the intervention; we learned to set participation targets and organize recruitment to hit these, but school size makes a difference here as well: big schools needed to get through more group meetings and that had some impact on the planning for group sizes. If the intervention is not to be repeated for a number of years in a school, the target can be set for the whole school population, otherwise, around 20-25% of the school's population in a year. Our overall participant numbers were affected by the lack of full commitment from one of the participating schools, making it difficult to run groups in this school with the efficiency achieved in other schools.
MEASURE 3: Qualitative feedback on reasons of interest or disinterest in the training offered among new AlcoLOLs	21 interviews with AlcoLOLs	AlcoLOLs reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a range of new communication and interpersonal skills • Acquiring knowledge about: effects of alcohol, risks, size of the problem, ways in which teenagers deal with it • Developing an acting on a sense of responsibility for others (friends, siblings, younger people) • Changed drinking behavior where previously problematic
MEASURE 4: volunteering for facilitation	200 volunteered to run groups	We made a conscious decision to include about a third more participants in the initial phase of training in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve more exposure in the school • Ensure that volunteers for phase 2 were in no way pressured to do so. Interview evidence indicates: high levels of satisfaction with the training and its effectiveness in preparing volunteers for running dialogue groups.
MEASURE 5: Benchmark survey in all schools	Conducted in 3 biggest schools, distributed to whole school populations, over 4000 questionnaires collected, Analysis still ongoing.	Initial and partial analysis shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude: scale 1-20, Mean 11.1, Mode 12, st. dev. 3.54 (N=3462) • Salience: scale 1-15, Mean 7.2, Mode 7, st.dev. 2.33, (N=3447) Both salience of alcohol for the respondents and their attitude towards it show very standard normal distributions with measures of central tendency falling near the middle of measurement scales used. We interpret this as indicating a lack of substantial reflection or knowledge about the issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills: scale 1-55, Mean 26.7, Mode 28, st. dev. 5.26 (N=3300) • Self-efficacy: scale 1-15, Mean 15.4, Mode 16, st. dev. 3.10 (N=3186) Both of these variables show distributions skewed towards the higher values in the scales. These findings, juxtaposed with the consistent picture of much learning resulting from the AlcoLOLs (practical, communication skills, confidence) found in evaluation questionnaires and interviews, suggest that that the young people's assessment of their own skills may be over generous: to put it simply, they don't know what they don't know.

MEASURE	DATA	LESSONS LEARNED
MEASURE 6: AlcoLOLs group evaluation	Survey (3 schools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78% (N=1237) would recommend participation in AlcoLOLs; • 76% (N=1255) found it useful; • 75% (N=1263) enjoyed participation in the groups. • 76% (N=513) found it a useful sort of information (top of the seven rated sources, ahead of family and school activities)
<i>Impact on behaviours</i> MEASURE 7: Workshop evaluation questionnaires	Collected 1402 questionnaires Measures of knowledge and self-efficacy more appropriate here than measure of behavior due to insufficient time between intervention and the survey. Note: <i>Questionnaire in 2015 amended due to the findings emerging from the AlcoLOLs interviews.</i>	<p>Measure of practical knowledge: 55% (N=1146) learned how to deal with alcohol</p> <p>Self-efficacy: 51% learned how to avoid mistakes</p> <p>Confidence/resilience: 40% more confident to speak up for myself</p>
<i>Impact on behaviours</i> MEASURE 8: Qualitative feedback from workshop facilitators through focus group discussion	21 individual interviews with AlcoLOLs 3 group interviews in schools	<p>Reported positive behavior change related to:</p> <p>drinking: self-regulation (better control of drinking,)</p> <p>helping/supporting others in managing alcohol better or managing risk</p>
<i>Indications of change</i> MEASURE 9: School surveys to gauge change in attitude and behaviours	3500 surveys analysed here	<p>At this stage, we can only present selected findings:</p> <p>25% of 13years olds and 62% of 15years olds reported ever having a proper drink (N=1289, combined data from 2013 and 2014). This is lower than the figures in the national survey SALSUS 2013 (32% and 70% respectively)</p> <p>Of those who had had a proper drink, 51% of 13 year olds and 21% of 15 year olds never drink now, compared to 14% of 13 year olds and 7% of 15 year olds in SALSUS 2013. The figures in our survey show lesser frequencies of drinking compared to SALSUS 2013, though not in such a stark manner as in the "I never drink alcohol now" category discussed above.</p>
MEASURE 10: interviews with head teachers	4 interviews with 3 teachers (1 head teacher, 2 guidance teachers who acted as link teachers for the project)	<p>Interviews confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning and change reported by the AlcoLOLs, particularly in skill development, confidence, and personal growth. • the virtuous circle of change effect of the project on the AlcoLOLs volunteers • positive educational value and a new dimension added to PSE alcohol education <p>Point to effects on schools community in facilitating learning across groups.</p>

MEASURE	DATA	LESSONS LEARNED
MEASURE 11: Data from police related to interventions; qualitative interview with front-line police officers in catchment area communities	Data from East Edinburgh Alcohol Community Partnership 2 interviews with police officers (including a school liaison officer)	Reported less street drinking and drop in the amount of alcohol confiscated from people under 18.



APPENDIX B: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS LEARNED

Schools are excellent sites for projects like the AlcoLOLs: it aimed to reach large numbers of young people where age is an important demographic factors in a number of ways; suitable to working towards achieving multi-level effects, i.e. individual, small group, and community levels.

At the same time schools are enormously complex and busy institutions and many lessons were learned in order to design an intervention that offers the best fit in term of:

- intervention-specific factors: AlcoLOLs can be a short intervention for some individual participants and at the same time, a long intervention for the school community (potentially running for years);
- school-specific factors: size, ethos, timetabling, provision of space/time /opportunities for senior pupils to exercise curriculum choice and develop nonacademic skills, such as leadership.

TWO KEY LESSONS:

Both place and space for training and dialogues groups are crucial. The first of these refers to the institution partnering with schools to deliver the project. Our evaluation shows that pupils, schools and families saw the fact that a University was involved as bringing an extra value, for example, by helping to incentivize the volunteers. The physical attributes of spaces in which training and dialogue groups took place was also important but could be managed successfully with the help of food and/or refreshments offered.

The project demands constant and careful attention to possible tensions between the freedom offered by truly peer-led approach (no adults in the room) with safety and support needed to ensure that the project is run ethically and does not put any of the participants in difficult or distressing situations. This is achieved mostly through careful training and appropriate levels of support from the project team while groups are running in school.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped us generously since 2010 when we started working on what eventually became the AlcoLOLs project.

Our thanks go first to the AlcoLOLs themselves: a most impressive group of young people with passion, open heads, and fantastic facilitation skills — always a pleasure to talk to, work and share pizzas with.

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