

The Street Weapons Commission

David Shaw

CHATTER

Commissioner

David Shaw, good afternoon. Thank you very much coming. You're representing Glasgow Council on Alcohol...

David Shaw

Yeah, that's right, yes.

Commissioner

...and all the time we've been here and all the papers we've read before we came and the briefings, there's this inter-relationship between the violence in Glasgow, quite extreme violence, as you know, largely involving knives and the relationship between all of that and alcohol.

David Shaw

Yes.

Commissioner

Can you firstly then for us start on the position as you see it, starting perhaps with the question, why should Glasgow have that sort of relationship with alcohol?

David Shaw

That's a question that's been asked a lot and I think it's a complex question in the sense that, alcohol is used in a lot of different ways. People use alcohol in a lot of different contexts and young people in particular use alcohol... they learn to use alcohol by their, you know, association with their peers so alcohol

is used by everyone in society, to some extent, so it cuts across social strata's, age, gender.

Commissioner

The age is getting lower, presumably, illegal drinking by definition but are getting lower you tell me?

David Shaw

Yeah, alcohol seems to be a big problem in this part of the World. Again, the reasons for that are quite complex, you have to look at the individual and social context in which people drink as well.

Commissioner

Yeah, yeah and what can you do to help that, that situation?

David Shaw

Well the work we do is mainly in helping people understand the reasons why they're drinking. We ask them to examine how they use alcohol and we try and help people, try and enable people to make positive changes in their life. So really what we're seeking to do is to facilitate change. We're doing that in a number of ways, we're doing that to help put... One of the ways we do that is to help people ask the right questions, you know, like we question whether drinking to excess is okay. It's generally accepted by some people that drinking to excess is just normal. So we provide alcohol education and we look at, you know, what our unit is, what the long term consequences of alcohol are, from a health perspective and also help people to examine the consequences for their family, community and so on.

Commissioner

Is this funded by...? Obviously there's money involved in this, is it funded

locally, is it funded centrally, is it charitable?

David Shaw

It's a voluntary organisation, yeah.

Commissioner

Voluntary?

David Shaw

Yeah.

Commissioner

So it's a charitable organisation?

David Shaw

Yeah, my particular project's funded by Social Work.

Commissioner

There is 1 school of thought which... and we've heard it expressed to us in this Commission, that one way of dealing with the alcohol problem and it's centrality to the whole business of gangs and use of weapons, is by making it so expensive that young people can't have access to it. There's another school of thought that says, if you do that, you'd increase offending because it's a drug and people offend in order to buy, buy whatever it is, whether it be Heroin or Cocaine or whatever else.

David Shaw

Yeah.

Commissioner

What is your position?

David Shaw

There is an argument for increasing the price of alcohol. It's something that's been discussed a lot lately. There's 2 ways we can limit harm caused through alcohol and alcohol's a drug, like any other drug, the more it's used, the greater volume it's used in, the greater the harm. We can limit the supply or we can limit the demand and I think a single solution isn't gonna be effective, I think we need to look at the problem from a number of different angles but certainly there's an argument for looking at the accessibility of alcohol, the availability and the price.

Commissioner

I'm sorry, just to pick that point up and I'm sorry... I must apologise to my colleagues for a moment, for jumping back in again but there is of course the very strong argument that says that much of this violence is committed now by under 18s and you shouldn't be buying or consuming alcohol under 18...

David Shaw

Yeah.

Commissioner

...and we're being told they don't tend to go into pubs, they tend to buy from the corner shop and buy from the off-licence. Now that's really a trailer for me to say that there is just at the moment the announcement of a major initiative by a major English supermarket to take... I won't go into the details but going to very rigorous steps which involve biometrics and facial identity linked with cards and so on to prevent youngsters buying alcohol...

David Shaw

Yeah.

Commissioner

It's got a lot of interest, nobody's made a decision on this yet, but what it's really doing is flagging up the issue that, okay, well we'll just stop them doing what they shouldn't be doing anyway and that's buying the alcohol, until they're 18. Now that at a stroke, if that were to work, big if, if it were to work, you could cut down the alcohol consumption by the under 18s almost to zero, in that perfect world.

David Shaw

Yeah.

Commissioner

I mean, is that a realistic option at all, do you think or not?

David Shaw

On the face of it, it sounds like a pragmatic solution but again I think we need to look at the alcohol use in a wider context. If people want to get alcohol, they'll get it so I think that yes, there needs to be careful consideration about how alcohol's sold, in price and so on, but again I think it's 1 solution. I think it's such a complex issue that, just limiting the supply alone won't help. I think it will make a difference, but I think there needs to be a more...

Commissioner

I'm sorry, I...

Commissioner

[INAUDIBLE]

Commissioner

I mean I think we're talking about a spectrum of issues here, I mean on the 1 hand we're talking about booze being the thing that often worsens violent behaviour 'cause it doesn't... there's no inhibitions left in the person and then on the other hand, we're trying to talk about promoting healthy lifestyles and so on and so forth and it worried me a little bit because the paperwork says that you achieve startling results with your education programme, you mentioned 3 things in your way of facilitating change, drinking to excess, educating kids about units and the long term consequences. Well my experience in youth work, 25 years as a youth worker, is that whenever you try and do that sort of thing with kids, they're not interested. Units are very, very difficult to now determine because of the different strengths of different kind and sizes of glasses and blah, blah, blah. Drinking to excess, as you said, is considered very normal and long-term consequences is far too far in the future for most teenagers to ever even want to think about. So, I can't quite put the 2 together, if that's the basis of your facilitating change, I don't see how startling results can come from that.

David Shaw

I don't know about startling results, I don't think I used words like that.

Commissioner

Okay, well...

David Shaw

But I don't know where that's come from, but I certainly haven't said startling results.

Commissioner

But presume... Okay well let's take that out of the picture.

David Shaw

But to take your other points... in terms of facilitating change...

Commissioner

I mean what we want to do...

David Shaw

I have to say as well...

Commissioner

Sorry can I, I mean we are here to talk about knives, guns, very violent behaviour by young people that may be fuelled by alcohol. Now my assumption, I may be wrong is that they are probably gonna be the group that are least receptive to some kind of educative intervention, whatever that may be and certainly not if it's about excessive drinking and units and so on. My question is, how do we get to those kids who's drinking behaviour is causing the stuff we're bothered about and how do we actually effect change in their behaviour through the reduction in their alcohol consumption?

David Shaw

I have to point out firstly that I don't work exclusively with young people. Many people that I see, that get referred to GCH are young but I don't work exclusively with young people. Again, it's a problem that affects adults as much as children. Children are more vulnerable, children are more, you know, they're still developing, so their probably most at risk from excessive use of alcohol. I don't think there's easy solutions to this and I think that, you know, we need to look at the problem from a lot of different angles, but in terms of facilitating change, I think we need to help young people in particular, help them to enable them to develop their skills so that they can ask

themselves the questions, is it normal to drink to excess? I mean most of the people I see are asked what age they were when they started drinking and for a lot of people it's round 13, 14, 15 year old and then the next question is, why, why did you start at that age? The usual reply that we get is because all my friends were doing it, so it's normalised and I think that's something that we need to question. Of course, if alcohol's cheap and easily available, then that's almost giving tacit acceptance that alcohol is okay to drink to excess. We as a society are saying it's okay to drink.

Commissioner

Mr Shaw, I'm very grateful to you for coming. You've been good enough to share with us your experiences in a critical area of the prevention of the sorts of problems that we all understand exist. Thank you for coming.

David Shaw

Okay, thank you.

Commissioner

Thank you.

David Shaw

Thanks. [CLAPPING]

CHATTER

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