

ACAN

Alcohol-free Childhood Action Network

ALCOHOL FOCUS SCOTLAND

On 5 December 2019, 30 supporters of the idea of a childhood free from alcohol harm met to scope the idea of a network to support information sharing and coordinated action in Scotland.

The group comprised representatives from community, third sector, NHS, research and local government organisations. A further 25 individuals pledged support and intend following developments and contributing to meetings.

This report provides insights from the meeting, additional background and links to useful reading in support of an alcohol-free childhood.

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Towards an Alcohol-Free Childhood

Alison Douglas
Chief Executive
Alcohol Focus Scotland

ACAN, 5 December 2019



Every child should be

Free from the emotional and physical impact of other people's drinking..

Free from commercial, environmental and social pressure to drink...

Free from health and social harms caused by consuming alcohol themselves...and

Supported and encouraged to make positive, healthy lifestyle choices as they enter adulthood.



Some background to the formation of the Alcohol-free Childhood Action Network



Alison Douglas, Chief Executive, Alcohol Focus Scotland

Meeting insights into what an AFC could look like were generated at the first ACAN gathering

Alcohol Focus Scotland grounds its alcohol-free childhood work on the UN rights of the child and we wish to ensure that children and young people are consulted about how alcohol use by others impacts their lives. We have developed the following vision statement: “Every child in Scotland should have the right to an alcohol-free childhood.” (See the four rights declaration on page 1.)

The initial work in this area was our 2013 report: [Unrecognised and under-reported: the impact of alcohol on people other than the drinker in Scotland](#). It involved a national omnibus survey of Scottish adults, a local case study to identify the impacts on frontline service providers and data mapping from existing surveys to bring home to people just how much harm alcohol causes people other than the drinker.

Then came [Promoting good health from childhood](#) produced by a committee of public health and marketing

Meeting insight

Parents will be empowered and supported to provide love, care and protection.

experts. Linked to the report we established a [pledge to eliminate the marketing of alcohol to children](#). This pledge has been supported by over half of Scotland’s members of Parliament as well as a range of civic and professional organisations.

Meeting insight

Children will be supported by adults to represent their views about alcohol and adults will take account of their views when shaping alcohol policy and managing the environments where children are present.

We are hoping to do a short update on this report for Spring 2020 which will look at how the evidence base has developed as well as what progress other countries have made.

We were also involved in the collaborative research report: [Like Sugar for Adults \(2017\)](#) with the Institute for Alcohol Studies (IAS) and the Alcohol and Families Alliance. The research identified the potential impacts of low level parental drinking. There has also been a recent peer reviewed publication from IAS. AFS has produced its own discussion paper based on the Scottish findings (see page 4).

Earlier this year we commissioned the Children’s Parliament to undertake an ‘Investigation’ for us: [Children’s Parliament Investigates: an alcohol-free childhood](#), published in September 2019. This project was undertaken by a group of nine to eleven year-olds who worked with 80 of their peers to identify the way in which alcohol can affect their everyday lives. They talked about feeling ‘unsafe’ and ‘ignored’. It generated a great number of valuable insights into where children see alcohol marketing as well as describing how drinking could impact on their play and relationships with adults. You can see the video they made at: <https://youtu.be/wqrAZC-m628> with more on page 8.

Meeting insight

It does not mean telling parents how they should behave with their children at home but it does mean providing information about the evidence around the impact of low level drinking on children and on the way drinking culture is transmitted to children.

Meeting insight

The pressure exerted by the alcohol industry to drink more in an expanding number of environments and occasions should be reduced in support of a more health conscious culture, mindful of the presence of

One of our charity partners, Children in Scotland, initiated a campaign called [Call 25](#) in which organisations were encouraged to outline their ideas for a better future for our children. [AFS responded to this](#), linking to those calls and highlighting the importance of supporting children's rights. The Scottish policy context for our work is fairly positive at the moment. The Scottish Government are in the process of integrating the UN Convention in the Rights of the Child into Scottish law. In their [Alcohol Prevention Framework](#), published in November 2018, they committed to putting "the voices of children and young people at the heart of developing preventative measures on alcohol. This will involve encouraging and seeking the views of children and young

people." They also gave a specific commitment to consult on measures to restrict alcohol marketing to protect children and young people. This consultation is expected in spring 2020, with potential legislation likely to be after the Scottish election in May 2021.

We have commissioned focus group research with young adult drinkers (aged 18 to 35 years), to explore how they currently perceive and interact with alcohol packaging, and how alcohol packaging could be used more effectively to communicate health information and messaging. A report with the findings from this research will be available in the first half of 2020.

Young Scot, who we have links with, are currently undertaking a Co-Design project involving 20 young people aged between 13 and 25 years from across Scotland. The project looks at the extent of alcohol marketing experienced by young people, the impact of alcohol marketing on consumption and alcohol-related harm, and how alcohol marketing could be restricted. This is expected to report in March 2020 and

will also inform the consultation.

With the support of partners we are establishing an [Alcohol-free Childhood Action Network \(ACAN\)](#), a network capable of inspiring, developing and supporting action to uphold children's rights not to be harmed by alcohol which brings together organisations and individuals from education, health care, family support, advocacy and research to examine and formulate policy and to identify ways to improve current practice. I'm hopeful this will develop into a strong network which can both contribute to the policy debate around the commercial pressures but also help us start to have conversations with children and parents about ways in which we can reduce the impact of adult drinking on children and young people.

Meeting insight

Removal of the belief that becoming a drinker is a necessary rite of passage into adulthood.



Healthy lifestyle choices will be obvious and readily accessible to all.

Everyone will be clear as to why drinking below 18 is not safe or healthy.

There will be age specific messages to help make information more accessible.

Addressing the culture of the inevitability of drinking without providing healthier options.

More people including children and young people will be aware of the harm to health, relationships and economy from alcohol use.

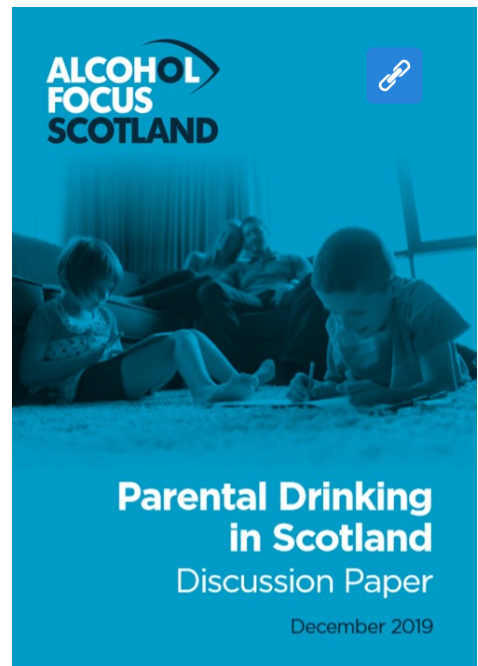
Parental Drinking in Scotland

David Robertson, Senior Policy
Coordinator

Alcohol Focus Scotland

John Holleran, Families and Communities
Manager

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs



John and David provided an overview of the [Parental Drinking in Scotland Discussion Paper](#). John had been a contributor to one of the expert panels that informed the report and David is the member of Alcohol Focus team tasked with leading the Alcohol-Free Childhood project, including developing the Action Network.

Alcohol Focus Scotland, the Institute for Alcohol Studies and the Alcohol and Families Alliance conducted research during 2016-17 to explore the impact of parental drinking on children across a range of drinking levels and patterns, with a principal focus on nondependent parental drinking.

The project used a mixed methods design comprising a literature review; a public inquiry with oral and written evidence; focus groups; and public opinion polling (online survey) of around 1000 adults and one of their children. The full UK-wide report, “Like sugar for adults”: the effect of non-dependent parental drinking on children and families, was published in October 2017 and a peer reviewed article reporting on the survey was published in November 2019.

This AFS report provides an overview of the evidence and key themes relating to parental drinking and its impact on behaviours and attitudes within families gathered through the inquiry session and online survey conducted in Scotland. The online survey comprising 200

interviews with families in Scotland took place in March 2017. For each family, both a parent and one of their children (aged between 10 and 17 years) were interviewed. The majority of parents surveyed drank within the UK Chief Medical Officers’ (CMOs’) weekly low-risk drinking guidelines of 14 units per week. A detailed description of the survey methodology, including strengths and limitations, can be found within this article.*

This report presents an analysis of the findings and suggests that there is a need to increase understanding of the impact of parental drinking amongst parents and families; address the pro-alcohol environment; improve identification and support for those affected; and ensure data collection and research effectively informs policy and practice responses.



[An Exploration of the Impact of Non-Dependent Parental Drinking on Children](#)



Quote from the discussion paper. The normalisation of alcohol in our society through the ubiquity of alcohol was considered a key driver of ambivalence towards, and acceptability of, parental drinking. The idea of alcohol as an everyday commodity was found to be perpetuated through alcohol marketing, with alcohol pervading all areas of society. JH

Headline stats



The trend over the last 20 years has been towards drinking at home and away from pubs where previously it was unseen by children.

80% of parents said that they drank in front of their children at home.



Two fifths of children surveyed reported that their parent's drinking had caused them to: be unpredictable; pay them less attention than usual; be less comforting and sensitive than normal; miss a family meal; argue with them more than normal; put them to bed earlier or later than usual; or make them late for school.

One third of children mentioned being confused or worried by their parents drinking.

This is not to say that children are in a constant state of distress (the survey asked have these things EVER happened) but these are the words they identified with and it points to concern on their part.

When asked why their parent chooses to drink alcohol, **just over a quarter of children** in Scotland said it was because 'it helps you when you feel depressed or nervous', 'to fit in with a group', 'to escape your problems', or 'to not feel left out'.



The 26% was interesting - the study showed that where parents gave negative reasons for drinking, their children gave similar answers.

Children's age may affect how they perceive motivations for drinking alcohol but in the Children's Parliament Report there were similar insights from under elevens about why adults drink.

Inquiry participants suggested that due to a perception that their children do not notice their drinking, many parents believe their children are unaffected by it. In reality however, children are often aware of their parent's drinking:

"the child is really absorbing everything that's happening around it from very, very early on. And parents [think] 'I'm only drinking when they're in bed' and 'they don't notice' but they do. They notice the smell. They notice the behaviour."

Jo Grace, NSPCC

Quote from the discussion paper. It's the normalisation of alcohol use within the home that might present problems later on. Even looking at the role of alcohol as a coping strategy as well...for the young people when they grow older in terms of modelling behaviours. JH

ACAN event workshop insights

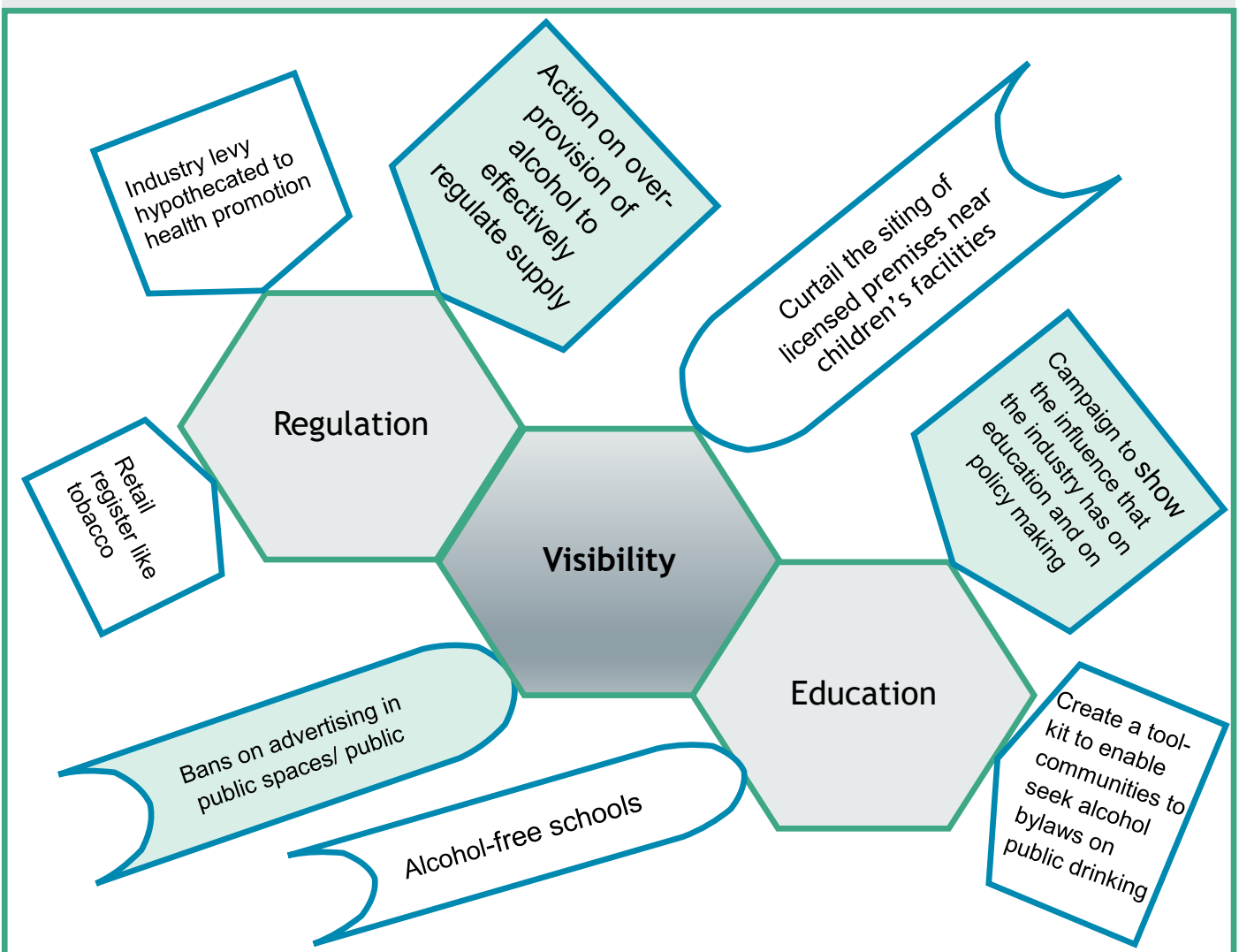
100 minutes was spend brain-storming five different tasks and here are some of the ideas that ACAN could support or help take forward

Some recurring ideas

Rather than Alcohol Free Childhood it might be better to refer to *a safe childhood free from alcohol harm or childhood free from alcohol impacts*. It may not be necessary for ACAN to change its shorthand descriptor but changing how we describe our work to others could be more thoughtfully encapsulated in language less easy to misinterpret or misrepresent.

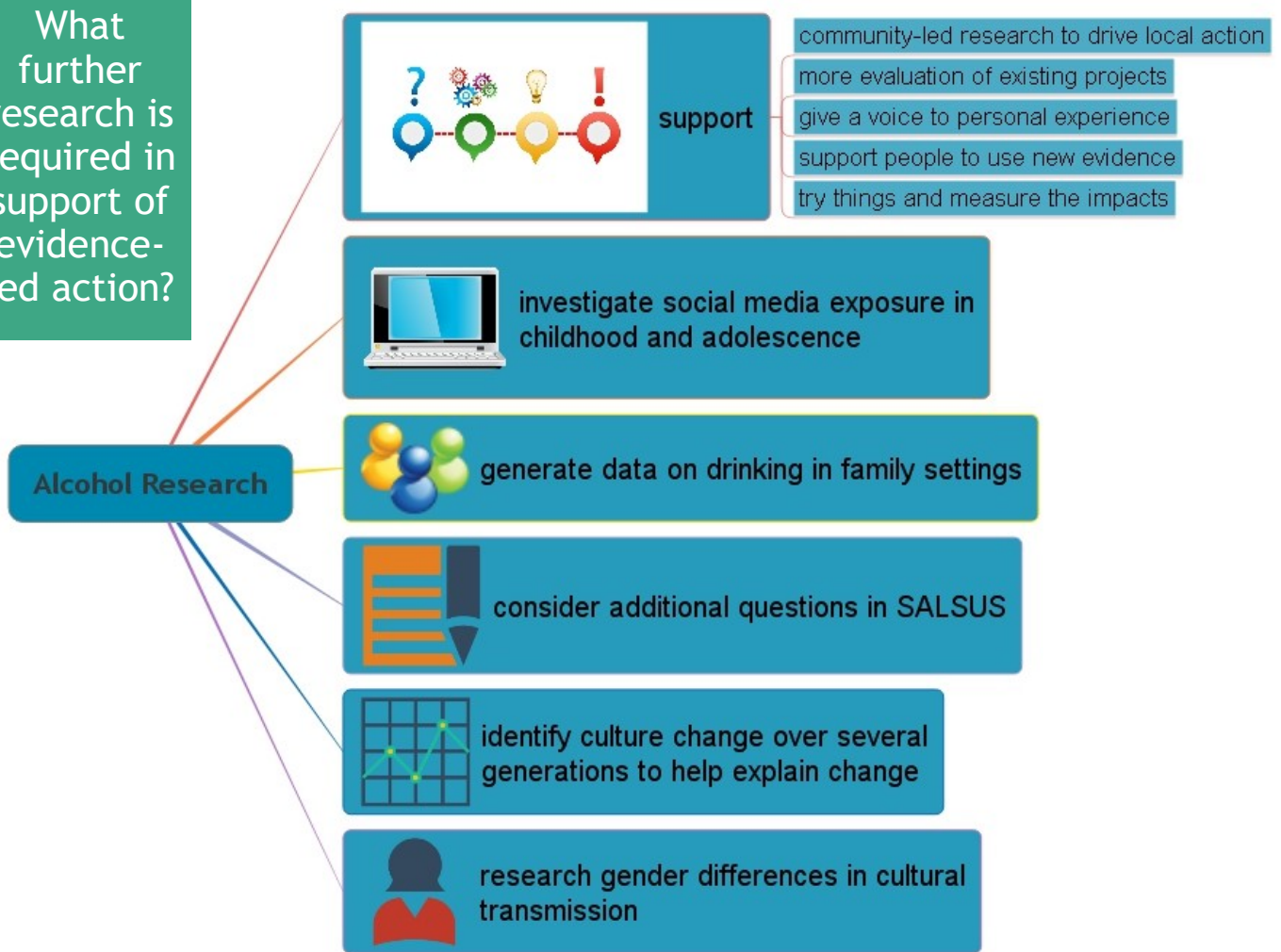
All the groups talked about the ongoing failure to join strategies together so that healthy eating and tackling other drug and tobacco use are more joined up in order to better influence alcohol culture.

There is a need to create alcohol-free spaces for families (and adults) to meet and socialise without being impacted by alcohol.



National action/measures that could be taken in support of AFC

What further research is required in support of evidenced-led action?



If money was no object and politicians compliant with our wishes, what two things would you get done and how?

Improve quality of life such as housing, work, access to healthy food, nursery provision, leisure and healthcare were seen as fundamental to reducing behaviours that cause harm.

Address inequality through resource transfer and tackling poverty.

- **ACAN members see addressing the harm caused by alcohol as part of wider societal change.**

Put in place Icelandic Model approaches that would mean: partnership working, parental involvement, provision of diversionary activities for youth, investment in sports and after school activities and peer to peer parenting opportunities.

- **ACAN members want to see communities empowered to make changes that will improve the quality of life.**

Which areas of support for an AFC are missing from this meeting and which organisations and agencies might be recruited in support of AFC?

ADP Boards and staff; Police, Fire and Rescue; home care support; staff addiction services; teachers and education service support staff; parent teacher councils; midwives; health visitors; retailers; family oriented pubs; planning departments; housing associations; licensing standards officers; family nurse partnerships; child

and adult mental health service; Barnardo's; Aberlour Childcare Trust; Children 1st; Children in Scotland; Action for Children; Salvation Army.

Young people: scouts and guides, peer educators, Youth Parliament, Young Scot, after school clubs.



Children's Parliament Investigates *an Alcohol-free childhood*

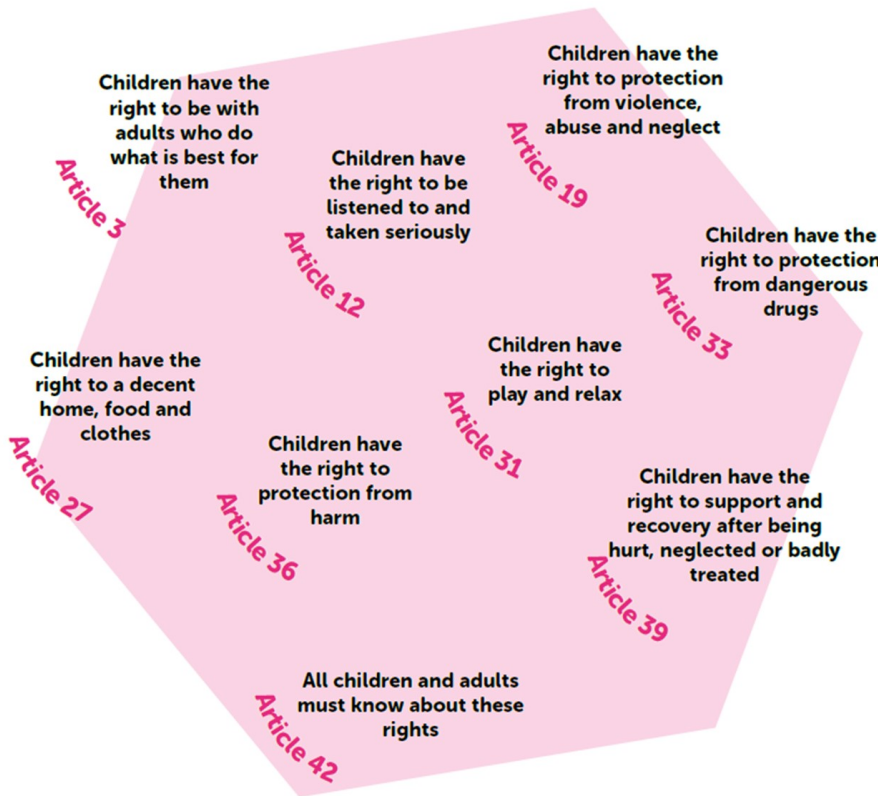
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Gemma Crompton

Policy and Public Affairs Manager

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Presented on standing up for children's rights and the work of the Children's Parliament



The Scottish Government's Alcohol Framework 2018 stresses the importance of consulting children and young people and championing their right to protection from dangerous drugs.

ACAN members should consider themselves "Unfearties" and support children in their quest for protect under the articles of the UNCRF. In the recent, AFS commissioned report by 10 and 11 year olds, they identified the children's rights impacted by the use of alcohol by others (left).

More information about how to pledge to stand up for children's rights can be found on the [ACAN web page](#) including a link to the full Children's Parliament Report and details of how to become an Unfeartie.



The children identified how alcohol affects them and came up with a list of actions that might be taken to improve their lives.

Reducing visibility of alcohol was key but they were also very keen to see safe areas to play, without anti-social behaviour and accompanying litter.

ACAN event workshop insights

25 minutes was spent talking about pictures painted by the Children's Parliament Investigators and their peers.



“My image was of people fighting and the child looking on. The caption read “...and nobody would have to be hated or hurt and kids won't get worried about their parents drinking.” It seems that this child has seen violence and is concerned about their parents both emotionally and physically.”

“My image was of a girl sitting alone watching drinkers in the distance. It seemed to underline the statements the children made about adults drinking to relieve stress and who drink as isolated individuals. This was more about the feelings of stress and anxiety that children feel as a result of adult drinking. How much more they notice and worry about things that adults expect.”



“My image was of a boy with a deformed arm and the caption read – disabled people would suffer less abuse in the street. I thought that this was a really interesting statement. Did the painter experience bullying himself? Had he noticed that people who drink are often less inhibited and more aggressive? Whatever he was thinking it seemed like an observation by a 10 year old thinking well in advance of his years.”

From seeing the many images of alcohol drawn by children, ACAN members agreed that involving children in gathering evidence around marketing and advertising was a valuable exercise and a good way to involve children in expressing their concerns and describing their experiences.



Yes ACAN do something in support of children impacted by the alcohol use of others and the culture which compels alcohol use across Scottish society

David Robertson

Senior Policy Coordinator:
Alcohol-free Childhood at
Alcohol Focus Scotland

I was pleased to see a very diverse turnout of enthusiastic ACAN members at the launch of the network on 5 December 2019.

Further discussion on the terms of reference for the network will take place during January 2020 but the consensus was for AFS to keep up the momentum by identifying actions as soon as possible and allow members to involve themselves in national discussions and policy shaping without delay!

Our vision is of a network capable of inspiring, developing and supporting action to uphold children's

rights not to be harmed by alcohol.

ACAN has been formed to reduce and prevent the harms experienced by children and families from Scotland's extensive use of alcohol throughout society. It will do this by bringing together organisations and individuals from education, health care, family support, advocacy and research to examine and formulate policy and to identify ways to improve current practice.

ACAN will improve communication across Scotland in respect of issues relating to an alcohol-free childhood helping to ensure information sharing and foster partnership working between organisations.

In early 2020, as ACAN Coordinator I shall be

contacting as many members as possible to find out about their work and ideas for future collective action. I will also continue to recruit.

AFS now has facilities to allow video-conferencing with those unable to attend meetings and thought will be given as to how communication and engagement can be streamlined so as not to impose undue burdens on our very busy membership.



@afs_protect

To register as a member of ACAN visit the network web page:

<http://bit.ly/2QXuKIDACAN>

To keep updated, register for AFS eFocus News:

<http://bit.ly/37WoQIHeFocus>

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