Where have we come from, where are we going? Partnerships as an approach to reducing alcohol related harm at local level

Dr Rachel Herring, Senior Research Fellow, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University, UK

IHRA Conference Liverpool, April 2010
What is alcohol harm reduction?

“Alcohol harm reduction can be broadly defined as measures that aim to reduce the negative consequences of drinking” (IHRA)

• Interventions that **do not** attempt to reduce consumption e.g. use of shatterproof glassware,

• But what about those that **do** attempt to reduce consumption e.g. server training, IBA: risk reduction or harm reduction?
Policy context (England): Alcohol

- Alcohol a new priority compared to drugs

Focus has been on:
- alcohol related crime and disorder
- public spaces
- youth (‘binge’ drinking)
- acute health harms e.g. accidents/injuries, hangovers etc

More recently:
- Home drinking
- Middle-aged (middle class) hazardous/harmful drinkers
- Broader health harms e.g. heart disease, liver disease
Policy context (England): Reducing alcohol-related harm

- Devolution of the responsibility to local areas for action to address alcohol-related harm and help achieve national targets
- Use of partnerships as a mechanism for developing and implementing local alcohol policies
- High Impact Changes (Department of Health)
- Alcohol as a cross cutting issue – health, criminal justice, community safety, commerce
Partnership

What is partnership?

“An agreement between two or more independent bodies to work collectively to achieve an objective” (Audit Commission, 1998, 2005)

Why work in partnership?

- Perceived failure of separately defined and run services
- International evidence: multi-component approach
- Funding
- Statutory requirement
Alcohol partnerships require:

- Appreciation that alcohol is a complex, cross-cutting issue that requires complex solutions
- Identification, mobilisation and co-ordination of appropriate agencies, stakeholders and local communities
- An understanding that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- Change in professional behaviour
Key elements of effective partnership working

- Senior level ‘buy in’
- Partner commitment/engagement
- Partnership structure
- Clarity: purpose, goals, priorities, roles
- Shared ownership/vision
- Sharing information and best practice
- Building in sustainability
Barriers to partnership working

- Lack of engagement of senior management
- Silos: working and thinking
- Professional ‘tribes’
- Inadequate resources: human and financial
- Time pressures: ‘quick wins’ and workload
- Complexity of the policy context
- Non coterminous boundaries
‘Operation Drink Safe’: Portsmouth, UK

- **Aim:** reduction in alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the entertainment district
- **Partners:** police, health, council, licensed premises, voluntary sector, local media
- **Activities included:** street pastors, enforcement, taxi marshalls, arrest referral, licensed premises management scheme
- **Outcomes:** reductions in assaults (17%), criminal damage (27%); increase in public order offences (9%)

“...the sum of the parts who are working together well will be greater than if everybody was working in isolation...”

Respondent, AERC partnership study, Thom et al