

## A INDEPENDENT COMMENT - BINGE DRINKING - IT'S ELEMENTARY

**A**dair Donaldson LLB BBus LLM has created the acclaimed independent "Putting youth in the Picture" training resource that focuses on youth and parents' decision-making. Over the last 12 months Adair has personally presented to more than 9000 students, athletes, parents, teachers and health workers in relation to issues associated with irresponsible drinking. To find out more about the resource visit [www.puttingyouthinthepicture.com](http://www.puttingyouthinthepicture.com).

Another day, another headline heralding the dangers of binge drinking. Most recently the media has focused on the role that sporting clubs have in preventing irresponsible drinking and suggest further regulatory steps need to be taken. No mention is made that over the last three to four years the majority of sporting clubs have been implementing changes and that the days of alcohol in dressing rooms are now a rarity. Both sporting organisations and licensees alike have in fact been the drivers of change in this area.

The alcohol industry is already the most highly regulated, most over-researched, subject of more government inquiries than any other industry. Yet the main issue is clear and well known: the irresponsible consumption of alcohol will cause people to make poor decisions that invariably lead to fights, sexual assaults, injuries and motor vehicle accidents. For many years your industry has willingly been addressing these issues yet there are few incentives for you to continue.

For example in Queensland, responsible hoteliers have gone well beyond the mandatory requirements imposed by the Government, to not only employ additional accredited security staff but also install state-of-the-art security measures to protect their patrons. In the past when a fight occurred the security staff restrained the parties involved and escorted them out of the licensed premises where they were held until the police arrived. Invariably the hotel then cooperated fully with police, providing them with security footage, statements etc. thus enhancing the likelihood of securing a conviction.

Instead of acknowledging the hoteliers assistance and initiative, the Queensland Government has responded by implementing changes that will now see these types of incidents go on the hotelier's record. Obviously this may have severe repercussions on the hotelier's licence and in the worst-case scenario lead to restrictions being placed on their livelihood. I have spoken to a number of hoteliers who comment that in future they will now be putting the offending parties in taxis and simply banning them from coming on to their premises again.

It seems that the government and health organisations seem committed to adopting an adversarial approach when it comes to the alcohol industry. Another example is Diageo's internationally renowned Drink IQ project. The government should be working with Diageo to make this resource available to every school, sporting club and community organisation throughout Australia. Unfortunately, this will never occur as this resource was developed by the alcohol industry. In contrast it has been my experience that those working at the front line need all the resources they can get and will accept funding/resources from whoever is generous enough to assist.

It would appear that some social commentators wish to accuse the alcohol industry at large of encouraging irresponsible drinking to boost its profits. In reality there is no benefit to be gained by hoteliers in encouraging irresponsible drinking. To blame and make hoteliers the scapegoats for binge drinking and its associated fallout misses the real point. It is elementary - it all comes down to the 3 Rs.

**Responsibility** – People taking responsibility for their own actions, parents taking responsibility when they are buying alcohol for their underage children and responsibility when parents are sending children to underage parties or hosting under age events themselves.

**Respect** – From their teenage years on, a lot of children are writing themselves off and putting themselves in vulnerable positions. They have no respect for themselves, others or the risks that they are taking.

**Rules** – There is an increasingly large number of young people that have little appreciation of what is and isn't legally acceptable behaviour. In a lot of cases teenagers are initiated into alcohol consumption at under age parties or schoolies, where by and large, an 'anything goes' attitude prevails. They are then taking these habits into licensed premises only to find themselves becoming criminals or ending up as victims.

Until the community, industry and government work together to tackle these core issues, all the regulation in the world will have no impact upon the issue of irresponsible drinking culture.

