



SCOTCH WHISKY
ACTION FUND

MANAGED BY



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Organisation: **Waverley Care**
 Date of Award: **2017, 2019 and 2020**
 Amount of Award: **£52,845**
 Project Name: **MSM (men who have sex with men) project**

Waverley Care was originally established in 1989 to build the UK's first purpose-built AIDS hospice in response to the growing epidemic in Edinburgh. It gradually extended its work to deliver a range of community-based services to provide post diagnosis support and, with the advent of new drug treatments, began to focus on helping people to live longer with HIV. In 2003, it updated its aims to include supporting those with all blood borne viruses in response to the growing issues caused by Hepatitis C.

Across Scotland, Waverley Care are reducing new HIV and Hepatitis C infections, encouraging people to get tested and providing direct care and support to people living with, or affected by blood borne viruses. Through this work, it is also challenging HIV and Hepatitis C related stigma, tackling health inequalities, and promoting good sexual health.

In 2016, launched SX, a service working to improve the health and wellbeing of gay and bisexual men, and all men who have sex with men.

MSM Project: The Pilot Phase

Waverley Care established the MSM (men who have sex with men) Project to help expand their learning and knowledge in the role of alcohol in the lives of MSM. This was a new area of work for the organisation and hoped it would inform awareness raising, education, and information services as well as delivering brief interventions to encourage men to reflect on their behaviours and make changes in their patterns of alcohol use. Overall, the project would help to ensure the safety and reduce harmful risk-taking behaviours amongst the MSM community.

In 2017 Waverley Care received a grant of £15,800 from Scotch Whisky Action Fund (SWAF) to employ a new, part-time, Project Worker to enable them to develop their activities to prevent alcohol-related harm within the MSM community in Lothian.

The project involved five areas of activity:

1) Self-management service Based on feedback from men engaging with its services, Waverley Care decided to integrate self-management into several activities, including group work and one to one support because some men felt discussing many deep-rooted issues, such as the complexities of the relationship between alcohol and sex, might be more constructive if group work involved sessions focused on issues faced by the community.

Outcomes and Impact:

- A total of 79 individuals (62 new contacts) over five workshops engaged in a series of group-work sessions focusing holistically on gay and bisexual men, and all men who have sex with men (MSM).
- All participants said they felt more informed about the role of alcohol and how it disproportionately affected those living with HIV.
- All participants felt that outreach work, that could reach men on the gay scene where there is a pressure to socialise and drink alcohol, could help.
- 80% of the group concluded that men living with HIV do drink alcohol more often to levels which are recognised as hazardous.
- 75% felt they learned new information.

2) Alcohol Brief Intervention (ABI) Service ABI services deliver useful information to the public to identify alcohol intake and understand when this is hazardous or problematic.

Participants learned to self-assess alcohol use and consider if they need to reduce their intake. Delivered in several environments: assertive outreach, 1-2-1s, community outreach, at various events and outreach on the commercial gay scene. ABIs were also integrated into one-to-one work and sexual health clinical brief interventions.

Outcomes and Impact:

- 191 ABIs delivered by Waverley Care through this project, including
- 60 hours of more complex 1-2-1 support provided to 16 MSM
- 457 conversations about alcohol
- a total of 664 alcohol related interventions
- Edinburgh Pride: 78 conversations about alcohol and 18 ABIs.
- Glasgow Pride: 167 conversations about alcohol and 32 ABIs.
- West Lothian Pride: 28 conversations about alcohol and 10 ABIs.
- BearScots a Scottish gay men's group in Glasgow and Edinburgh that hosts the annual 'BearScotFest' in the Autumn : 30 conversations about alcohol and 19 ABIs.
- Outreach with Crew: 40 conversations about alcohol and 15 ABIs
46 conversations about alcohol and 9 ABIs
68 conversations about alcohol and 17 ABIs

3) Campaigning Four public facing alcohol-related campaigns, targeting the MSM population, at key strategic times in the MSM calendar e.g. BEARScots and during Scotland's HIV and Sexual Health testing week.

Outcomes and Impact:

- "Getting to the bottom of it" – included public events and social media outreach resulting in 3,954 online impressions
- "Don't Bottle it up" – 2,250 information items (flyers, beer mats, postcards) distributed in total
- "Dry January" – social media campaign with a total of 997 impressions
- "Alcohol and Decisions Don't Mix" – short-info film distributed across social media with a total of 618 views

4) Peer-to-Peer Research Two participatory peer research programmes were conducted at the beginning and end of the funding period. Recruited and trained 20 MSM volunteers to conduct 60 1-2-1 research interviews with their peers.

Key findings from the research were:

Most of our research participants felt that alcohol played an important role in the lives of MSM, but debated whether the community had a more problematic relationship with alcohol than the general population.



OUR VOICE

Alcohol

Peer Research

If you are interested
email: ross.fairgrieve@s-x.scot or
phone: 0131 650 3250

Training will take place on 17/11/18



Interviewees identified the centrality of pubs and licensed venues within the community and coping with stigma and discrimination as some of the reasons alcohol consumption may be high among MSM.

Our participants had mixed opinions on the role alcohol played in their sex lives. Some felt that alcohol was a social enabler and that this was a positive thing. Others felt that alcohol had led them to make decisions about sex that they later regretted, or to take risks.

Interviewees raised concerns about consent and alcohol consumption, drawing attention to harassment and unwanted touching in LGBT venues.

Research participants felt that alcohol did impact on health, as well as a cause of poor mental health. Some of our participants felt alcohol had a positive impact on wellbeing, because of its stress relieving effects.

5) Partnership Work With two key partners: Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADPs) and the Commercial Gay Scene to inform them of the impact of alcohol harm on the community.

Outcomes and Impact:

- Within the ADP work; 77% found the training useful and overall participants felt better informed about sexual health prevention strategies.
- Within the Commercial Gay Scene; partner organisations are now more aware of the impact of alcohol on the MSM community.

CASE STUDY: Malcolm (25) was referred for one-to-one support with Waverley Care and was supported over twelve sessions. In the initial one-to-one session, it became apparent that Malcolm's drinking issue was intertwined with his relationship difficulties and feelings of isolation. Using the life-wheel tool, the Health Improvement Worker noticed key issues relating to alcohol and drugs, emotional health, and mental wellbeing. Malcolm was asked to keep a weekly alcohol diary, so that he could take stock of his intake. It became clear his relationship with alcohol underpinned some deeper problems, specifically with isolation and the desire for a long-term relationship.

Through the MSM project Malcolm was encouraged to introduce a minimum of two alcohol-free days a week, with one of these being at the weekend and to maintain the alcohol-diary to monitor his progress. Two months after the initial meeting, Malcolm had reduced his drinking to the recommended limit of 14 units per week and reported feeling better physically and mentally.

The charity continued to help him in achieving his desire to drink less and be more in control of his sexual health. Malcolm has been able to meet another partner, take part in the peer-research process and pursue some volunteering work, boosting the chance of reaching his career potential.

MSM Project: Post Pilot

The initial funding helped Waverley Care in their learning of the MSM project. The peer research and surveys conducted in the first year highlighted drinking among the MSM community remained a significant issue, with 78% of men surveyed (56 in total) highlighted they drink more than 5 units of alcohol on a typical night out. 42% also classed their relationship to alcohol as negative and alcohol has a negative impact on their sexual health due to poor choices while under the influence of alcohol.

This evidenced the need and demand for the project to continue and a further grant of £24,580 was secured in June 2019 from SWAF to upscale the delivery to a national programme across Scotland, including NHS Forth Valley and the Highland Regions of Elgin and Argyll and Bute. To achieve this, Waverley Care delivered a national awareness raising campaign to targeted beneficiaries in rural communities.

The key difference in delivery from year one of the funding was the location, with Waverley Care promoting alcohol harm and associated risks in the rural communities of Forth Valley, Elgin in the North East, and Campbeltown and the Firth and Forth lower Islands, within the Argyll and Bute region.

MSM often face additional barriers to accessing health and information services due to factors such as stigma. In rural areas it was found many fear identifying themselves as gay or bisexual, and are disadvantaged simply having to travel a long way to access specialist sexual health and support services.

Another new element was the inclusion of videos, podcasts, and blogs for campaigning and awareness raising as they were found to be an effective way to capture people's attention at events, across social media and website pages.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic in the last quarter of year two it reported 2,915 men benefited from the activities delivered. Lockdown delayed and altered many of the activities planned and Waverley Care had to adapt and move to online methods to mitigate the impact of the situation of the MSM community.



CASE STUDY: Marc is a gay man in his early 20s, who grew up outside of the UK. He works short, but well-paid, contract jobs. Recently he had found out his partner was having sexual partners outside the relationship without Marc's consent. He had been struggling to form friendships, and his partner used negative and condescending language about Marc's appearance.

Marc's consistent drinking was having a negative impact on his employment and his self-esteem. Marc had noted to get through the day, he would start drinking straight after work and stop whenever he passed out. Paired with the emotional and mental abuse from his partner, Marc felt he was 'spiralling' and wanted to know how to get out of his situation but was unsure what the first steps to take were. To boost his confidence, he had started to chat to guys through social-sexual apps such as Squirt. It was through this app Marc contacted SX to talk about sexual health risk and access support.

At his first meeting with SX, they began by making sure Marc was safe and not at risk of violence from his partner and provided him with HIV and syphilis test as he had never tested before. The next step was to undertake a brief alcohol intervention to establish the scale of Marc's use. Marc was very open to discussing the issues that drove him to increase his alcohol use. Over several sessions, they worked with Marc to reduce his drinking and take up activities such as exercise through which he could meet new people and improve his wellbeing. During this period, they discussed Marc's relationship and helped build his confidence to be more independent from his partner.

Marc was able to leave his partner and move into a flat share. Since this move, he has reported his alcohol use is more focused around enjoyment than necessity. He drinks two or three days a week with his new flatmates or people from his running club. Although Marc has an increased sense of self-esteem, more body confidence and is now forming new friendships he still notes doubt and anxiety impact his ability to interact with other men he has a sexual interest in. SX will continue to work with Marc, to build his confidence in talking to other men and improve his sexual health knowledge.

Fortunately, Marc has remained employed during the pandemic and has continued his physical exercise and managed to reduce his alcohol intake further.

Final Year of Funding

The project continued throughout 2020/2021 as did the challenges of the pandemic. Waverley Care were able to continue to evidence the need for the MSM project to be supported for a third and final year, and a grant of £12,465 was awarded in 2020. In total Waverley Care received a total investment of £52,845 from SWAF over a three year period.

Despite COVID-19 vastly reducing its ability to engage with service users face-to-face, it adapted the delivery of its service through a range of online events and reimagining physical resources into digital ones, such as a new digital magazine, social media campaigns and digital booklets. Events became virtual leading to the launch of webinars, community panel discussions and a series of podcasts.

Four issues of the digital magazine were published, 'Between the Covers'. Each issue focused on a specific area concerning MSM and how these themes relate to the question of alcohol harm. These themes included: disability, trans identities, consent, and the COVID-19 lockdown. Prior to the development of each magazine a call out to

the community to respond to the theme was shared on social media. These points of community engagements returned articles, artworks, and suggestions for further editions of the magazine.

Included in the magazine was a continuing feature 'Bottoms Up: Alcohol Sex and Me' with published articles written by MSM individuals with lived experience of challenging experiences with alcohol. The articles can take any format - stories, diary entries, poems etc. Issue 4 includes Walter Lewd's poem, Bored Games, which discusses alcohol harm and sexual social apps such as Grindr.

To date, the four editions of Between the Covers has regularly reported high levels of impressions on social media and Issuu. Between the Covers issue 3 created 899 impressions on social media and has been read 332 times with an average read time of 3 minutes 46 seconds. Article highlights were also created to accompany the magazine's launch, receiving 316 social media impressions and 78 views.

The magazine represented a unique online space for community members, to share their lived experiences and a space in which to provide specific health interventions. The thematic nature of the magazines presented the opportunity to speak further about the intersectional elements of alcohol harm and MSM might be missed by more generic harm reduction interventions.

In addition to the Bottoms Up feature in the digital magazine, an audio podcast was created with versions of the submitted articles. These are published on the SX website, Soundcloud and Apple iTunes. In total there are four unique podcasts freely available to download or stream, containing six individuals experiences, history or creative musing on alcohol harm and the community.

The podcasts offered alternative ways of community members to engage with the work outside of traditional written health messages. These were also featured as part of a digital pack sent out to LGBT+ pride groups for distribution as part of organised virtual prides for 2021.

Collectively the podcasts series of Bottoms Up has been listened to 838 times, which illustrates the success and benefit of creating multiple ways for individuals to engage in the work and with health messaging.

SX would traditionally attend local prides, the LGBT+ bar scene, and community events. Due to COVID-19 restrictions it reconsidered how best enable opportunities for engagement through a digital means.

Activities completed to promote SX services and increase engagement with resources were:

Queer Spaces Panel Discussion To mark LGBT History month, a panel discussion exploring the importance of LGBT+ spaces in Scotland was held. The event included business owners who run LGBT+ commercial spaces where alcohol is, and isn't, sold. Discussions included: Does alcohol help to define a queer space?; Can LGBT+ spaces be successful without selling alcohol?; Is there a need for more alcohol free spaces on the LGBT+ commercial scene?

Over 60 members of the community attended this event. Feedback on the event was positive, for example "Really great discussions on this panel covering LGBTQ+ spaces in Scotland, how we need more diversity, inclusivity and unity. Online events like this bring our community together still despite the pandemic" There is a recording available here: [Scotland's LGBT+ Spaces: Then and Now – YouTube](#).

Webinar with Comedian Scott Agnew On 24th March 2021 SX hosted a webinar with Scots comedian Scott Agnew – a gay man with lived experience of challenges with both alcohol and drugs. Scott has been clear of drugs for several years now, and generously agreed to discuss his experiences. The talk highlighted what led to his addictions and what support helped him recover, and this was followed by a Q&A.

Over 20 members of the community attending this event. There is recording available here: [Stream episode, In conversation with... Scott Agnew by SX Scotland podcast | Listen online for free on SoundCloud](#)

SX Workshop with Community Champions Project Glasgow LGBTQI Substance Use Partnership SX were invited to help educate and train the LGBTQI Substance Use Community Champions. The purpose of the workshop was to train the champions on the unique inequalities for MSM including Chemsex (intentional sex under the influence of drugs) as well as effective health interventions for the community. Links to all the events recordings and resources have been provided for future and further training.

Coronavirus has led to a greater reliance on social media to disseminate key messages, with little to no opportunity to distribute printed resources. Increasing digital service delivery does come with advantages, such as increased engagement with those living in remote and rural areas. While a return to delivering community engagement when it is safe to do so will happen, the new digital capacity will continue to be utilised by SX to maintain a wider reach and enhance accessibility.



CASE STUDY: Simon is bisexual in his late-20s living in West Lothian. Simon was having difficulties controlling his alcohol use since the closure of the LGBT+ bar scene due to the pandemic. His alcohol use had dramatically increased due to isolation, and he believed it was impacting his ability to work.

Simon had previously enjoyed the opportunities to attend LGBT+ bars in Edinburgh. He said this was his only opportunity to feel part of the community as, in his hometown, he feels very isolated. During the lockdown Simon said he would drink to gain confidence to speak to guys online via social apps and websites. This would lead to circumstances where he was potentially putting himself at risk, as he was drinking large quantities before going online or meeting someone. This presented issues for Simon, due to lack of memory of meeting and/or having sexual encounters with other men. Simon came to SX to discuss steps he could take to reduce his alcohol intake and how he could find alternative ways he could feel part of the LGBT+ community.

A SX Health Improvement Coordinator met Simon, via weekly video calls on zoom for seven sessions. As part of these sessions, they spoke at length about harm reduction techniques, and strategies he could use to reduce his consumption of alcohol. These included physical exercise, setting tangible goals, and keeping a diary to identify triggers. In addition, the sessions also focused on Simons sexual social app use and his confidence around sex, this including sharing with Simon an edition of Between the Covers which focussed on Consent.

Simon wanted particularly to talk about the pressures and issues that bisexual individuals face from within the LGBT+ community. SX supported Simon, in exploring these areas, and advising him on potential community groups of interest including the Scottish Bi Network.

By the end of seven sessions Simon had reduced his alcohol consumption, better understood his triggers, and had engaged with several LGBT+ groups. These included a LGBT running group, the Scottish Bi Network and LGBT+ charity volunteer groups. He is also keen to volunteer and will be involved in supporting the outreach project in the local bar scene in Edinburgh once restrictions allow.

Simon had also become more confident engaging with other guys online and had better understanding of potential risk regarding sexual health. By the end of the seven weeks, he had also started a relationship with someone in his local area.

The Future of the MSM Project

Waverley Care have come to better understand the unique inequalities MSM face in relation to alcohol harm. Going forward it will continue to facilitate opportunities for community members and organisations to learn and engage on the specific topic of alcohol harm. This will include but not limited to bar outreach, resources, training opportunities, community engagement events and social media campaigns.

“

This funding has helped us explore the connections between alcohol misuse and harmful sexual behaviours in the GBMSM community and encourage creative approaches and new ways of engaging individual and groups. The interventions and resources we have developed with this funding will have a long-term, positive impact on our community.

Matt Middler

Fundraising Manager, Waverley Care

“Providing me with this information (PrEP, condoms etc.) has been helpful – no-one else does this.”

“I am now drinking less and feeling better in my head. I make better decisions.”

“I now feel better and more confident about the decisions I make. I realise the drunk confidence I used to rely on isn't really confidence, and it's much better to be in control than out of it.”

“Drinking less has made me feel better as a person.”

EDINBURGH

1st Floor, QM Two, 2 Lister Square
Edinburgh EH3 9GL
t: 0131 222 9200

THE SCOTCH WHISKY ASSOCIATION

info@swa.org.uk
www.scotch-whisky.org.uk



@ScotchWhiskySWA



@ScotchWhiskySWA

LONDON

16 Old Queen Street
London SW1H 9HP
t: 0203 404 6393