

Controlled Drinking Environments

Mid-Year Report

October 2014

1 Background

In recent years, Birkenhead Town Centre has experienced difficulties associated with problematic street drinkers that, typically, congregate in the Hamilton Square and Borough Road areas, in close proximity to central Birkenhead's supported housing services (The Ark and The YMCA). The typical profile of these Street Drinkers tends to be male, single and unemployed, although their respective accommodation statuses are varied; a significant majority will be homeless whether this be in the form of rough sleeping, or as residents in supported housing services. However, approximately 30%¹ of this group will have their own accommodation and have volitional reasons for drinking in the street, centred on social aspects and the expense of drinking in traditional establishments/public houses, but also may include factors such as their inability to afford heating, a lack of furniture and simply as a means of avoiding eviction.

Although reports vary as to the total number of street drinkers in Birkenhead, in 2013/14, 247 different individuals were seen by outreach workers on the streets of Wirral a total of 2393 times. Over the 12 month period and as a cumulative total of 762 individuals were seen, 107 were new clients and the remaining 655 were known to the outreach workers in previous years. Of the 762 individuals seen in 2013/14, the majority were male (81%) and the majority were aged 35 to 50 years (58.2%). Alcohol alone was recorded as used by 57.8% of the clients, and 41.2% were recorded as using alcohol in combination with opiates. 86.5% of the clients were in contact with services; 23.3% of all clients with ARCH, 26.7% with Wirral Drugs Service and 21.1% with Wirral Alcohol Service. However, as to be expected, the volume of street drinking is linked to seasonal factors i.e. the numbers of street drinkers will increase during spring/summer months

Many entrenched street drinkers are resistant to the notion of treatment and are unaware of local services. Many have developed chronic alcohol and drug dependencies but are unwilling or unable to contemplate an alcohol-free existence. Social networks tend to reinforce this; the most important factor in achieving goals linked to alcohol reduction may often be the availability of a socially functioning support network where pressures and triggers to drink are reduced. For street drinkers with complex needs and limited resources, escaping and replacing old drinking ties may be particularly challenging. Additionally, for the cohort that is both alcohol dependent *and* homeless there remains an ongoing problem of poor health status and poor access to healthcare among people sleeping rough and lone homeless people living in emergency accommodation in both England and Scotland. Some homeless people cannot access the NHS because the system operates largely on the basis that the people using it will have a permanent address. Although it is not vital to have an address in order to register permanently with a GP, some surgeries may mistakenly refuse registration to homeless people on that basis. The range of mental health problems encountered amongst this cohort can include cognitive impairment related to long-term alcohol dependency, alcohol induced psychosis, manic depression, clinical and reactive depression. Some may also have a learning disability.

The issue of street drinking is not a problem unique to Birkenhead. Indeed, street drinking is a problem with a global scale and over the years, a range of service types developed to attempt to meet the needs of chronic street drinkers. One such development of Controlled Drinking Environments (CDE's) which operate under the principle that drinking inside in a supervised environment is less damaging than drinking on the street. They generally operate within a framework of "harm reduction". This assumes that by tackling the consequences of long-term heavy drinking, it is possible to improve the quality and purpose of individuals' lives, reduce drinking. In this way, the service can potentially tackle the revolving door syndrome that remains such a punitive and obstacle in drinkers' lives (many have a long history of bans from hostels and other services).

CDE's were first proposed by the Government's Rough Sleeper Units as a professional solution to the issue of chronic street drinking, providing a place of safety where chronic drinkers can go to safely drink, socialise, get help with accommodation, receive support for their health needs, and where necessary be referred to primary healthcare services, and to reduce or stop drinking altogether. It has been indicated that the provision of a CDE would save various budgets an estimated £248,000 per year, through savings on arraignments, hospital stays, policing, casualty admissions, health care, custodial sentences, street maintenance and security. Nottingham Police, in particular have welcomed the development of CDE's in other parts of the country as the resources spent in arresting a person can be disproportionate.

In June 2013, a non-recurrent under-spend was identified within the public health grant for 2013-15. With the support of the Portfolio Holder it was suggested that consideration be given to seeing how the under-spend could be used to benefit the local population through investing in other areas across the Council, thereby enabling them to contribute further to the delivery of public health outcomes as defined by the national Public Health Outcomes Framework. Resultantly, all strategic directorates were invited to submit proposals for non-recurrent spend which would be assessed for their public health impact and prioritised for investment.

¹ Homeless Review 2012 – Town Centre Statistics

Arising from feedback from relevant local services that work with vulnerable people, local businesses and Members, a bid was submitted by the Regeneration & Environment Department (Supported Housing and Homeless Division) which proposed the development of two distinct Controlled Drinking Environments (CDE's), one of which was to be located at Birkenhead YMCA (YMCA) on Whetstone Lane and the other at Mary Cole House (The Ark) which is sited on Sandford Street. The purpose of CDE's is to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment at which basic needs for food, shelter, safety, personal hygiene and sociability are provided. They offer a setting at which a vulnerable person's housing and other more specialised needs can be assessed, and from which the help of other agencies can be enlisted. They provide an opportunity for those with alcohol dependency to be encouraged and helped to develop new interests, activities and occupations, in order to build confidence and self-worth and reduce or control alcohol problems and offer a point-of-contact for outreach workers and other agencies who can meet and work with clients who are hard-to-reach or have challenging behaviour.

The submissions were scrutinised by, amongst others, the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Health and, at the Cabinet Meeting of the 10th October 2013, Members approved the award of funding for the development of the two CDE's

The service located at the YMCA is based within the Hostel itself and is staffed by a NHS Worker on secondment and, at the time of writing, is intended for existing YMCA residents only although discussions are currently being held to determine whether the service could be expanded to offer services to non-residents. The CDE at the Ark is available to residents and non-residents alike. The service at the Ark differs from the YMCA service insofar as it is not located within the hostel, but rather in a Portakabin based in the staff car park.

Both services sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide a first point-of-referral and contact for those who are excluded or unable to use conventional or mainstream housing, health, addiction and social services, where help is provided and people are started on a path to treatment and a return to less problematic and more conventional lives.
- To increase the numbers of chronic drinkers engaging with alcohol treatment.
- To increase the numbers of chronic drinkers entering detoxification /rehabilitation programmes and successfully finishing the course.
- To reduce the volume of visible street drinking and associated incidences of anti-social behaviour in the Central Birkenhead area.
- To effect a reduction in individual levels of drinking and to provide education around safer drinking patterns.
- To reduce the number of entrenched rough sleepers with chronic alcohol problems by diverting them into appropriate accommodation.
- To reduce the volume of alcohol-related crime in the Birkenhead area.
- To reduce the volume of alcohol-related admissions to Hospital.
- To reduce the level of alcohol-related ill-health and mortality.
- To increase the volume of chronic drinkers engaged in diversionary activities (Employment, Education etc.)

An operational group comprising representatives from the Ark, the YMCA, NHS, Merseyside Police and Wirral Council's Housing Division have met on a monthly basis since the CDE's went live. The purpose of this group is to discuss issues relating to the day-to-day delivery of the respective CDE's and to provide advice and guidance as to their operation.

2.0 Service Descriptions

The Kabin (Wirral Churches Ark Project)

The Kabin, which opened on the 10th February 2014, is operated in a porta-cabin in the car park of Mary Cole House. There are two full time members of staff; a Project Co-ordinator and an Alcohol Project Worker. It is open from Monday to Friday from 8.30am – 3.30pm.



DrinkY's (Wirral YMCA)

DrinkY's (pronounced Drink-Wise) is delivered in the former coffee bar in Birkenhead YMCA

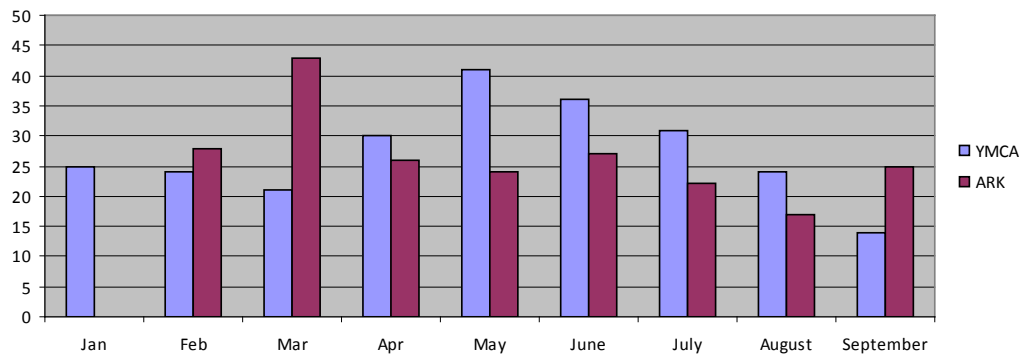
DrinkY's Staff members are seconded from the National Health Service via The Alcohol Service. These engagement workers work five days a week from 8am to 4pm. The YMCA CDE is also open Saturday and Sunday 8am to 4pm.



3.0 Statistical Analysis

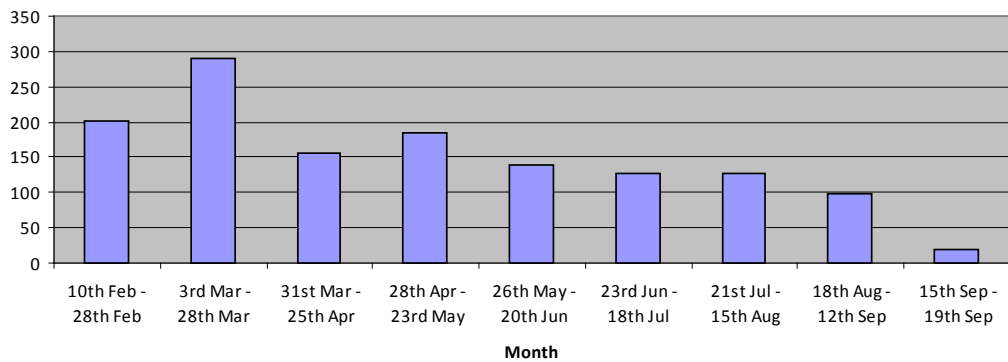
Usage

Chart showing Individual Users of CDEs Jan-Sep



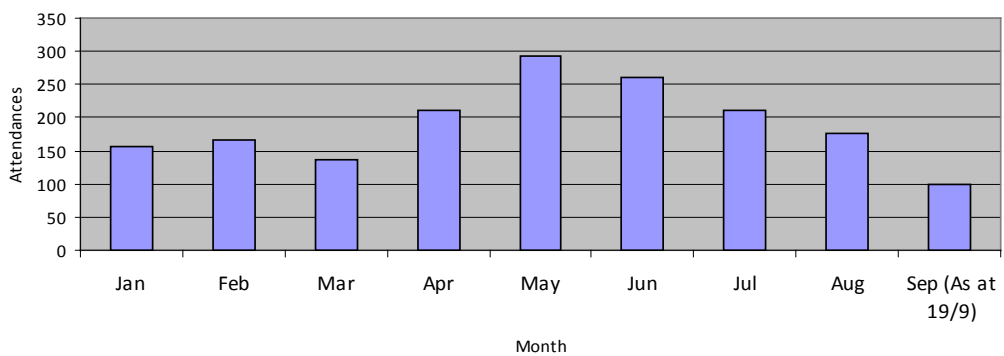
The chart above shows the number of individuals accessing the respective CDE's from January to September 19th. The Ark CDE did not open until February hence the absence of data for January.

Number of CDE Attendances 10th Feb - 19th September (ARK)



The chart above shows the total number of attendances for the Ark CDE. During the period covered by the chart, it can be seen that attendances peaked between the 3rd March and the 28th March and then leveled out. However, the volume of attendances for the YMCA, as seen in the chart below, follows a different trend, insofar as there was a gradual increase in attendance, peaking in May, with a subsequent decline after this.

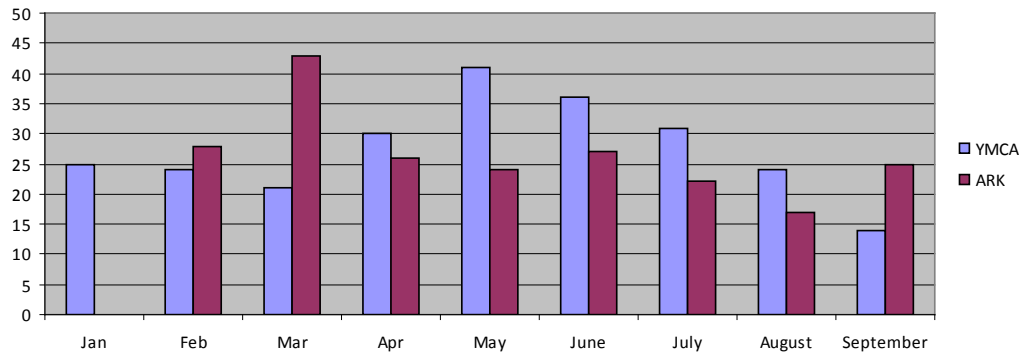
Number of CDE Attendances Jan - 19th September (YMCA)



Statistical Analysis

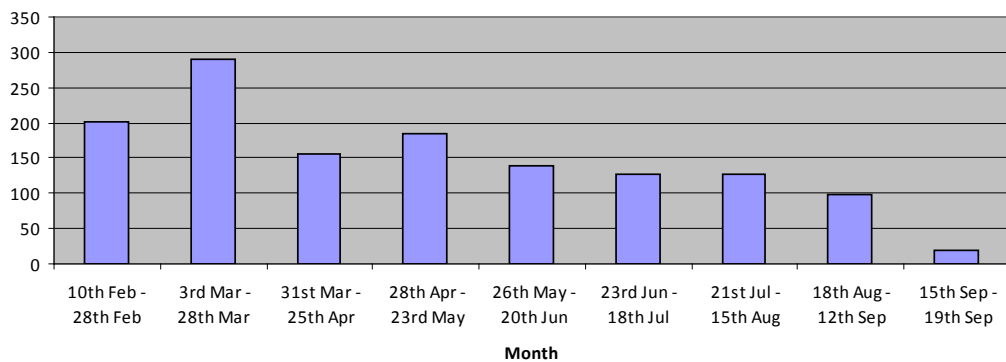
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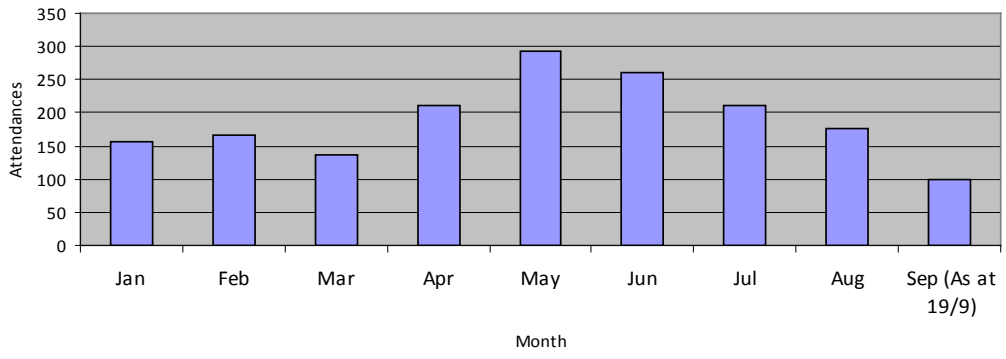
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Number of CDE Attendances Jan - 19th September (YMCA)



Statistical Analysis

Age

By far, the majority of both Ark and YMCA CDE Users fall within the 40-49 age bracket which is consistent with previous anecdotal evidence. The second most represented age demographic is the 32-39 range, followed by the 25-31 bracket. The YMCA CDE reported no usage of their service by the 18-24 range, whereas the Ark reported of 8 users in this bracket. It is interesting to note that there was no usage of the CDE's by the 60+ age range during the period covered by this report.

Chart showing Ages of CDE Users (Ark)

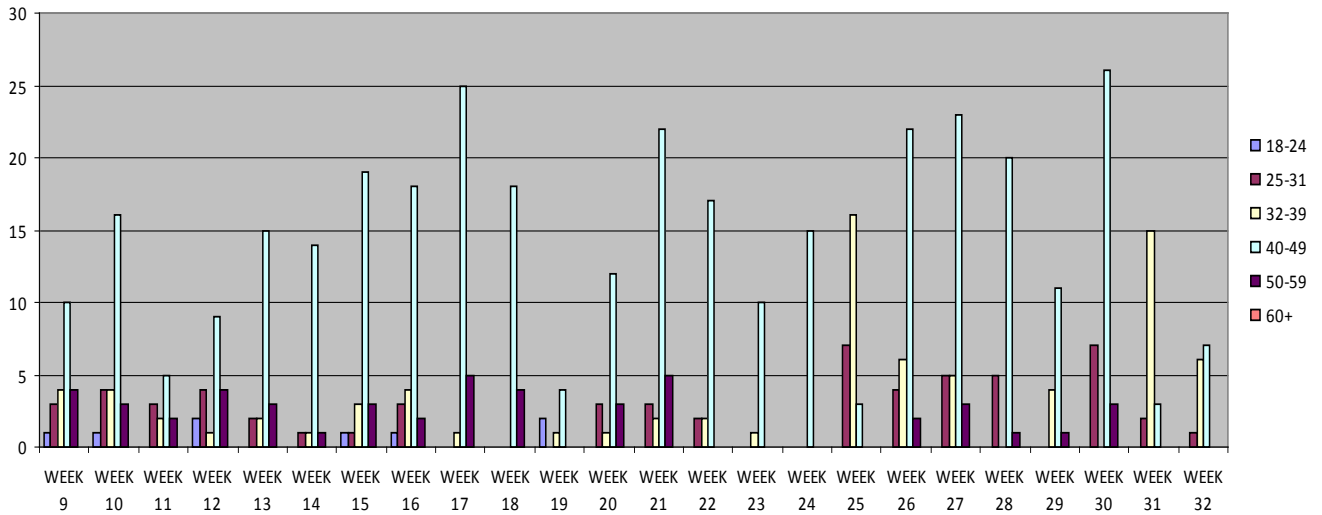
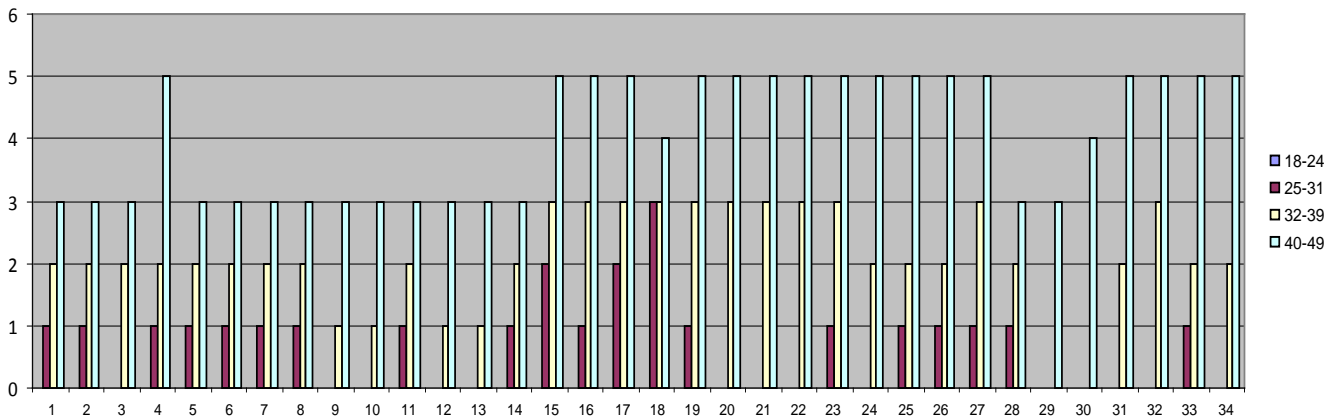


Chart showing Age of CDE Users (YMCA) January - September

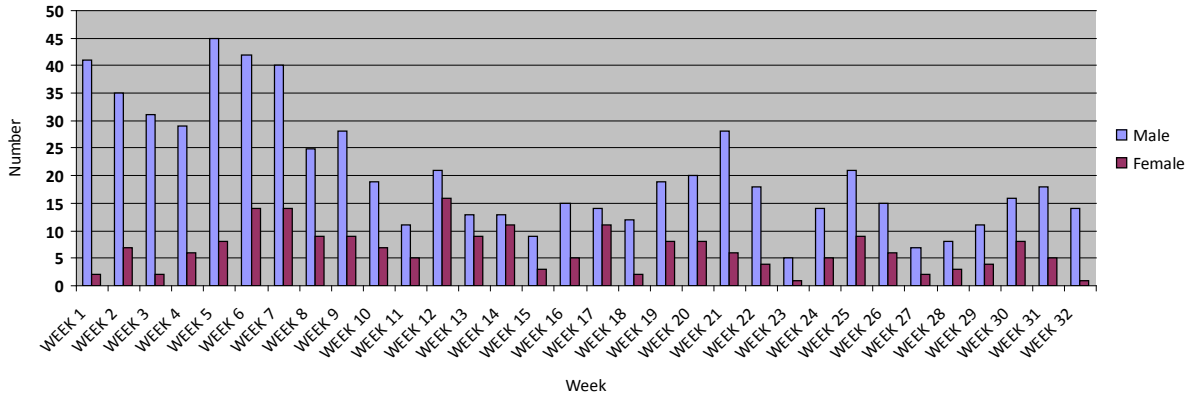


Statistical Analysis

Gender

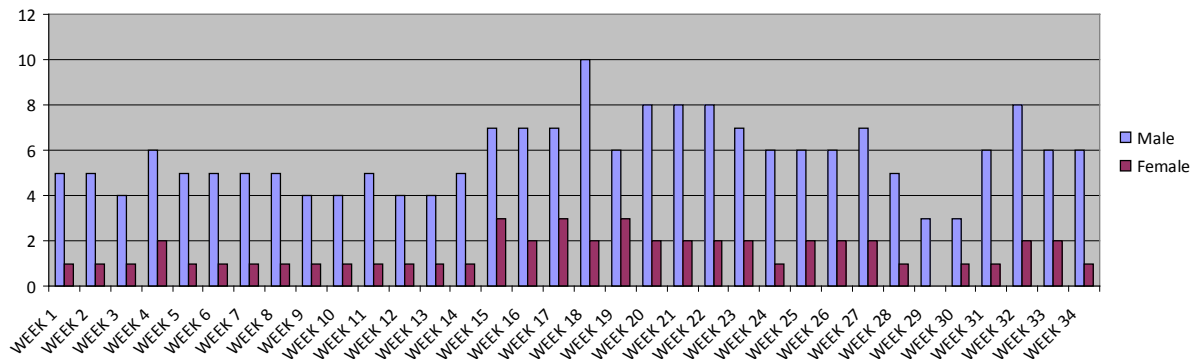
In respect of the Ark CDE, the chart below indicates that the majority of service users are male. There are however some notable spikes in female attendances (Weeks 6, 7 and 12)

Chart showing Gender of CDE Users (Ark)



The chart below shows the gender of the YMCA CDE Users. In viewing this information consideration must be given to the fact that although the YMCA does accommodate a small number of females, it is a predominantly a male environment.

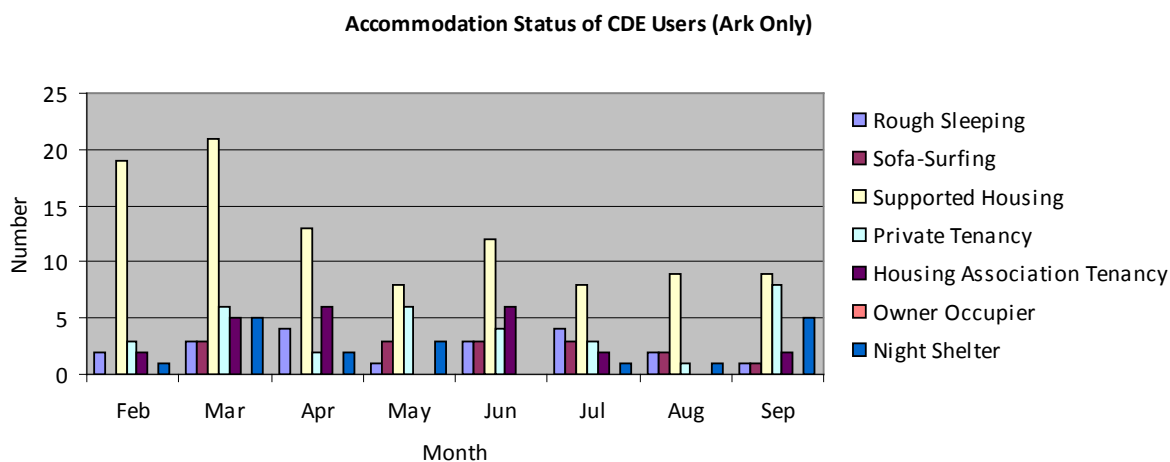
Chart showing Gender of CDE Users (YMCA)



Statistical Analysis

Accommodation Status

The chart below shows the accommodation status of the users of the Ark CDE (As the YMCA CDE is available only to YMCA residents, their data has not been included) from February to September 2014. It can be seen that almost half (**47.5%**) of Ark CDE Users were resident in supported housing services at the time of service usage. Service Users in rented property (Social and Private) account for over a quarter (**26.8%**) of the total number of service users. Approximately **10%** of CDE Users defined themselves as Rough Sleepers and **8.6%** were staying in the YMCA Night Shelter. No Owner-Occupiers utilized the service during this period.



Statistical Analysis

Alcohol Consumption

The following charts represent the type and volume of alcohol consumed in the CDE's. By far, the most preferred beverage of the CDE users is strong cider (White Lightning, Frosty Jack etc.), dispelling the myth that most street drinkers drink super-strength lager which, although, the second most preferred beverage

Chart showing Consumption (Litres) by Alcohol Type (YMCA)

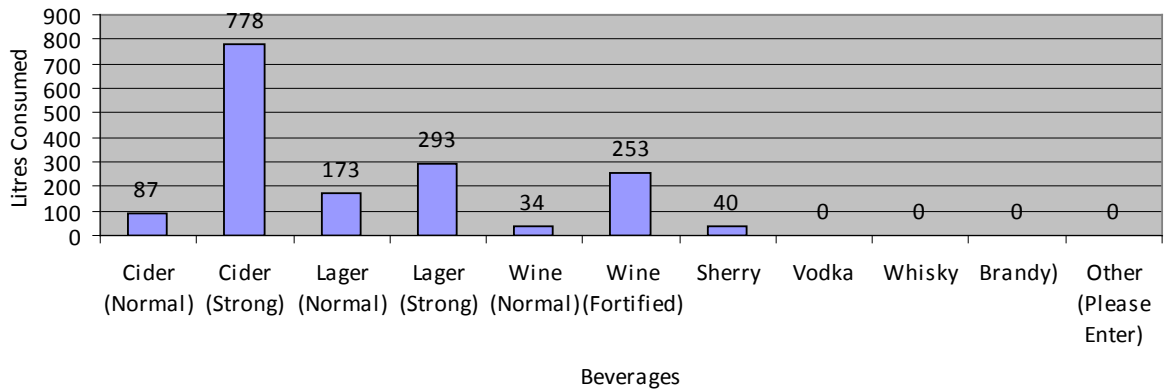


Chart showing consumption (Litres) by Alcohol Type (Ark)

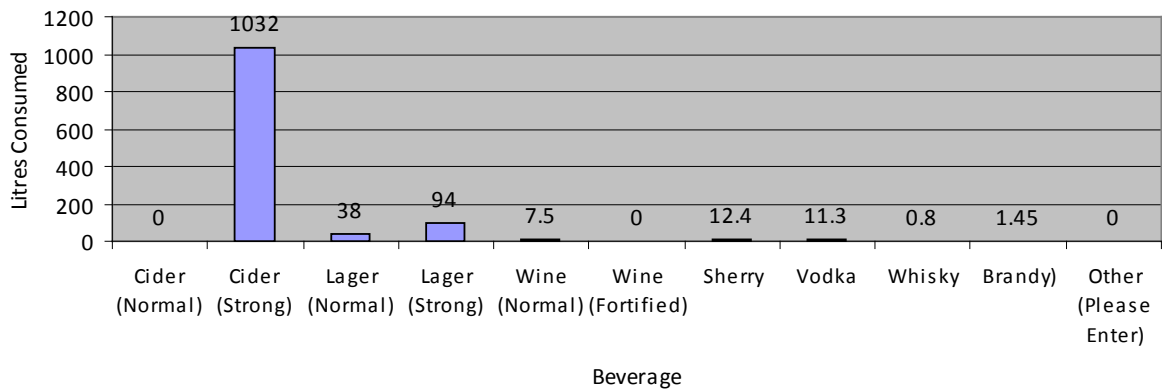
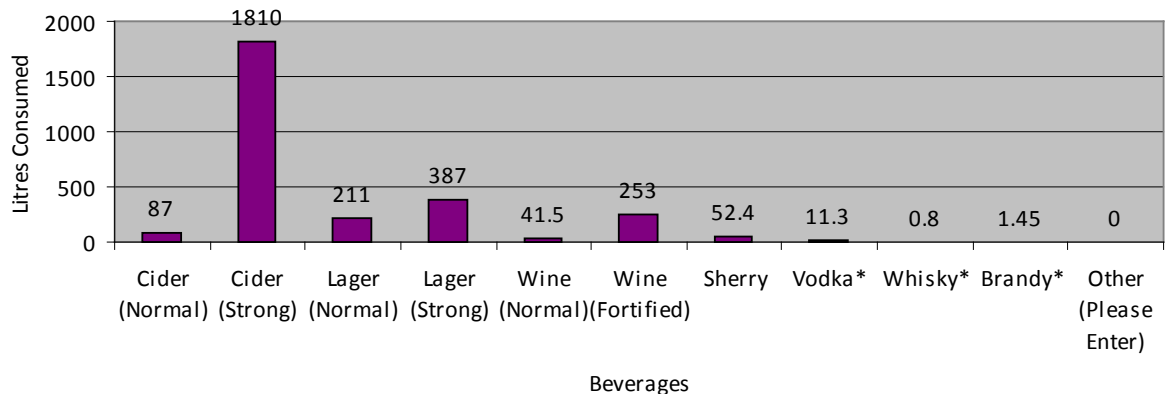


Chart showing Consumption (Litres) by Alcohol Type (Both Services)



Statistical Analysis

Alcohol Related Crime

In 2012/13, alcohol was considered a causal factor in 11% of all crime occurring in Wirral (1,655 out of 14,410 crimes). This represents a rate of 5.2 alcohol-related crimes per 1,000 head of population. In terms of offence typology, alcohol is particularly linked to criminal damage and violence.

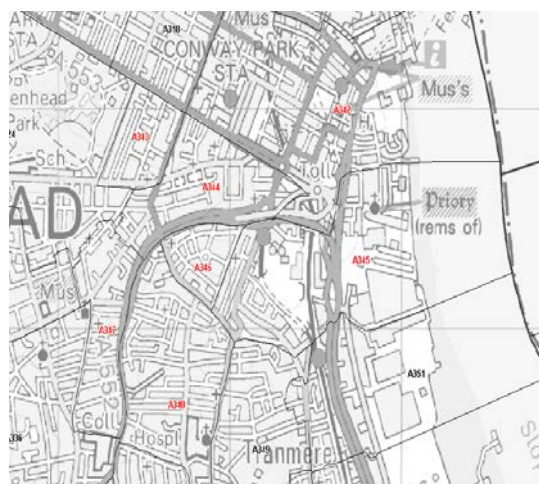
Statistics provided by the Council’s Community Safety Team suggest that, at least during 2012/13, the teenage years and early-50’s are the peak ages for women to commit alcohol-related crime, whereas there is less fluctuation for men, although the late-50’s appears to be a peak age.

As the table opposite shows, it would seem that the wards in Wirral with the highest volumes of alcohol-related crime in 2013 were, generally speaking, also the most deprived areas in the Borough.

Ward	Alcohol-related Crime 2013 (Rate per 1,000)
Bromborough	4.91
New Brighton	5.79
Liscard	6.55
Seacombe	8.23
Rock Ferry	8.24
Bidston and St. James	11.46
Birkenhead and Tranmere	21.18
Wirral	4.85

During the same period, it was seen that 15% of all Anti-Social Behaviour incidents were linked to alcohol. Again, a significant proportion of these incidents occurred in the Birkenhead and Tranmere area which is likely linked to the fact that this area represents the principal night-time economy in Wirral.

The presence of the CDE’s has had a marked impact on the volume of alcohol-related offences in the Birkenhead area, specifically the 1.5 Square Mile zone referred to as the 7 Beats area which is shown in the map opposite.



From the following charts, it can be seen that the development of the CDE’s has coincided with a sharp drop in alcohol-related offences. During April to September 2014 (i.e. After the CDE’s went operational) in the 7 Beats zone, arrests for Drunk & Disorderly reduced by 24% when compared with the same period in the previous year (i.e. Before the CDE’s went operational)

During the same period, arrests for Drunk & Disorderly in the overall Birkenhead area reduced by 30% when compared with the previous year.

Chart showing arrests for Drink & Disorderly in the A3 (Birkenhead) Area 2013-2014

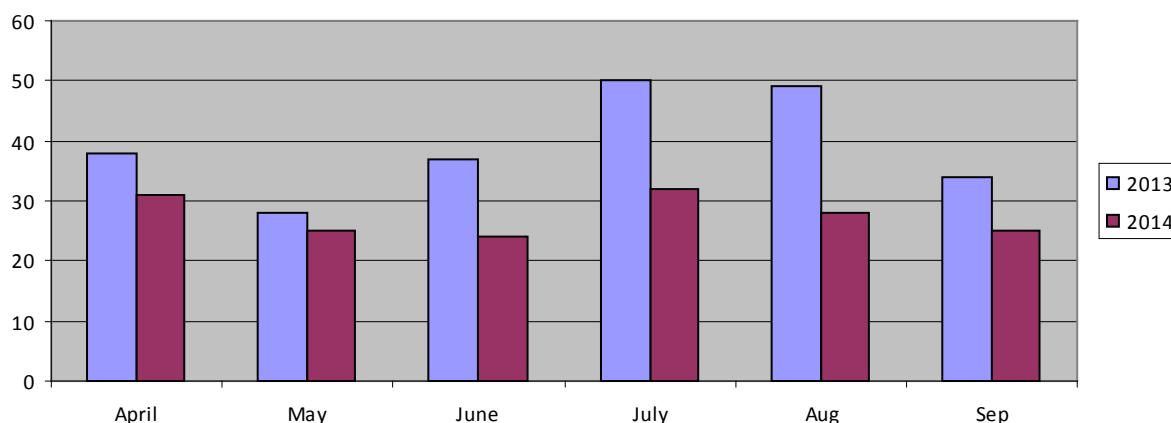
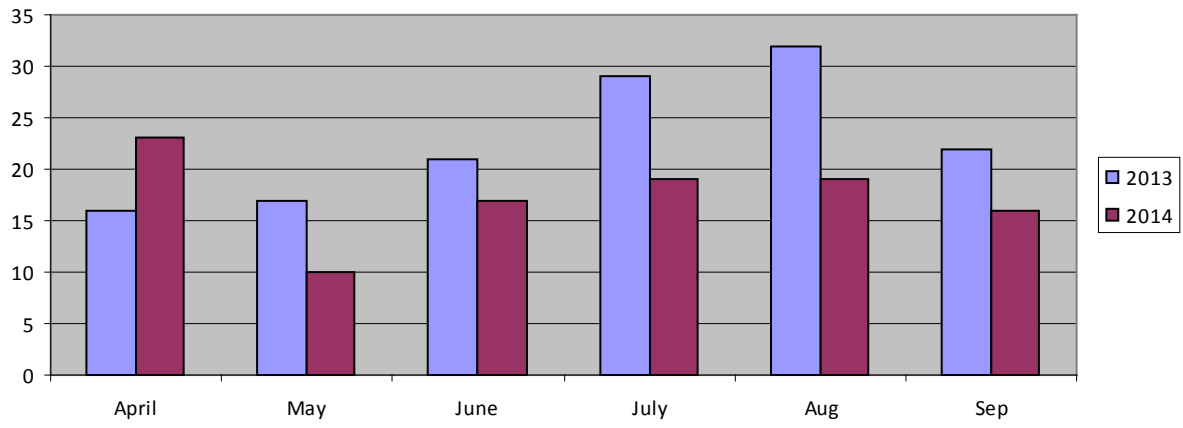


Chart showing arrests for Drink & Disorderly in the 7Beats (Birkenhead) Area 2013-2014



4.0 Operational Group

The Operational Group has met on a monthly basis to receive reports from the respective CDEs. The membership of the group comprises:

Peter Cookson	Head of Supported Services	Wirral YMCA
Tracy Upton	Service Delivery Manager	Wirral Churches Ark Project
Kerry Greenop	Homelessness Nurse	NHS Wirral
Simon Barrigan	Licensing Sergeant	Merseyside Police
Wayne Tsoi	Homelessness and Housing Options Manager	Wirral Council
Andy Parker	Contracts and Review Team Leader	Wirral Council

The CDE Operational Group is underpinned by a Terms of Reference which states that the intended objectives of the group are:

- To receive regular reports of progress on the implementation of the CDE's and to offer advice on their development.
- To consider and recommend ways in which the services can be improved, expanded upon and made available to a wider range of both Clients and Service Providers, if deemed appropriate by the Group.
- To assist and provide guidance in building a strong intelligence base to inform good practice, influence change and to support any future requests for funding.
- To ensure that links are made with other strategies, agencies and other strategic developments within mainstream services and to consider opportunities for developments that will further the aims of the CDE's

5.0 Issues Arising

The Ark

The Ark has reported of a number of difficulties experienced in delivering their CDE:

The delivery of the CDE has negatively impacted on the hostel staff and clients due to the fact that it attracts people other than just drinkers. This is more than likely due to the vulnerability of some of the drinkers, as they are perceived as an easy target for money, alcohol, sex work and bullying/intimidation.

Once the CDE has closed, people who have been drinking there (both hostel and non-hostel users) then tend to hang around once CDE staff have finished for the day so have to be moved on from the car park, the street corner and the front of the building again meaning increased potential for conflict between staff and drinkers. Due to the car park being in constant use up to about 8pm, the gates to the car park cannot be closed to keep people out.

People will often present highly intoxicated with the perception that they can sit in the CDE for a period of time even when the CDE is closed. This can cause conflict when people are turned away. There have been a number of incidents where people have collapsed in a drunken state outside the premises or been the victim of assault as the days drinking starts to get out of hand (*people often continue to drink once the CDE has closed its doors, often in Hamilton Square area and the council car park next door*).

These situations result in hostel staff then having to liaise with emergency services and/or administer first aid whilst waiting for an ambulance/paramedics etc. This leads to staff being drawn out of the hostel building, into the surrounding area to manage this behaviour. Staff members will then have to complete police statements and write up incident reports etc which results in a diminished service to the clients who are accommodated in the hostel.

Across the road from MCH and round the corner to the left (*George Street*) is mostly industrial units and a piece of wasteland and a disused doorway. This is where people tend to congregate (*although the door way has finally been sealed up and can no longer be used as a seating area for drinkers*) and there have been regular reports of Anti-Social Behaviour and criminal activity taking place in this area.

The Ark reports of an inconsistent approach by the Police to people congregating in this area. An example of this is when a group of drinkers set a wheelie bin on fire in the street, causing thick black smoke to come towards the hostel and local businesses. Hostel staff called emergency services but the police determined that no action was required towards the perpetrators. They were moved on but as soon as the police and fire service had left they returned and continued drinking, some even bragging about the incident.