

Making a Difference

Helena Conibear, Founder and CEO of The Alcohol Education Trust, reflects on how this Dorset-based charity has helped young people make better choices

I'm proud to be a Dorset lass. My first years were spent in Branksome Park before my family moved to Puddletown, and my focus moved from sailing to ponies. But by the time I was 18 I couldn't wait to 'escape' sleepy Dorset. After university I spent three very happy years working in California, South Africa and Burgundy before moving to London. I subsequently returned to Dorset in 1998.

My working life has always been around alcohol and this led to editing a journal on alcohol research. I became fascinated by how and why people drink, and by the evidence on how 'early intervention' health education programmes improve outcomes for young people by helping them recognise and manage risky situations. At that time there were great programmes in Europe and Australia, but nothing in the UK that was engaging fun or freely available for schools.

So that's how The Alcohol Education Trust (AET) started. In 2009 I lost both my parents to cancer and had a cancer diagnosis myself. Such things make you reflect on your life, and I really wanted to make a difference. With a group of wonderful trustees (all teachers and health specialists) we adapted and trialled what was working well internationally for the UK; we made the lessons and activities available to schools for free with training.

We started, and have remained, in a garden garage in Frampton. With a grant for £15,000 we set about writing to every secondary school in the UK, starting with Dorset. A decade later there are 2,500 schools, children's homes, special schools, youth and sports clubs across the UK that use AET's 'talk about alcohol' (including 52 in Dorset). And last year we were finalists for the best small



Photo: helenjamesphoto.co.uk

Helena Conibear, Founder of The Alcohol Education Trust, on the site of their proposed office, café and community centre on The Great Field, Poundbury

'By facilitating discussions through games and role play, children think more about situations they may face and can work out safer choices'

charity in the UK with a turnover of under £2 million (ours is just £170,000).

Telling children not to do something invariably has the opposite effect, but by involving them and facilitating discussions through games and role play, they think more about situations they may face and can work out safer choices.

As we reach our 10th Birthday, and thanks to the generosity of The Duchy of Cornwall, we have the chance to have a new home on the Great Field at Poundbury. The Pavilion in the Park will have a community/training space and office with a revenue generating café. It's also within walking distance of nearly 5,000 children and their families in five schools. The park will have a running track, outside gym, parkour and children's play area. We are busy fundraising to help ensure this move happens and we have raised £22,000 via crowdfunder.co.uk and this has been match funded by Dorset County Council Youth Opportunity Fund.

We hope our Midsummer 10th Anniversary Ball (22nd June) at Moreton House will help us to raise more for this cause. Please do join us at this special celebration for a Dorset charity which is doing so much to help support young people. ♦

MIDSUMMER BALL

At our Midsummer Ball at Moreton House (22 June) there will be bubbles and canapés, a three course meal with wine, entertainment from acrobat and performer Charlie Bicknell, a Wessex FM DJ on the decks. and An Auction of Promises hosted by Garry Batt of Dukes and Galabid. To book tickets (£90 per person) visit alcoholeducationtrust.org and click on Store and select Events or call Carol Matthews on 07876 593345.

