

Celebrated Not Inebriated

Recently I awoke smiling as the previous evening I had attended a gorgeous 21st birthday party for a dear and beautiful young woman. It was a fete of her life and her journey. She truly celebrated and there wasn't a sign of any one being inebriated!

As I listened to family and friends honouring her through speeches and song, I remember thinking that those tears and prayers of 21 years are so worth it, coupled with the support of family and friends journeying together with their children.

So why do some parties go so very well and some go so dreadfully wrong? A couple of things immediately come to mind:



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CONSIDER YOUR INVESTMENT

Where are you going to put your investment? Is it in the food, decorations, entertainment, alcohol?

In this instance the parents had cleverly decided to put their investment for their stylish and musically talented daughter's 21st into a fabulous venue and a great salsa band (complete with dancing lessons!).

Delicious nibbles were provided and a cash bar was available. What a great idea! During the night we were surrounded by dancing, singing, laughing young people and no evidence of alcohol abuse. Most people seemed to be enjoying the non alcoholic drinks and delicious coffees. The next day the owner of the venue said the party had restored his faith in 21st birthdays. They had just about decided to stop having them due to problems with the young people's excessive consumption of alcohol. That night his staff had had a ball!

This party contrasted with a radio report from a bar manager the day Parliament voted on the drinking age. He described how young people at an 18 year old birthday party had totally trashed his bar the previous Saturday night. The parents had invited 100 people and hired a security guard, but many more arrived and brought alcohol onto the licensed premises. The drinking and the young people got out of control.

Holes were smashed in walls, there was lots of sexual activity and the place was generally trashed.

This bar manager supported raising the drinking age to 20 years of age and we did too. Keeping the drinking age at 18 signals that we expect them to begin drinking regularly at this age, which increases the risk of dependency and depression later on.

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

As a parent, uncle, aunt, youth leader, teacher, coach, friend of young people – do you believe they can have fun without alcohol? Teen drug and alcohol use is a parent problem too. In fact according to Columbia University Centre of Substance Abuse and Addiction, parental attitudes and example are key influences on how children respond. This is backed up by the Australian Institute of Family Studies 2004 report on Parenting Influences on Adolescent Alcohol Use. Simply put, “children rise to the expectations of adults who love and care for them”.

Addressing the culture of alcohol in our country is a community responsibility. We are cheering you on from the sidelines as you plan fabulous parties that show you can have celebration without inebriation! J