

Peer-led initiatives to reducing harm

Student Drug and Alcohol Conference 2025



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

Introductions



Session Outline

- Introduction to peer-led initiatives
- The student experience
- What could a 'peer-led' initiative look like at your institution?
- Examples of other peer-led initiatives

Peer-led initiatives

The peer-led approach

- *“may involve the delivery of part or all of an intervention by same age or older peers in informal or formal settings, such as community centres, street settings, nightclubs, school classrooms or youth clubs”* MacArthur et al. 2016
- Respected approach in community drug and alcohol services - support groups, peer support workers
- Often includes those with lived experience, but this isn't a necessity. Most notable examples of this include programmes such as AA
- Evidence base into peer-led approaches with young people is relatively small

What does the evidence tell us?

- Students who took part in a peer-led behavioural intervention reported lower post-intervention cannabis and alcohol use than those in a control group (MacArthur et al. 2016)
- Spanish college students who took part in a 30-minute peer-led motivational interview reduced their consumption of alcoholic drinks per week by an average of 5.7 units (Lavilla-Garcia et al. 2023)
- Service users who received a behavioural activation intervention led by a peer recovery specialist noted reduced substance use stigma. Reduced stigma is known to reduce attrition within recovery programmes (Kleinman et al. 2024)

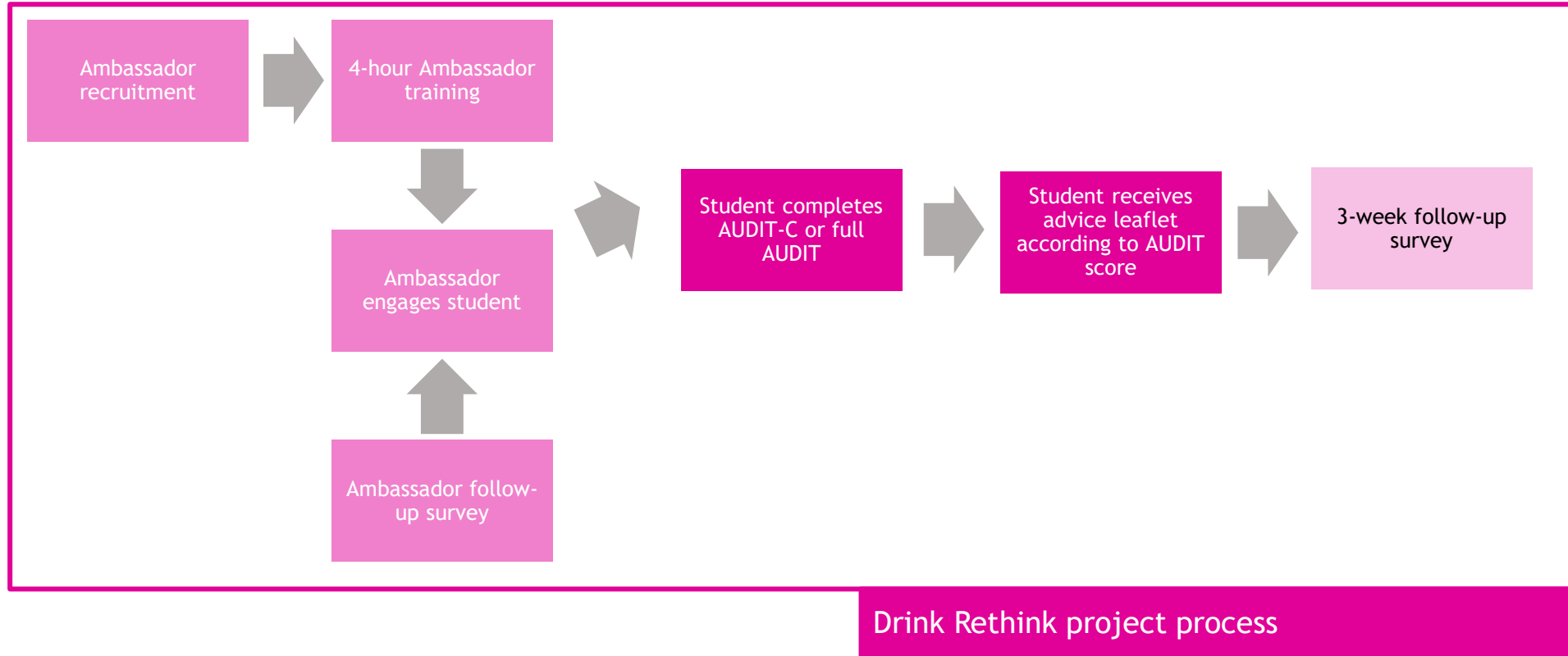
The Drink Rethink Project



- A project based on the principles of Alcohol Identification and Brief Advice (Alcohol IBA)
- Identification: Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
- Brief Advice: Short, brief advice designed to encourage a risky drinker to reduce their alcohol consumption to lower risk levels
- Based on principles of motivational interviewing
- Delivered to students by students at 11 institutions across England and Scotland

The F2F process

**Drink
Rethink**





The Impact



67%
agreed Drink Rethink
gave them
information about
their alcohol
consumption they
weren't aware of

48%
of the respondents
agreed that Drink
Rethink made them
think about changing
how they drink
alcohol

38%
of the respondents
agreed that Drink
Rethink made them
change how much
alcohol they drink

37%
of the respondents
agreed that Drink
Rethink made them
change how often
they drink alcohol

“It was overall positive, I did not feel judged or pressured into talking about my drinking habits, overly enjoyable experience”

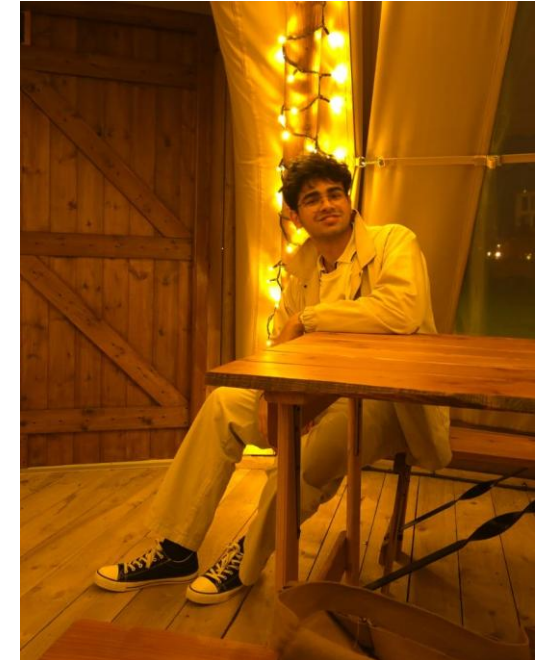
The Student Experience

Why did you want to take part?

What were the highlights of your time as an ambassador?

What did you learn? Were there any challenges talking about alcohol use?

Do you think students engaged differently due to it being peer-to-peer?



**What could this look like
at your institution?**



Activity

- What peer support networks do you already have in place?
- How could you use these peer support networks in harm reduction? If you do not work in a student-facing role, how could you support this work in your role?
- Would students need training? If so, what resources are needed?
- What are your desired outcomes?
- How could you evaluate success?

Examples of peer-led initiatives in HE

Better Than Well - University of Birmingham

- A collegiate recovery program (CRP) launched in 2021
- Aim: to support students who are in recovery from any form of dependency while they complete their studies
- Offers peer-to-peer support, social events and weekly meetings
- Co-ordinated by an academic and a recent graduate student with lived experience
- Connection to 12-step programmes in the community

Got Limits - St Andrews University

- A peer-to-peer training initiative
- Aim: student initiative working to promote safety awareness around drugs and alcohol
- Involves peer-delivered alcohol awareness training, delivered to sports teams, societies and halls of residence
- SU and University endorsed initiative run by a student committee
- Elected 'Got Limits' officers as a paid position