

An evaluation of the Good Hosts Pilot program

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Executive Summary

The overall purpose of the evaluation reported here was to examine the Good Hosts program in operation at corporate events in order to further improve the development and implementation of the Good Hosts program and accreditation criteria.

The evaluation method involved:

- a description and comparison of each corporate event
- the conduct and analysis of pre and post event interviews with employer representatives and employees, and
- the conduct and analysis of researcher observations of each event.

Four organisations participated in the pilot evaluation. All four agreed that the Good Hosts program was a success and that it assisted in minimising alcohol related risk at their events.

All organisations evaluated also agreed that there was a need for, and readily accepted, the Good Hosts program. Two main motivations were identified for being involved in the program:

1. concern regarding duty of care for employees and other event attendees, and
2. concern for the public and corporate image of the organisation.

These motivations should be emphasised in any marketing strategy. Two of the organisations involved were also motivated to be involved due to their previous involvement with the Good Sports program. Again this should be an important consideration for any marketing strategy.

Accreditation criteria non-compliance

The evaluation indicated that all events complied with most accreditation criteria. However, there were some consistent exceptions. In particular:

- few events provided information on drug and alcohol self help services
- advertising and promotion of the Good Hosts program was limited
- no event maintained an incident register
- few organisations had an event alcohol management policy that included an incident response plan
- safe transport, provided free of charge, was generally restricted to after the event finished. Little consideration appeared to be given to attendees who left early, or were asked to leave due to intoxication
- proof of age checks were not observed at events where attendees appeared to be under 18 years old
- only one event provided a breathalyser unit.

Modifications to accreditation criteria

Several issues concerning the suitability and effectiveness of the draft accreditation criteria also identified. First, the suitability of accreditation criteria varied according to the type of event and how the event was managed. This may be rectified by allowing for

more flexible criteria, or different criteria for different event types. The provision of a breathalyser as an accreditation criterion warrants further consideration. Due to issues with the reliability of different devices and the need for regular calibration, breathalyser provision may not be an effective risk mitigation strategy. In addition, accreditation criteria should be expanded to include the additional risk mitigation strategies identified in this evaluation such as:

- only water and non-alcohol drinks should be made available on arrival, so that attendees can quench their thirst before alcohol is served
- alcohol drinks in bottles or cans should not be made available for attendees to help themselves
- pre-pouring or the topping up of alcohol drinks should not occur
- adequate and appropriate food should be available for the same duration that alcohol is available
- Good Hosts program advertising and promotion should encourage low risk drinking and be supported by low risk drinking posters and resources
- consideration should be given to displacement effects if the event does not cater for specific demographic groups within the organisation.

Suggestions for improvement

Several suggestions for improvement, made by those involved in the evaluation, warrant consideration. In particular the following may prove useful for both program effectiveness and program marketing:

- the development of guidelines (e.g., for different types of events)
- the development of tools and resources (e.g., incident register, event planner)
- a process of regular communication with program participants and formalisation of the accreditation process.

Accreditation basis

A further issue for consideration is whether accreditation is to apply on an event basis or an organisation wide basis. If accreditation is to apply on an organisation wide basis, effective dissemination of Good Hosts principles and resources across the organisation and some form of auditing process to protect the integrity and reputation of the program will become particularly important.

Marketing suggestions

A crucial issue for both the effectiveness and marketing of the program will be early engagement of both senior management and employees. A strategy for engaging senior management may be to focus on the identified motivations for program involvement (e.g., duty of care and corporate image) in early communications with potential program participants. A strategy for employee involvement may be a recommendation by Good Hosts for the involvement an event planning/management committee that includes frontline employees. In addition 'looking after your co-worker' may prove a powerful strategy/message for employee engagement.

Funding issues

While the Good Hosts program is intended to operate on a fee-for-service basis, there may be opportunities for sponsorship and/or external funding. Good Hosts program is consistent with the National Preventative Health Strategy and a range of other public health/alcohol initiatives.

BACKGROUND

In partnership with the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), the Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) has developed a corporate event and hospitality program - the 'Good Hosts' program. The Good Hosts program is designed to assist organisations manage their corporate events safely and provide alternatives to traditional 'all you can drink' hospitality.

The Good Hosts program was developed in response to preliminary findings that workplace corporate events and hospitality functions are potentially high risk environments for alcohol misuse, illicit drug use and drug-related harms including negative short and long term health effects, violence, and drink driving. Such risks can adversely affect staff and client safety and relationships, workplace productivity and industrial relations, and the organisation's reputation in the wider business and social community.

The specific aim of the Good Hosts program is to improve responsible alcohol management at corporate events and hospitality functions. In doing so, the program is expected to provide additional benefits such as:

- minimising the risk alcohol related harm at these events
- minimising risk of harm to corporate image and reputation
- reducing potential liability for employers through alcohol-related incidents that may occur at these events
- reducing drink driving
- enhancing safety and function amenity for all attendees – clients, staff, other stakeholders
- assisting corporate hosts to meet duty-of-care and health and safety obligations
- contributing to a workplace and wider community culture of responsible alcohol use.

The Good Hosts program is based on the ADF's highly successful 'Good Sports' program which works with community sports clubs across Australia to reduce alcohol and other drug problems and build sustainable and quality sport options in communities. The primary strategy is to introduce 'best practice' alcohol management procedures based on a voluntary accreditation system. There is growing evidence indicating that accreditation models are effective in improving organisational behaviour and service delivery. Accreditation models allow for the establishment and dissemination of work practices and enhance quality improvement by allowing for third party evaluation. In addition the Good Sports program indicates that accreditation is an effective strategy for promoting stronger settings-based alcohol management.

The Good Hosts program also uses a voluntary accreditation system, whereby organisations are provided with tools, resources and advice on how to develop and implement policies, procedures and strategies to minimise risk of alcohol related harm at corporate and other work related hospitality functions. The successful development and

implementation of such policies, procedures and strategies will result in accreditation as a corporate 'Good Host'.

The workplace has been identified by both the ADF and NCETA as a priority setting for alcohol (and other drug) health promotion and prevention strategies. Such strategies are likely to minimise alcohol related harm in the workplace and have a positive affect on workplace culture concerning alcohol use. Moreover, such effects are likely to extend to the wider community. Thus, the Good Hosts program has potential as a strategy for achieving broad cultural change in relation to alcohol use in Australia.

By focusing on the workplace as an intervention setting to address alcohol-related harm, the Good Hosts program is also consistent with the National Preventative Health Strategy. The National Preventative Health Strategy proposes the use of the workplace as a setting to introduce a range of interventions aimed at reducing the chronic disease burden associated with three lifestyle risk factors – obesity, tobacco and alcohol.

THE PILOT PROGRAM

During 2009/2010 the ADF and NCETA designed a 12 month pilot of the Good Hosts program. This 12 month pilot began with the initial development of the program criteria and an evaluation of the introduction of the program into five organisations holding corporate events during November and December 2009.

Guided by an Advisory Group, a preliminary set of accreditation criteria and a risk assessment checklist were developed for the Good Hosts program in September 2009 (see appendices). During this time the five organisations were recruited to take part in the pilot:

1. the NRMA Group
2. the ADF
3. the NIB
4. the Newcastle Herald, and
5. Newcastle Permanent.

Times and dates were then arranged where representatives of the five organisations recruited for the initial pilot program could meet with the ADF Good Hosts team. At these meetings the plan for each corporate event was discussed and information consistent with Good Hosts accreditation criteria was offered to the organisations in order to minimise identified risk of alcohol related harm.

THE EVALUATION

The overall purpose of the evaluation reported here was to examine the Good Hosts program in operation at the corporate events in order to further improve the development and implementation of Good Hosts program and accreditation criteria. Specifically, the aims of the evaluation were to identify:

- initial levels of need for such a program
- initial levels of acceptance of the program
- perceptions of the program's success

- suitability and effectiveness of criteria
- areas for improvement within the program.

The evaluation method involved a description and comparison of each corporate event, the conduct and analysis of pre and post event interviews with employer representatives and employees, and the conduct and analysis of researcher observations of each event. Details of each event and a brief evaluation of each event are provided below.

THE EVENTS

1. THE NRMA GROUP CHRISTMAS PARTY

The NRMA Group Christmas party, attended by approximately 1,300 NRMA staff and family members (900 adults, 400 children) was held at the Sydney Showground (Sydney Olympic Park) on November 28th 2009. Staff were notified of the event by electronic and hard copy fliers (*appendix A*). The event ran from 12-9pm and was designed to be a family day with rides, music and other activities available free of charge. Food and non alcoholic drinks were available free of charge for the entire event duration, while alcoholic drinks (light beer, full strength beer and wine) were available free of charge from 12.30-8.30pm.

Overview of the NRMA event

The NRMA group Christmas Party was a family orientated event designed as a family fun day. The event had a carnival atmosphere providing both children's and adult entertainment (child and adult rides, face painting, sideshow alley, music, games, etc). Santa paid a visit at 1pm-2pm and 5pm-6pm. This event was much larger than previous years as the NRMA had recently merged with other two other organisations to form a much larger NRMA Group enterprise. The event was judged as successful by management and no alcohol related incidents were reported. Over 1,300 people attended, 446 of whom were NRMA Group staff.

Ample food (hot dogs, hot chips, bbq, and ice cream, etc) was provided all day while soft drink and water stations were located at various locations around the event venue. Alcohol, provided at a bar run by RSA trained catering staff, was available in a separate enclosed outdoor area. As it was a very hot day, children were allowed to sit with their families and eat in the enclosed (air-conditioned area) until 5pm. After 5pm the area became an over 18 year old area only.

The event venue provided a fee paying parking area and was closely located to public transport facilities. Charter buses were organised for regional areas and a shuttle bus regularly ran from the NRMA Strathfield office and return. First aid and security provisions were made available and there was a breath testing machine located at the entry/exit point that was available to all patrons at the entry/exit point of the party.

The NRMA Group has a brief set of guidelines concerning alcohol and work related functions (*appendix B*), and the person responsible for the event has experience in event management. A risk management approach to the event was taken.

No reference to the Good Hosts program was made on the event invitation, however, four ADF posters were displayed around the bar area and ADF binge drinking and low risk drinking pamphlets were handed out to attendees.

Advantages of the Good Hosts program for the NRMA Group

The employer representative reported that the NRMA Group's motivation for becoming involved in the Good Hosts program was concern over duty of care to employees (drink driving in particular) and concerns over NRMA's public image. Given that the NRMA is a large motor vehicle insurer, the elimination of drink driving is an organisational goal and NRMA's public image could be damaged if staff drank and drove.

In this regard, the employer representative reported that Good Hosts program was a valuable source of advice to minimise risk and provided an access point for relevant resources. Management stated that it was particularly useful to be able to run the event plan past Good Hosts representatives at the pre-event meeting in order to obtain suggestions and recommendations for improvement in risk management strategies. According to the NRMA management representative, the Good Hosts program was easy to implement and gave NRMA an opportunity to rethink policy and practices concerning alcohol (and other drugs) within the organisation.

NRMA Group recommendations to improve the Good Hosts program

NRMA management noted the need to disseminate information about minimising risk at work related events involving alcohol across the whole organisation. They suggested that this could be in the form of policy, guidelines, checklists and other resources.

In addition, the NRMA management representative highlighted that commitment to the Good Hosts program and directions concerning minimising risk at these events needs to come from the top (i.e., Board and senior management).

Evaluation summary

An evaluation of the NRMA Group Christmas party identified several issues of relevance to the ongoing development and implementation of the Good Hosts program. The first concerns the organisation's motivation for involvement in the program. While a duty of care to employees and their families was a motivation, so too was concern for NRMA's corporate image. Both should be considered as a general rationale for the Good Hosts program in any marketing strategies.

While no alcohol related incidents were reported, the NRMA group event was nonetheless a potentially high risk event. A large number of people attended, it was a very hot day, and alcohol was served free of charge and with no apparent limits over a long period of time. Alcohol service ceased only 30 minutes prior to the event closing. The employer representative acknowledged that the duration of the event in general was too long and they would consider reducing the event duration. In addition, large numbers of young people under the age of 18 years attended the event and these children were allowed in the alcohol area until 5pm. Field observations indicated proof of age was not routinely required as part of the bar service. Young people aged 18 years and over may

have been the most at risk of alcohol related harm at this event. It was observed that by 8.30pm-9.00pm most of the remaining attendees were young people that were ‘kicking on’ and only left due to the event closing. There appeared to be no provision to ensure the safety of these attendees.

While a very positive feature of the event was the focus on families and family style entertainment, this focus may have acted as a disincentive to employees without children. Only 446 NRMA group staff attended the event, despite a much larger number people being employed by the NRMA group. Non-parent employees, young employees and/or single employees may have been less attracted to the event. The NRMA Group management representative acknowledged that young, single employees may not be adequately catered for and stated more consideration would be given to this issue at next year’s event. An alternative explanation for low staff numbers may be that staff from recently merged organisations attended end of year events associated with their ‘old’ organisation rather than attending the ‘new’ NRMA Group event. Either way, this may have resulted in staff attending work events involving alcohol that did not have the Good Hosts program or other risk mitigation strategies in place.

The NRMA group staff Christmas party met all proposed accreditation criteria *except* for those outlined in Box 1.

Box 1 NRMA – accreditation non compliance

Criterion	Comment
Level 1	
Bar management ii <i>Alcohol is only provided during set hours</i>	The provision of free alcohol was only restricted by 1 hr (30minutes after the event began and 30 minutes before the event finished) during a 9 hour event
Provision of food and beverages iii <i>Non- and -low alcohol options are at least 10% cheaper than full strength alcohol drinks</i>	All drinks (alcohol and non-alcohol) were provided free of charge
Pathway to care i <i>Information on info to drug & alcohol self help services included in event invitations and collateral</i>	No information on drug & alcohol self help services was evident on the event invitation, however, four ADF posters were displayed around the bar area and ADF binge drinking and low risk drinking were handed out to attendees
Promotion & Reinforcement i <i>Promotion that event is ‘Good Hosts’ accredited through invitations and collateral</i>	No reference to the Good Hosts program was made on the event invitation, however, four ADF posters were displayed around the bar area and ADF binge drinking and low risk drinking were handed out to attendees
Level 2:	
Bar management ii <i>Event bar managers maintain an up to date incident register</i>	Appears this did not occur
Safe transport i <i>Safe transport provided at discounted cost</i>	Public transport was available (free transport was provided for attendees travelling to and from NRMA offices)
Level 3	
Safe transport ii <i>Safe transport provided FOC</i>	Public transport was available at normal rates (free transport was only provided for attendees travelling to and from NRMA offices)

Social inclusion (this was on original draft criteria)

The focus on family entertainment may have resulted in non-parent employees, young employees and/or single employees (the population groups most likely to drink at risky levels) being less attracted to the event. If this is the case, these groups may seek out alternative end of year work related celebrations that involve alcohol, but do not have risk management policies and practices in place.

2. THE ADF ORATION

This Annual Oration, attended by 100 key client stakeholders and ADF staff, was held at the State Library of Victoria on December 1st 2009. Staff were notified of the event as part of their work commitments and stakeholders were notified by electronic and hard copy invitations (*appendix C*). The event ran from 5.30pm to 7.30pm and involved the delivery of invited key note oral presentations followed by a brief reception. Food (canapés), beer, wine and non-alcohol drinks were provided free of charge by catering staff.

An evaluation of the ADF oration was restricted to a field observation only. As the ADF was one of two key partners involved in the development of the Good Hosts program, it was considered unlikely that employee or employer interviews would provide further organisational insight into indentifying levels of need, acceptance and perceptions of the program. However, a field observation was considered useful to identify areas for improvement.

The ADF Oration was a low risk event for several reasons. First, alcohol service was restricted to one hour, with catering staff explicitly directed to serve food first. Second, the event was an oration, not a celebratory end of year event. For the majority, the purpose of attending was to hear the oration, not to socialise or celebrate with other attendees. The researcher undertaking the field observation reported two attendees commenting that the very nature of the oration topic - 'Changing Australia's alcohol culture' - deterred them from drinking. In addition the average age of attendees appeared to being 40 years and over. Very few attendees under the age of 30 years, and not attendees under the age of 18 years were observed. Compared to younger Australians, older Australians are less likely to engage in risky patterns of consumption.

Despite being low risk, the field observation did identify areas for improvement:

- water should be made available on arrival, so that attendees can quench their thirst before alcohol is served
- non-alcohol drinks should also be poured ready for the close of the formal proceedings, not just alcohol drinks
- opened bottles of light beer (or other alcohol drinks) should not be left on the bar for attendees to help themselves. Rather, drinks should be served 'on demand'
- 'topping up' of alcohol drinks should not occur
- the CEO or MC should restate that it is a Good Hosts event and briefly explain the concept to those in attendance
- food (and preferably non-salty food) should be available as long as alcohol is available.

Many of the accreditation criteria did not apply due to the relatively short duration of the ADF Oration. This issue aside, the oration met all accreditation criteria *except* for those outlined in Box 2:

Box 2 ADF – accreditation non compliance

Criterion	Comment
Level 1	
Bar management iv <i>Names of RSA trained staff members are displayed on signs where alcohol is being served</i>	Bar service was provided by caterers
Provision of food and beverages iii <i>Non- and -low alcohol options are at least 10% cheaper than full strength alcohol drinks</i>	All drinks (alcohol and non-alcohol) were provided free of charge
Pathway to care i <i>Information on info to drug & alcohol self help services included in event invitations and collateral</i>	No information on drug & alcohol self help services was evident on the event invitation or collateral
Level 2:	
Bar management ii <i>Event bar managers maintain an up to date incident register</i>	Appears this did not occur
Safe transport i <i>Safe transport provided at discounted cost</i>	Public transport was available at normal rates
Level 3	
Safe transport ii <i>Free breathalyser tests made available</i>	Appears this did not occur
Safe transport iii <i>Safe transport provided FOC</i>	Public transport was available at normal rates

3. THE NIB STAFF CHRISTMAS PARTY (NEWCASTLE, 4TH DECEMBER 2009)

Few details are available for the NIB Staff Christmas Party. Participation in field observations was refused and to date the employer representatives have not made themselves available for interview.

4. THE NEWCASTLE HERALD CHRISTMAS PARTY

This annual Christmas lunch, attended by approximately 250 staff and family members, was held at the Newcastle Foreshore on December 5th 2009. Staff were notified of the event by electronic and hard copy fliers (*appendix D*). The event ran from 11.30am to 2.00pm and was designed as carnival event with rides and other activities available free of charge. Food and non-alcohol drinks were also provided free of charge and staff were permitted to bring their own alcohol.

Overview of the Herald event

The Newcastle Herald Christmas Party was a family orientated event with a focus on the children of staff. The event had a carnival atmosphere providing mainly children's entertainment (rides, face painting, clowns, balloon sculpting, etc). Santa paid a visit to hand out small gifts (provided by parents) to children. The event has been conducted in this way for 10 years. Individual department events still occur, however, the annual Christmas lunch is the officially sanctioned end of year event.

The change to an organised family day for all staff was driven by a new General Manager who wanted to expand the family culture focus of the newspaper. According to management, there had been little resistance to this change and overall it had been welcomed by staff. Management received many post-event-congratulatory emails and employee interviews indicated staff who attended enjoyed the event.

The primary purpose of the event was to reward staff and their families. According to Herald management a great deal of time and money went into the event and staff appreciated this effort. This was confirmed to us by staff, with one employee stating that through the event it was "*good to see employer acknowledges staff families*".

No reference to the Good Hosts program was made on the event invitation, nor was any signage or advertising of the Good Hosts program evident at the event location.

Advantages of the Good Hosts program for the Herald

Herald management did not have a clear expectation of what the Good Hosts program could deliver in terms of the family Christmas lunch. The event was intentionally designed to be low risk for alcohol related problems. The focus was on families, no alcohol was provided, the event was held at lunchtime, the provided entertainment was fast paced, and the event time frame was short (11.30am to 2pm). To-date, no alcohol related incidents have been recorded at this event.

The Herald's involvement in the Good Hosts program was largely driven by previous support for Good Sports. The Herald and ADF believed that the Herald Christmas lunch was included in the pilot program because it was a good model for the Good Hosts program. This belief aside, Herald management were also of the opinion that involvement in the Good Hosts program had 'opened their eyes' to potential alcohol related risks in relation to other functions they are involved in (e.g., client and staff functions such as lunches, concert, football corporate entertainment etc). Management

stated that they would need to rethink how they approached these functions. In this regard, management reported that they believed the Good Hosts program would be useful.

Herald recommendations to improve the Good Hosts program

The Herald also provided some recommendations regarding ways the Good Hosts program could be improved. These included providing more information/briefings during year to keep the concept fresh (e.g., changes in relevant legislation, suggestions for events, case studies, suggestions for risk management, on-going communication). A need for umbrella accreditation for any event the organisation holds, rather than accreditation for each individual event was also by Herald management.

Evaluation summary

The evaluation of the Herald event revealed several considerations for the ongoing development and implementation of the Good Hosts program. One consideration concerns the organisation's motivation for involvement in the program. The primary stated aim was to support the Good Hosts program and to ensure the safety and welfare of staff and their families. However, there was also a public relations motivation. As the event was held in a public place, management recognised community perceptions of what was occurring were important. As stated above, this motivation (together with a duty of care motivation) is of particular relevance to the Good Hosts program marketing strategy.

Management considered the event to be a good model for the Good Hosts program and were keen to get the Good Hosts branding as a seal of approval. While this is a desired motivation, it has implications if an umbrella accreditation is provided to all events conducted by the organisation, rather than individual events. While the Herald's family Christmas event may have been low risk, other Herald staff events may be more risky. In addition, for reasons outlined below, the sanctioning of one family event as the single 'official' Herald event may inadvertently contribute to other events being more risky.

The focus on employees with children at the official event may exclude employees without children. In total, around 250 staff and family members attended the event and this attendance number has remained relatively consistent over a 10 year period. Total Herald staff number around 250. If each employee attending the family Christmas event also brought a partner and one child, this means that only around a third of employees attended the event. Field observation of the event confirmed that it was primarily attended by family groups. Employee interviews also indicated that the event was mainly attended by employees with children, with statements such as "*if I didn't have kids I would not go*" and "*I don't know any one who goes that doesn't have kids*" being recorded.

While management acknowledged that the official family event focused on children, and was primarily attend by staff with children, they also believed a good demographic mix of staff attended and appeared un-concerned that the event was less appealing to other employees. However, the focus on staff with children may lead to implicit exclusion of staff who are at greater risk of alcohol related harm (e.g., non-parents, young, single, etc).

It was clear from the field observation of the official family event that little alcohol consumption occurred and the consumption of non-alcohol drinks was an established norm. In this sense alcohol was conspicuous because of its absence. Only two small groups were observed drinking. Such family orientated non-drinking norms may unintentionally lead to the conduct of more risky ‘non-official’ events involving unconstrained drinking, that occur as a as a reaction to the official family function (where drinking is constrained). Employee interviews confirmed the existence of other ‘non-official’ events and indicated a clear distinction between these “*adult*” events and “*the kids one*”.

Management were aware of other non-official departmental events occurring, but raised no concern about potential risk at these events. Employee interviews indicated that these events usually occurred after work between 6pm and midnight, with free food and drinks provided by senior management (i.e., beer, wine and non-alcohol drinks). No alcohol problems related to these events were reported by employees. However, employees also appeared defensive and protective of these events. The events were reported as providing an opportunity to socialise and ‘let their hair down’ with other employees. While one employee reported that he would still attend these events if no alcohol was provided, others reported they would not like to see any change to these events as “*no one would go if there was no alcohol involved*” and “*if these events were to stop I would want extra holidays instead*”.

The Newcastle Herald event met all proposed accreditation (largely due to the non-service of alcohol) except for those outlined in Box 3.

Box 3 the Newcastle Herald – accreditation non compliance

Criterion	Comment
Level 1	
<i>Smoke free ii</i> <i>Smoke free signage displayed</i>	No signage observed
<i>Pathway to care i</i> <i>Information on info to drug & alcohol self help services included in event invitations and collateral</i>	No information on drug & alcohol self help services was evident on the event invitation or collateral
<i>Promotion & Reinforcement i</i> <i>Promotion that event is ‘Good Hosts’ accredited through invitations and collateral</i>	No reference to the Good Hosts program was made on the event invitation or at event
<i>Alcohol management policy i</i> <i>Event alcohol management policy developed including an incident response plan</i>	No policy was identified. Despite no alcohol being provided and even of short duration – attendees were allowed to BYO
Level 3	
<i>Safe transport iii</i> <i>free or discounted safe transport</i>	None provided
<i>Safe transport ii</i> <i>Free breathalyser</i>	None provided

Social inclusion:

The focus on family entertainment led to a perception among staff of a 'kids' as distinct from the 'adult' events. This may lead to staff attending work-related events where less constrained alcohol consumption and alcohol-related behaviour occurs.

5. THE NEWCASTLE PERMANENT STAFF CHRISTMAS PARTY

This annual event, attended by approximately 350 staff and partners, was held at Newcastle City Hall on December 5th 2009. Staff were notified of the event by electronic and hard copy flyers (*appendix E*). The event ran from 6.15pm to midnight and was a themed (villains and heros) fancy dress party. Food and beverages were served by City Hall catering staff. Canapés were served from 6.15pm to 9.45pm. Food, beer, wine and non alcohol drinks were free of charge, while spirits could be purchased at the bar.

Overview of the Newcastle Permanent event

The Newcastle Permanent staff Christmas event is a themed fancy dress party with a focus on all staff and their partners. While entry was free for staff, partner tickets cost \$60. The event is seen by management as reward for staff and an opportunity for staff to socialise and network with co-workers whom they may not work with on a regular basis. Staff are involved in the event planning with a sub committee formed to organise the event. The event is advertised through the intranet and employee interviews indicated staff look forward to the event as the date approached.

The event location involved four separate 'party zones', live music and dancing. A separate area for smokers was also provided. Feedback from staff was that the event was a success, in particular the four separate spaces which allowed attendees to sit down and have a conversation. The event was well received by employees with positive feedback such as "*best one ever*" and "*excellent event*".

This event was run differently to previous events held by this organisation. Transport arrangements were expanded (including chartered buses to outer regions with suburban drop offs) and the venue was more suitable (more central and with better trained staff). Also existing alcohol restrictions imposed by Newcastle Council at the venue made risk management easier.

Newcastle Permanent management were keen to ensure the event was conducted appropriately and a risk management approach was taken that involved a range of strategies including:

- food provided during the event and before drinks served.
- restrictions on alcohol service
- RSA training
- safe transport to and from the event
- security
- a pamphlet provided to staff concerning behaviour at the event and responsible drinking guidelines.

This risk management approach was adopted to minimise risk to health and safety and Newcastle Permanent's reputation. According to one employer representative, the focus on risk management and community attitudes had increased over the last few years. The employer representative believed there had been little resistance from staff to this risk

management approach as improved safety has additional appeal for staff due to the employee gender mix (70% female, 30% male).

Newcastle Permanent are intending to survey employees to obtain reactions and feedback on how the event could be improved.

The Good Hosts program was specifically mentioned on the invitation and Good Hosts drink coasters were on tables at the event.

Advantages of the Good Hosts program for Newcastle Permanent

Newcastle Permanent management were initially interested in the program due to their involvement in the Good Sports program. They saw the Good Hosts program as an opportunity to improve risk management and wanted to assist the program to gain traction. The employer representative reported that while a risk management approach was already taken, the information provided to the organisation by the Good Hosts program identified additional issues for consideration. In particular, they found the risk assessment checklist very useful.

Newcastle Permanent management believed the involvement of the Good Hosts program made a difference as it sent a clear message to attendees about responsible drinking. Employee feedback also indicated that there was more emphasis on responsible drinking at this event than in the past. One (non-drinking) employee reported that while some event attendees had too much to drink, overall, everyone was “*very well behaved*” and not “*out of control*”.

Newcastle Permanent recommendations to improve the Good Hosts program

Newcastle Permanent management were very impressed with the Good Hosts approach. However they suggested a need to formalise the accreditation process. The employer representative believed third party accreditation was a very powerful tool as it provided an indication that the organisation was taking every effort to mitigate risks. Management believed the Good Hosts program gave credibility and endorsement to their efforts to achieve a low risk event.

Evaluation summary

While the Newcastle Permanent staff Christmas party was potentially high risk, the combination of existing risk management strategies and the Good Hosts program appeared to effectively mitigate this risk. According to one employee, increased risk management strategies were originally introduced after a previous staff Christmas party where one attendee became very intoxicated. This same interviewee revealed that poor behaviour and vomiting in the toilets were more common at previous events.

The evaluation did reveal issues of relevance for the Good Hosts program. Some of these issues concerned the staff Christmas party that was part of the Good Hosts program, while some concerned other Newcastle Permanent events involving alcohol.

The employer representative reported that while a number of people attending the staff Christmas party were refused service due to intoxication, no one was forcibly removed. However, employee interviews indicated that some attendees were also asked to leave the premises due to intoxication. According to one employee this was because the food (finger food) provided was not adequate, or not provided regularly enough, for the amount of alcohol consumed by many. This was also acknowledged by the employer representative who reported management would consider a sit down meal next year.

The number of incidents concerning intoxication may also be a reflection of the party atmosphere of the event. Several employees reported that pre-loading (drinking before the event), while usually limited to a couple of drinks in the hour before the event, was a common practice. Field observations also revealed a steady flow of alcohol at the event, while the flow of non-alcoholic drinks was less obvious. During the breaks, when presentations occurred, bar staff were pouring drinks in preparation for when people returned. These pre-poured drinks appeared to signify an open bar with 'free flowing' alcohol that may encourage rapid and excessive intoxication as opposed to the more typical lining up at a bar and waiting to be served and then waiting for the drink to be poured.

Structured norms may also play a strong role in levels of intoxication. Both field observers 'nursed' alcoholic drinks to 'fit in' and one commented that she didn't usually drink but that the kind of atmosphere and build up of this event made her want to have a drink, and to think that she should have one. This was also evident in the employee interviews with one (non-drinking) attendee reporting 'nursing' a drink "*just to fit in*". Interestingly, less alcohol consumption was observed in areas without a bar. It seemed people felt more comfortable drinking around a bar area.

Field observations of the event also revealed that while adequate transport was provided to get attendees home safely after the event, little attention (if any) was paid to attendees who left early. This may be a particular issue for those that had been asked to leave due to intoxication.

Employee interviews also revealed that other Newcastle Permanent staff events involving alcohol also occurred at Christmas and other times during the year. These events were usually much smaller, being held at the branch/department level. While attendees have become intoxicated at these events more controls were evident. First, most of these events did not involve free alcohol. Employee interviews revealed alcohol and other non-alcoholic drinks are purchased by attendees through normal bar and/or waiter service provided at the event venue. The small number of attendees and the presence of supervisors and managers also provides greater levels of surveillance. In addition, informal rules exist at these events. For example, one employee revealed that the nominated 'skipper' (driver of the car) does not drink and co-workers tend to look after each other. This 'looking after your co-worker' behaviour was also observed at the main staff Christmas party. At one point a drink was spilt on the marble stairs, making it very slippery. While security were being called to clean it up one employee in fancy dress stood over the spill to warn those walking past that it was slippery.

The Newcastle Permanent event met all proposed accreditation criteria *except* for those outlined in Box 4.

Box 4 the Newcastle Herald – accreditation non compliance

Criterion	Comment
Level 1	
Provision of food and beverages iii <i>Non and low alcohol options are at least 10% cheaper than full strength alcohol drinks</i>	All drinks (alcohol and non-alcohol) were provided free of charge
Provision of food and beverages iv <i>Substantial food is provided when the bar is open for more than 1 hour</i>	Canapés provided may not have been sufficient. Some attendees complained of not enough food and several cases of refusal of service due to intoxication were reported
Pathway to care i <i>Information on info to drug & alcohol self help services included in event invitations and collateral</i>	No information on drug & alcohol self help services was evident on the event invitation or collateral
Promotion & Reinforcement i <i>Promotion that event is ‘Good Hosts’ accredited through invitations and collateral</i>	No reference to the Good Hosts program was made on the event invitation or at event
Alcohol management policy i <i>Event alcohol management policy developed including an incident response plan</i>	No policy was identified. Despite no alcohol being provided and even of short duration – attendees were allowed to BYO
Level 2:	
Bar management ii <i>Event bar managers maintain an up to date incident register</i>	Appears this did not occur
Bar management iv <i>Names of RSA trained staff members are displayed on signs where alcohol is being served</i>	Bar service was provided by caterers
Level 3	
Safe transport ii <i>Free breathalyser</i>	None provided
Safe transport iii <i>free or discounted safe transport</i>	Free and safe transport was provided when the event finished, but appears no provision made for those who left early (in particular those asked to leave due to intoxication)

Social inclusion (this was on original draft criteria)

There was a strong norm of alcohol consumption at the event. This was to the point where non-drinkers felt compelled to hold a drink ‘to blend in’.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMEDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While only five organisations were involved in the early pilot program, the diversity in the types of organisations holding events and in the events themselves provided sufficient information to meet the evaluation aims.

Levels of need for, and acceptance of, the program

Four of the five organisations participated in the pilot evaluation. All four of these organisations agreed that there was a need for, and readily accepted, the Good Hosts program. Two main motivations were identified for being involved in the program:

1. concern regarding duty of care for employees and other event attendees, and
2. concern for the public and corporate image of the organisation.

These motivations should be emphasised in any marketing strategy. In addition, two organisations were also motivated to be involved in Good Hosts due to their previous involvement with the Good Sports program. This should also be an important consideration for any marketing strategy.

Concern for the public and corporate image of the organisation appears a particularly strong motivator which has important implications for the Good Host program. Concern for public and corporate image may result in some organisations seeing accreditation as a 'seal of approval' that reinforces positive public and corporate image. While this may be justified if the organisation's event complies with Good Host accreditation criteria, risk to the integrity and reputation of the Good Hosts program may increase if the event does not meet accreditation criteria. For the Good Hosts accreditation program to be effective and credible, some form of auditing process may be necessary. Organisations should need to demonstrate that they have adequate risk mitigation policies and procedures in place before accreditation can be granted. This would protect the value of the 'product' (i.e., accreditation) being marketed.

Suitability and effectiveness of the accreditation criteria

The evaluation indicated accreditation criteria were effective with all events complying with most criteria. However, there were some consistent exceptions including:

- few events provided information on drug and alcohol self help services and no event bar manager maintained an incident register
- few organisations had an event alcohol management policy that included an incident response plan
- advertising and promotion of the Good Hosts program was not evident in some events and only limited in others
- most events provided some form of safe transport free of charge, however, this was restricted to after the event finished. Little consideration appeared to be given to attendees who left early, or were asked to leave due to intoxication
- proof of age checks were not observed at events where attendees appeared under the age of 18 years
- only one event supplied a breathalyser unit (however, this may not be an appropriate criterion).

Several issues concerning the suitability and effectiveness of the draft accreditation criteria were also identified. First, the suitability of accreditation criteria varied according to the type of event. For example, alcohol was not provided at the Newcastle Herald, but BYO was allowed. Therefore, provision of alcohol and bar management criteria did not apply and there were no criteria concerning BYO. Similarly, at events where no alcohol is served, the provision of information concerning self-help program may not be considered by the event hosts to be appropriate. The suitability of accreditation criteria also varied at events where alcohol was provided. For example most of the events evaluated provided alcohol free of charge. Thus, accreditation criteria concerning lower prices for non-alcohol drink compared to alcohol drinks did not apply. This issue could be solved by introducing flexibility into the accreditation criteria (e.g., if alcohol is not provided free of charge then non-alcohol drinks must be at a lower price than alcohol drinks). Finally, the draft accreditation criteria included the provision of a breathalyser. This criterion warrants further consideration as accuracy of these units depends on reliability of the device and regular calibration. The use of a breathalyser may be counter productive if it gives false readings and increases the organisation's liability.

Other risk mitigation strategies were identified that could also be included in the accreditation criteria including:

- Good Hosts program advertising and promotion should encourage low risk drinking and be supported by low risk drinking posters and resources
- only water and non-alcohol drinks should be made available on arrival, so that attendees can quench their thirst before alcohol is served
- alcohol drinks in bottles or cans should not be made available for attendees to help themselves
- pre-pouring or the topping up of alcohol drinks should not occur
- adequate and appropriate food should be available for the same duration that alcohol is available

Previous drafts of the accreditation criteria included a social inclusion category. This category was not included in the final accreditation criteria. However, the evaluation revealed that social inclusion was an important issue. In one instance, the consumption of alcohol was a focus of the event to the point where non-drinking attendees felt compelled to hold a drink 'to fit in'. In contrast, the focus on a family day event and children's entertainment at some events may result in the social exclusion of employees with no children. These employees may seek out more adult focused work-related events involving heavier alcohol consumption. Therefore consideration should be given to the needs of the organisations full staff demographic (in particular those who may be unintentionally excluded from the event) and to any displacement effects that may occur if the event does not cater for specific demographic groups within the organisation.

Perceptions of the program's success and identify areas for improvement

Overall, the NRMA, the Newcastle Herald and the Newcastle Permanent all agreed that the Good Hosts program was a success and that it assisted in minimising alcohol related risk at their events. In addition, these organisations provided ideas for improving the program. These included:

- dissemination of information about minimising risk at work related events involving alcohol across the whole organisation by producing resources such as policies, guidelines, and checklists
- providing more information/briefings during year to keep concept fresh (e.g., changes in relevant legislation, suggestions for events, case studies, suggestions, on-going communication, etc)
- formalisation of the accreditation process
- consideration of organisational accreditation rather than event accreditation
- development of processes to engage senior management.

Future directions

Overall, the evaluation indicated that there was a need for, and a high level of acceptance of, the Good Hosts program. Participating organisations believed that the program was a success and that it assisted in minimising alcohol related risk at their events.

The two main motivations for corporate involvement in the program were concern over employee safety and wellbeing and in particular, concern over corporate image. These motivations should be emphasised in any marketing strategy. Two of the corporations involved were also motivated to be involved in Good Hosts due to their previous involvement with the Good Sports program. Again this should be an important consideration for any marketing strategy.

The evaluation also identified several issues concerning the suitability and effectiveness of the draft accreditation criteria. First, the suitability of accreditation criteria varied according to the type of event and how the event was managed. This may be rectified by allowing for more flexible criteria, or for different criteria for different event types. In addition, accreditation criteria should be expanded to include the additional risk mitigation strategies identified in this evaluation.

Several suggestions for improvement, made by those involved in the evaluation, warrant consideration. In particular the development of guidelines (e.g., for different types of events), tools (e.g., incident register, event planner) a process of regular communication with program participants and formalisation of the accreditation process, may prove useful for both program effectiveness and program marketing.

A further issue for consideration is whether accreditation is to apply on an event basis or an organisation wide basis. If accreditation is to apply on an organisation wide basis, effective dissemination of Good Hosts principles and resources across the organisation and some form of auditing process to protect the integrity and reputation of the program will become particularly important.

An important strategy for both the effectiveness and marketing of the program will be early engagement of both senior management and employees. A strategy for engaging senior management may be to focus on the identified motivations for program involvement (duty of care and corporate image) in early communication with potential program participants. A strategy for employee involvement may be a recommendation by Good Hosts to involvement an event planning/management committee that includes frontline employees. In addition 'looking after your co-worker' may prove a powerful strategy/message for employee engagement.

While the Good Hosts program is intended to operate on a fee-for-service basis, there may be opportunities for sponsorship and/or external funding. Good Hosts program is consistent with the National Preventative Health Strategy and a range of other public health/alcohol initiatives.