



## **THE ARK**

### **AN ALCOHOL FREE NIGHTCLUB & CENTRE 'SERVING THE YOUTH OF AYRSHIRE'**

#### **Why and how it was started**

The Ark is an innovative, alcohol free nightclub and centre for youth aiming to provide a safe recreational environment for young people in our community, and promote their self worth regardless of their sex, race, creed, physical or mental ability.

The county town of Ayr is one of contrasts, some living in suburban areas, whilst many others live in urban areas rated high in the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SMD 2006). A lack of recreational facilities for Ayr's youth has long been an area of concern. Ayr currently has a cinema complex, bowling alley, sports centre and a few local youth centres. The educational facilities include Paisley University (Ayr Campus), Ayr College, Scottish Agricultural College and six large secondary schools, with a total of 5,000 pupils attending the schools alone. This represents a significant and proportionally large group of young people between the ages of eleven and eighteen, reflecting the social diversity in the town as a whole.

The level of underage binge drinking amongst 11-18 year olds is of national concern. Recent teenage discharges from Accident & Emergency Services specifically for alcohol related problems in Ayrshire were rated the highest in Scotland. Further reports of the extent of alcohol misuse and binge drinking amongst young people are seriously concerning (Ayrshire & Arran Alcohol Profile 2006). The lack of safe, recreational alcohol free facilities for young people at early risk of developing alcohol and drug use problems is obvious.

In 2003 a Charitable Company called The Ayr Ark was founded (Charity No. SC035832). Support was drawn from a wide range of sources within the local community (churches, voluntary organisations, private and public sectors) and a Voluntary Management Committee appointed to get The Ark up and running. The latter still oversees The Ark and is made up of professionals in the fields of Finance, Architecture and Property, Law, Youth Work, Addiction Services and Business Management.

#### **The history past, present and future**

The Ark officially launched in August 2004 and encountered an overwhelming demand from the local young people for our facilities (up to 400 young people every weekend) – a clear sign of our success. A high ranking police official stated that The Ark was: "the best project of its kind I have seen. I would like to see other towns following Ayr's lead." A senior local Community Education officer also commented that The Ark was "by far, the most attractive youth facility in the whole of South Ayrshire."

In spite of a tragic fire in April 2005 which devastated our work and completely destroyed our premises, The Ark successfully re-launched in an even bigger and better building in April 2006. The Ark went on to receive a special commendation award for excellence from the national body 'Faithworks' and subscribes to the Faithworks Charter. We are most encouraged that The Ark has been held up as a regional and national flagship project in this way, and that we have come through such testing times stronger and more professional as a result.

The Ark is a serious, but fun and attractive alternative to underage drinking, taking drugs, hanging around on the streets, and anything that might be regarded as anti-social behavior for young people.

As such it has helped relieve the tension upon licensed establishments in the area that encounter problems with under age youths trying to access pubs, clubs or even purchase alcohol from off-licenses. The Ark operates with the full support of the licensing department.

The Ark is a consistent diversionary project with over 12,000 young people having used our facilities in the past year. We promote music and the arts through live band nights, and over 150 local youth bands, artistes and DJs performed at The Ark in 2006! Our weekend activities include discos, karaoke's, live gigs, theme parties, competition events and table-top games like pool and air hockey. This year we have extended our opening hours to run weekly dance classes, a lunch café for local school pupils and students, and a free drop-in centre where young people can chill out, record some music, study in our computer suite, meet with friends, get informal advice on a range of issues from alcohol and drugs to internet safety, play 5-a-side football or badminton, eat some hot food or just talk to one of our youth workers. The Ark is considered a place 'where leisure and learning meet'.

## **Our Outcomes**

We have three outcomes that we want to achieve for our clientele and staff over the coming year, this includes volunteers. These are:

1. To promote self worth, creativity and self expression among young people
2. To reduce the level of alcohol and drug misuse (with a particular emphasis on under age drinking) among 11 – 18 year olds in our community
3. To enhance outcomes 1 & 2 by developing and increasing the impact and capacity of The Ark's work in the wider community

## **Staff and Volunteer Base**

The project currently employs a full-time Team Leader, Assistant Manager, and a part-time cleaner. They are supported by a growing team of voluntary relational youth workers, caterers, bar staff and stewards (currently 40 active volunteers) who are provided with support and training as necessary. The local council, police, schools, and Alcohol and Drug Action Team recognise that we are acting in line with local and national government strategies and each have expressed their support. Further, in June 2007, 15 of our relational youth workers received Millennium Volunteer Awards for over 3,000 hours of work in The Ark. This means that The Ark, as an organisation, officially engages the most youth volunteer recruits in all of South Ayrshire. This is the second time we have done this, proving that The Ark has exceeded the hopes of the Scottish Executive's Volunteering Strategy (2004) for engaging young people in active citizenship. We are also in the process of developing an accredited volunteering programme with Project Scotland.

## **The financial support in place at present and the support required to carry out future plans**

The Ark requires a total income of £108,400 each year, and with £32,400 coming from our operations this leaves an annual shortfall of £76,000. So far we have raised our required total for 2007. Long term sustainability is an ongoing challenge for all voluntary organisations, and we are currently seeking to secure core funding for our staff and running costs for 2008, 2009 and 2010, as well as raise money for two immediate capital projects - creating a stylish open-air seating and activity area for our young people (£10,000), and upgrading our inadequate heating system (£5,000 - £7,000 approximately). Thereafter we plan to develop our capacity to serve the youth of Ayrshire by increasing our staff team and opening more hours and days throughout the week.

The Ark seeks to demonstrate and encourage good practice in youth work and organisational excellence. We partner with a growing number of local, regional and national organisations with similar aims and objectives. Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information or if you feel able in any way to contribute to our work either financially, in-kind, or in sharing your experiences of good practice: Email: [admin@ayrark.co.uk](mailto:admin@ayrark.co.uk) Tel: 01292 264020 Web: [www.AyrArk.co.uk](http://www.AyrArk.co.uk)