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Healthy Alcohol Marketplace

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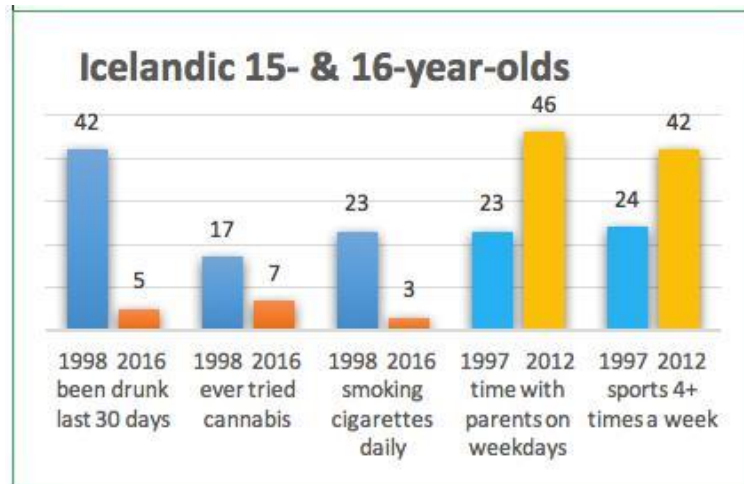
Moderation and the Icelandic Model

Overall, Americans are consuming less alcohol. This is especially true for young adults and underage youth who are drinking a lot less than past generations. Part of this phenomenon may be due to our focus on reducing underage drinking, but there is also a health trend that promotes healthy eating and fitness. Young adults may be more likely to look at labels for ingredients, calorie and alcohol content. It seems clear that a concern about health has impacted alcohol consumption. Millennials say that they anticipate not drinking as much as their parent's generation.

For alcohol this trend in moderation has spawned various projects and programs. An example is Dry January, which started in the United Kingdom in 2013 and this year had over 3 million participants. We have also seen programs touting "mindful drinking" whereby one chooses to drink less or not at all; and, organizations like Better Drinking Culture, Hello Sunday Morning and Club Soda have resources for joining the mindful drinking movement. Daybreakers has organized close to 200 drug-and-alcohol-free, morning dance parties since it started in 5 years ago.

While young adults and teens are drinking less, the numbers are still high and college drinking has not gone down by much. Moreover, more than 90% of alcohol consumed by youth is in the form of binge drinking. At the college level, drinking to the "black-out" state is all too common. We risk losing many of our youth if we can't change these destructive patterns.

An intriguing approach to youth alcohol abuse can be found in the small country of Iceland. They have seen great success in lowering the drinking rate among children and teenagers. In the 1980's and 1990's, Icelandic teens drank at very high rates; today they are among the lowest. According to a local psychologist, "You couldn't walk the streets in downtown Reykjavik on a Friday night because it felt unsafe," and there were large groups of teens getting very drunk. Iceland instituted a number of policies that seem to be working. The approach is very positive and focuses on having a variety of activities to occupy and interest kids after school. The program choices are broad and include art, music, dance, sports, etc. But it also involves curfews at night and greater involvement of parents. In fact, parents are encouraged to spend a greater quantity of time with their kids, not just limited "quality time."



A survey administered every year asks students about behavior around intoxicants, how they spend their time, and their state of mind. Icelandic teens now spend more time involved in artistic activities and sports, and more time with their parents. All of this has required a large investment and political will, but Iceland has decided that the results are worth it. Other countries have consulted with Iceland, and on a smaller scale, the Icelandic model has been followed in municipalities in Spain, Lithuania and Belarus-- but nowhere else on the scale of Iceland. They've made the calculation that investing in kids before they try alcohol will cost less in the long run.

In our country, there are an increasing number of similar programs. For example, there is an organization called "Natural High" based in San Diego that engages others "to help young people discover those core activities in their lives that uplift, inspire and motivate them-to find their "Natural High" rather than use alcohol or drugs." Dr. Harvey Milkman at the Metropolitan State college of Denver has worked with the Iceland program and was instrumental in establishing a project in Denver called "Project Self-discovery." All of these programs can be accessed via the internet.

For communities that want to see further progress in youth use of alcohol and drugs, these programs are worth exploring.

Sources:

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Drinking in America: Myths, Realities, and Prevention Policy [PDF-599KB]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005.

<https://mosaicscience.com/story/iceland-prevent-teen-substance-abuse/>

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<https://naturalhigh.org/science>