

REVIEWS

'The' guide to drugs and alcohol

This book provides insightful and practical advice to dealing with drugs and alcohol for all those who work with young people

The Essential Guide to Working with Young People about Drugs and Alcohol

Edited by Jenny McWhirter and Hajra Mir

Published by DrugScope

176 pages

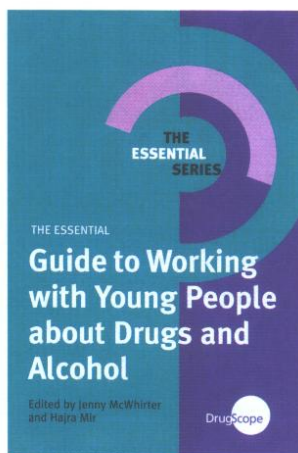
£14.95

The latest in DrugScope's excellent *The Essential Series* is, like its predecessors, packed with everything you need to know about working with young people on drugs issues and it does exactly what it says on the cover. With chapters drawn from a range of highly experienced and knowledgeable practitioners, this is a comprehensive tour around all the pertinent issues relating to young people and alcohol and drugs from those in the know.

The volume has been produced with support from the Brit Trust, the charitable arm of the British phonographic industry, and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is well set out and, over the 11 chapters, presents perspectives on working with young people's alcohol and drugs issues from different disciplines.

The guide will appeal to a wide range of professionals from different services, not only to check out their own area of interest but to also gain a deeper understanding of how other services are addressing these issues and how this enhances all our work.

Consequently, as well as reinforcing my existing knowledge about drugs and the law, drug education in formal settings and youth support services, I learned much about working with families, effective interventions and putting young people at the heart of services. And that is the book's



strength. It provides an overview of all the main areas of working with young people and how these interlink with each other. Teachers, youth workers, drug treatment workers, youth offending teams and Connexions personal advisers will all find something relevant to them in the book.

I was particularly pleased to see editor Jenny McWhirter's chapter on evaluation, but rather disappointed it was included at the end. Often tagged on as an afterthought (if at all) in service design, evaluating the impact and effectiveness of working with young people should really be the starting

point. Initiating research to set the baseline, setting aims and objectives, and putting in place systems to monitor developments not only makes for a solid foundation for working with young people on any issue, it provides a strong case to commissioners and enhances the delivery of that service to young people.

Right through the chapters there are helpful case studies to illustrate effective working, check points to enhance learning and dilemma boxes to aid reflective thinking. I found these particularly helpful when considering an unfamiliar topic as this helped me understand how other workers approached these issues.

My only quibble would be design and layout. While reading the 176 pages of black and white text, I began to pine for an illustration, a photograph, a splash of colour – anything to break up the fields of text.

Having said that, this is undoubtedly a very useful addition to our sum of knowledge about young people and alcohol and drugs. It should be required reading, and a constant point of reference, to all those who are working in this area.

Reviewed by Alan Matthews, an independent researcher, adviser and trainer on the issues around young people and drugs. aj.matthews@blueyonder.co.uk

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