

**School Leaver Celebrations on Rottnest Island:  
Going it Alone**

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**July 2002**

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ISBN:1 74067 152 X

This research was commissioned by the School Drug Education Project (SDEP) in Western Australia as part of the Leavers Live project, funded by the National School Drug Education Strategy, through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>V</b>
SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY .....	VII
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	VII
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS .....	X
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES .....	3
OTHER RESEARCH .....	3
<i>The background of the Leavers Live Project and its impact on strategies undertaken by the host community in 2001</i> .....	4
<i>Leavers Live initiatives repeated in 2001</i> .....	4
<i>Leavers Live initiatives not repeated in 2001</i> .....	5
<i>New initiatives implemented by the host community in 2001</i> .....	6
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
DATA GATHERING METHODS .....	7
<i>School leavers</i> .....	7
<i>Major stakeholders</i> .....	8
<i>Participant observation</i> .....	10
ANALYSIS .....	10
<i>School leavers</i> .....	10
<i>MajorsStakeholders</i> .....	10
<i>Participant observation</i> .....	11
LIMITATIONS .....	11
<b>RESULTS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
SCHOOL LEAVERS .....	15
<i>Leavers' expectations of the Rottneest experience</i> .....	15
<i>Alcohol and drug use</i> .....	18
<i>Concerns about personal harms/ safety</i> .....	21
<i>Harm reduction strategies</i> .....	23
<i>Best part of evening activities</i> .....	25
<i>Negative experiences</i> .....	27
<i>Parental warnings</i> .....	29
<i>Police warnings 2001</i> .....	31
<i>Ways to improve the experience</i> .....	32
ATTENDANCE AT AND EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES .....	35
STAKEHOLDERS .....	37
POLICE STATION, NURSING POST AND CHILL OUT TENT DATA .....	41
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION .....	43
<i>The media</i> .....	43
<i>The hotel</i> .....	43
<i>The Chill Out Tent/ Nurses Station/ St John of God Ambulance</i> .....	44
<i>The Police and security personnel</i> .....	45
<i>Heritage Common music initiative</i> .....	45
<i>The leavers' behaviour</i> .....	46
<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1</b> .....	<b>59</b>

<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>FROM 2000 EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>LEAVERS' SURVEY INSTRUMENT .....</b>	<b>63</b>

#### **TABLES AND FIGURES**

Table 1: Gender make-up of groups interviewed in each year.....	12
Table 2 : Proportion of leavers and non leavers interviewed .....	13
Table 3 : Gender and status of those interviewed.....	13
Table 4: Leavers expectations of the Rottnest experience .....	19
Table 5: Alcohol and drug Use.....	19
Table 6: Concerns about personal harms/ safety .....	22
Table 7: Harm reduction strategies.....	24
Table 8: Best part of evening activities .....	26
Table 9: Negative experiences.....	28
Table 10: Parental warnings .....	30
Table 11: Police warnings 2001 .....	31
Table 12: Ways to improve the experience .....	33
Table 13: Attendance at and evaluation of intervention activities .....	35
Table 14: Formal Police responses during leavers' week 1999-2001 .....	41
Table 15: Nursing Post occasions of service during leavers' week 1999-2001 .....	42
Table 16: Services provided by Chill Out Tent 2001 .....	42
Figure 1: Home suburb of leavers interviewed 2001 .....	9

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Paul Catalano for mapping the leavers' place of residence in such an elegant manner. We would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the Rottnest Community, in particular those stakeholders who gave of their time and agreed to be interviewed. Thanks go to the Rottnest Nursing Post and Rottnest Police for providing statistical information, the School Drug Education Project (especially Lorel Mayberry) and Healthway for providing the researchers with promotional materials and incentive items. Finally the authors would like to acknowledge the 2001 leavers for freely and openly discussing their experiences with the researchers during their celebrations.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year in late November school leaver celebrations occur in Western Australia. The most popular destination for these celebrations is Rottnest Island. Here 16 – 17 year old leavers gather to unwind after the stress of their final exams, socialise and mark their passage into adulthood. For most participants alcohol consumption is involved in their celebrations, while for some the consumption is excessive and accompanied by the use of illicit drugs.

Community concerns about underage drinking and the potentially harmful interpersonal violence and health consequences of excessive alcohol and other drug consumption that accompany the leaver celebrations on Rottnest prompted implementation of a range of strategies aimed at reducing the harm to both the leavers and the host community. The School Drug Education Project (SDEP) received National Drug Education Strategy funding from Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) over three consecutive years to develop this prevention program. The National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) received part of this funding in each year for evaluation.

Researchers from NDRI investigated celebrations in 1999 and produced a formative evaluation report (Bogaards, Midford & Farrington, 2000). The recommendations made in this report formed the basis of an intervention coordinated by SDEP on Rottnest in 2000 known as Leavers Live. NDRI was involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the Leavers Live intervention and produced a follow up report (Young, Midford & Farrington 2001).

This report is the third in this series. Its purpose is to gauge the longer-term sustainability of the leavers' intervention in the absence of major external support. In 2001 the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) assumed the major co-ordinating role and implemented the following activities.

- Police visited selected high schools and talked to leavers prior to leavers' week
- Information for parents of leavers was made available for school newsletters via the School Drug Education Project newsletter

- Information was sent out by the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) to all leavers holding bookings
- A deposit of \$1000 was required with all accommodation bookings (RIA and Rottnest Lodge)
- Discounted Recovery Breakfasts were offered at the tearooms.
- A Chill out Tent was set up and staffed by volunteers from Drug Arm, the Schoolies Island Chaplaincy (SIC) and the WA AIDS Council
- Rottnest Island rangers visited and briefed all leavers in their accommodation
- The General Store bottleshop and Hotel suspended home delivery of alcohol during the leavers' celebrations
- Many Rottnest food outlets extended their trading hours
- Sunscreen was provided at the Chill Out Tent and Nursing Post
- Alcohol and other drugs pamphlets and displays were provided at the Nursing Post
- An information tape, containing *100% Control* messages and music was provided for the ferry trip
- Security staff were increased at the Rottnest Hotel
- An afternoon music program of live bands and DJs was provided on Heritage Common
- Members of SIC provided a pastoral service for leavers in their accommodation
- A late night food van selling hotdogs and hamburgers was situated outside the Police Station
- The Nursing Post remained open 24 hours a day
- Wrist bands were issued by the RIA to identify school leavers, who had booked accommodation
- The bottleshop employed private security staff to ensure no one under 18 obtained alcohol
- The Rottnest Police and Rangers maintained a presence on the main jetty and provided information talks to disembarking leavers as to what was expected of them during their stay



- Rottneest Police searched bags belonging to young people under 18 years of age if they believed they were carrying alcohol

Some of these activities were carried over from the previous years. Some were new initiatives, based on learning from previous years

## **SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY**

Research was conducted on a smaller scale than in previous years, although the methodology was comparable. 112 young people were interviewed by researchers on the island during the 2001 celebrations. They were interviewed in groups and the survey questions were used to guide discussion of the young people's experiences. Common response themes were identified for each question and presented in a matrix that allows comparison of prevalence between 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Participant Observation was also undertaken by the two field researchers during the three most intensive days of celebrations. In addition five key stakeholders were interviewed approximately a month after the celebrations about their experiences of the Leavers' period in 2001. These included the people in charge of the Police Station, Nursing Post, Tea Rooms, General Store and the RIA Manager of Events.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The 2001 leavers were found to have the same expectations as those in previous years - to unwind and have fun after the pressure of their final exams. There was a clear intention to drink to excess amongst both males and females. Many leavers reported that they had brought alcohol from the mainland. Despite a comprehensive program of searching underage leavers upon arrival on the island and confiscating alcohol in their luggage, more leavers reported bringing alcohol with them than in previous years. This is thought to be largely due to the requirement of the RIA to have at least one person aged 18 years or above in any group booking accommodation.

Many more leavers reported that their parents had supplied their alcohol than in previous years. This development occurred despite an education campaign for parents launched by SDEP aimed at reducing the amount of alcohol parents themselves

supplied. Parental warnings in 2001 were considered to be more practical and in some instances leavers were accompanied during their celebrations by their parents.

Illicit drug use increased once again in 2001, though not as dramatically as the rise from 1999 to 2000. This finding may reflect increasing use of illicit substances amongst youth in the community. Alternatively there may be more willingness to reveal use. Of concern was that more leavers reported obtaining the substances on the Island. This finding would support initiatives contemplated by police to target drug dealing in future years.

The hard line policing of street drinking, a 'crack down' on underage possession of alcohol and a more intense monitoring of accommodation issues seemed to affect the celebrations in a number of ways. The leavers concerns for their safety swung dramatically away from physical and alcohol related harms towards fear of getting themselves into trouble. The young people in 2001 became focused on what they considered to be intrusive scrutiny by the authorities. This seems to have resulted in them giving less consideration to strategies aimed at avoiding harm, while increasing the incidence of strategies designed to avoid involvement with authorities. This may be counterproductive because appropriate assistance would also be less accessible .

There was a substantial increase in the incidence of leavers reporting that their negative experiences included feeling physically sick because of drinking. It seems a decline in patronage of late night food initiatives could be a contributing factor here. The cost of food available from the late night van rose considerably in 2001 and seems to have discouraged patronage.

Boredom seemed to be an important contributing factor in the anti-social violence and vandalism on the island in 1999. In 2000 boredom was not reported and in that regard the program of activities was a success. In 2001 the theme of boredom returned once again, although there was no aggregate increase in associated damage or vandalism. This may however need to be monitored in future years.

There was a rise in the number of young people suggesting that extra activities should be provided. However, the activities that were provided were not very well attended. Others pointed out that nothing more ought to be done and that the host community had provided enough activities. Participant observation seemed to confirm that many

leavers made their own fun, using the bus to tour the island, organising informal games and going out for lunch.

The music initiative provided by RIA on Heritage Common was widely acknowledged by the young people when interviewed. It provided a festive backdrop for the day-to-day proceedings and conveyed a valuable message that the Rottnest community had gone to the effort of providing something special for the leavers. This seems to have contributed to the development of a respectful relationship between the young people and the community. This atmosphere of mutual consideration is invaluable, because it reduces the risk of harm and damage that would inevitably occur if the relationship between a host community and celebrating young people deteriorated into confrontational and rebellious anti-social behaviour.

The police talks given in 2000 were important in setting the tone for mutual respect between the leavers and authorities. In 2001 the talks received a mixed response and it seems that different schools may have received talks from different officers or at least delivered with different emphases. If school talks are used in the future they could probably reduce more harm by being tolerant and understanding in tone while firm and informative as to expected behaviour.

The Chill Out Tent was once again a standout success and the statistics gathered in 2001 indicate the value of the service. There were suggestions that extra services would be well utilised. Importantly the presence of the tent did not result in leavers naming it among their harm reduction strategies. This suggests that the leavers are not abrogating their personal responsibility for safety.

Overall the leavers' period was effectively managed. While the program grew out of a joint initiative by the RIA and the School Drug Education Project (SDEP) in the previous year, planning and implementation in 2001 was completely controlled by the Rottnest community. This shows how strategic expert support can produce long-term benefits by enhancing community capacity.

Community involvement in providing for the leavers was a powerful factor in building a relationship between the two groups. The implicit message was that the community cared enough about the leavers to try and make their stay on the Island enjoyable. This in turn created a sense of reciprocal obligation to treat the community with respect.

This sense of relationship seems to be the key to a well managed leavers' week. Leavers are going to continue celebrating on Rottneest and the community is never likely to develop the perfect program that eliminates all the problems. However, giving the leavers a sense of ownership of the event and the setting where it takes place is likely to be the best foundation for reducing harm.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Police talks at high schools should be consistent in content, positive and respectful in tone and convey clear messages as to expected behaviour during leavers' week.
- The parent education program should be continued and emphasise practical parental warnings that can be given and the dangers of providing excessive alcohol to minors.
- Provision of cheap, convenient food late at night and in the morning is an important practical harm reduction strategy that should be supported.
- An additional or expanded Chill Out Tent should be considered to broaden the reach of this well regarded harm reduction strategy.
- Initiatives that foster an atmosphere of mutual respect will be more resource efficient and effective in reducing harm in the long term. Widespread use of confrontational or punitive measures should be carefully considered, as their immediate benefits may be outweighed by a reduced sense of obligation on the part of the leavers to care for the host community.

## INTRODUCTION

The celebrations to mark the end of school, variously known as “Schoolies Week’ or ‘leavers’ week’, seem to be a distinctly Australian phenomenon. In Queensland, this event has a long and notorious history (Ballard, Curd & Roche, 1998; Smith & Rosenthal, 1997). Here large numbers of local and interstate school leavers congregate at well known holiday spots, such as the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast where they consume large quantities of alcohol and engage in risky behaviour (Zinkiewicz, Davey & Curd, 1999). In Western Australia school leaver celebrations occur on a smaller scale in late November/ early December, and are spread over a number of seaside holiday locations accessible from Perth. One of the traditional and most popular destinations for leavers in Western Australia is Rottnest Island. Each year around 4,000 young people gather to unwind after the pressure of their final exams, socialise (possibly for the final time) with old school friends, make new friends and mark their passage into independence and adulthood (Bogaards, Midford & Farrington, 2000a). For most leavers these celebrations involve the consumption of alcohol. For many leavers this consumption is excessive and for some it is accompanied by the use of illicit drugs (Bogaards, Midford & Farrington, 2000; Young, Midford & Farrington 2001).

There have long been community concerns about underage drinking and the potentially harmful interpersonal violence and health consequences of excessive alcohol and other drug consumption that accompany the leavers’ celebrations on Rottnest. The agency with responsibility for managing the island, the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA), has implemented various strategies over a number of years aimed at reducing the negative impact of the celebrations on the other visitors, island residents and the leavers themselves, although formal evaluation has only occurred in recent years. In 1999 the National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) received funding to undertake a formative evaluation of school leaver celebrations on Rottnest Island. The aim of this initial research was to assess the nature of the alcohol and other drug use and harm associated with end of school celebrations on Rottnest and make recommendations about interventions most likely to reduce the identified harm. The findings from this initial research were presented comprehensively in an Institute technical report (Bogaards, Midford & Farrington, 2000).

In 2000 the recommendations made in the formative evaluation report formed the basis of the comprehensive Leavers Live intervention, coordinated by the Western Australian School Drug Education Project (SDEP) and implemented in conjunction with the Rottnest Island Authority and the rest of the island community. The immediate intention of the initiatives was to reduce the alcohol harm experienced by leavers and the host community. The longer-term goal was to evaluate the intervention to inform other holiday communities looking to reduce the impact of leavers' week.

NDRI was involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the Leavers Live intervention. The research findings were presented comprehensively in a follow up Institute technical report *School Leaver Celebrations on Rottnest Island (Leavers Live): Evaluation Report* (Young, Farrington & Midford 2001). Evaluation data were presented from a range of sources and a series of recommendations were made on the basis of this information regarding intervention initiatives that would be useful to repeat or modify, as well as suggestions for additional strategies/ activities that could be implemented at Rottnest in the future (2000 Recommendations included as Appendix 1).

In 2001 the SDEP continued its support of the Leavers Live Project. Partnerships were developed with other holiday communities involved in hosting leaver celebrations as a means of broadening the program. Contact was also maintained with Rottnest in the lead up to the 2001 celebrations. The SDEP was no longer involved in providing personnel for the intervention activities, as these were completely organised by the Rottnest community. There was however support offered by Leavers Live and RIA staff and Rottnest Police continued to attend the bimonthly Leavers Live Steering Committee meetings. An important issue with community projects that receive temporary external support is long-term sustainability. NDRI was particularly interested in investigating how the Rottnest Island community dealt with transition and was involved for a third year in evaluating the management of leavers' celebrations on the island.

Emerging theory in health promotion sees capacity building as an approach to the development of sustainable skills, organisational structures, resources and commitment to health improvement within communities. (Hawe et al., 2000). Accordingly the capacity of the Rottnest community to maintain or further develop the initiatives

introduced as part of the Leavers Live intervention is an important consideration in assessing the benefits of such a community support program. The focus of this report and primary objective of the evaluation is to gauge the longer-term sustainability of the Rottnest intervention in the absence of external support.

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. Investigate the capacity of the Rottnest Island community to reduce alcohol and other drug related harm during school leaver celebrations in the absence of external personnel support previously provided by the SDEP.
  - 1.1 Compare strategies undertaken to reduce harm in 2001 with those undertaken in 2000.
  - 1.2 Gauge the effectiveness of strategies used by the host community in 2001 to reduce alcohol and other drug-related harm on Rottnest Island during school leaver celebrations.
    - 1.2.1 Describe school leavers' alcohol and other drug-related experiences and harms in 2001 as compared with 2000 and 1999;
    - 1.2.2 Assess the harm reduction strategies used by school leavers in 2001 compared with those employed in 2000 and 1999;
    - 1.2.3 Investigate school leavers' perceptions of the activities provided in 2001 as compared with 2000 and 1999.
    - 1.2.4 Investigate key stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the leavers' week in 2001 as compared with 2000 and 1999.
- 2 Identify those strategies used in 2001 that would be useful to repeat or modify, and suggest additional strategies/ activities that could be implemented at Rottnest.

## **OTHER RESEARCH**

The formative research NDRI conducted in 1999 was aimed at gaining an understanding of how school celebrations were being managed on Rottnest and to formulate recommendations for intervention strategies that were likely to be successful in the following year. As well as interviewing young people and stakeholders on Rottnest the initial investigation also included a comprehensive literature review of young people's use of alcohol and other drugs during celebratory activity at holiday

destinations in other parts of the world. This literature review was used to identify common themes in terms of problems and those intervention strategies that had been consistently successful (Bogaards et. al., 2000b). The relevant research includes initiatives undertaken in the USA addressing the American ‘Spring Break’ phenomenon (Josiam et al., (1998) and five Australian studies connected with school leaver celebrations on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia (Stanton et. al., 1997; Smith et. al., 1997; Ballard et. al., 1998; D’Arcy & Foran, 1998; Zinkiewicz et. al., 1999). More recent research has looked at the behaviour of young people while on holiday at the resort town of Ibiza in Spain (Bellis et al., 2000). All the studies reported high levels of binge drinking, which caused problems for the holidaymakers themselves and the host community. Some studies reported on interventions and these guided the initial development of the Leavers Live project.

### **The background of the Leavers Live Project and its impact on strategies undertaken by the host community in 2001**

The School Drug Education Project in consultation with the RIA, various stakeholders and community agencies implemented an intervention on Rottneest Island during the school leaver celebrations in 2000. The collaborative nature of the intervention was integral to its success, with individual agencies taking responsibility for different components. The following is a summary of earlier initiatives, which were and were not repeated in 2001, along with a list of new initiatives known to have been implemented by the host community in 2001.

#### **Previous initiatives repeated in 2001**

- Police talks to school leavers prior to leavers’ week
- Parents of leavers – information available for school newsletters via School Drug Education Project newsletter
- Information sent out by Rottneest Island Authority (RIA) to all leavers holding bookings
- \$1000 deposit required to acquire accommodation (RIA and Rottneest Lodge)
- Discounted Recovery Breakfasts at the tearooms.



- Chill Out Tent coordinated by Rottnest Island Nursing Post and RIA – staffed with volunteers from Drug Arm and WA AIDS council.
- Rottnest Island rangers visit and brief all leavers in accommodation
- Stopping of alcohol home deliveries
- Extended trading hours for many Rottnest food outlets
- Provision of sunscreen – Chill Out Tent, Nursing Post.
- Alcohol and other drugs pamphlets and displays at Nursing Post and Chill Out Tent
- Research looking at the impact of the interventions/ strategies – National Drug Research Institute.
- Information tape – *100% Control* messages and music for ferry trip (RIA and 96FM)
- Increased security staff at Rottnest Hotel

#### **Previous initiatives not repeated in 2001**

- Beach Breakout – beach activities sponsored by 100% Control including volleyball and other competitions
- Discount snorkelling
- Late Night sausage sizzle in settlement area.
- Coloured wrist bands for over 18's entering the Rottnest Hotel
- Rottnest Island Police and Rangers Sausage Sizzle (food donated by local businesses).
- Injuries related to alcohol – research conducted by Health Department of WA, Injury Control supported by the nursing post
- 100% Control competition
- Filming of harm reduction strategies by Edith Cowan University Communication and Media students, and production of short film
- Bands and DJs at the Rottnest Hotel – afternoon and evening – sponsored by Healthway (100% Control), Office of Youth Affairs and Rottnest Island Authority developed in conjunction with Melville Youth Advisory Council

- De-licensing of a section of the Rottnest Hotel to form an underage dance area.

### **New initiatives implemented by the host community in 2001**

- Afternoon music program of live bands and DJs held on Heritage Common coordinated by the RIA.
- Schoolies Island Chaplains (SIC) visited leavers in their accommodation giving away red frogs and taking a pastoral approach to overseeing the celebrations.
- Late night food van selling hotdogs and hamburgers outside the Police Station.
- Nursing Post open 24 hours, and security guard employed to stand at the door.
- Arm bands issued by the RIA to identify school leavers with accommodation
- Extra security staff at the bottleshop to ensure no one under 18 obtained alcohol.
- Rottnest Police and Rangers maintained a presence on the main jetty and provided information talks to disembarking leavers as to what was expected of them during their stay.
- Rottnest Police searched bags belonging to young people under 18 years of age if they believed they were carrying alcohol.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The main purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of strategies used by the host community to manage school leaver celebrations on Rottnest in 2001 compared with that of previous years. The methodology was similar to that used in the studies undertaken in 1999 and 2000, so as to allow meaningful comparison between the data gathered over the three years. In addition the same primary field researcher was used in both 2000 and 2001. It should be noted that the 2001 study was conducted on a smaller scale than in the previous two years and so there were necessarily some differences in approach. These are outlined in the limitations section that follows.

Similar to previous years, responses were gathered from the school leaver population and the major business and service provision stakeholders on the island. Once again the field researcher spent time living on Rottnest during the peak period of the celebrations and documented activities that occurred during this time. In this way the study combined a number of evaluation methods. This research approach is termed 'triangulation' by Guba and Lincoln (1981). It was repeated in 2001 because it has proved useful in providing a global perspective of the leavers' phenomenon, while offering a check on the accuracy and consistency of the data gathered by each of the evaluation methods.

## **DATA GATHERING METHODS**

### **School leavers**

This group was allocated the most amount of research time. One hundred and twelve young people were asked about their celebrations on Rottnest Island over the first weekend of leavers' week. This three-day period (Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> to Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November) formed the most intense period of the school leaver celebrations in 2001, although leavers were still coming to Rottnest throughout the following week. A randomly selected, gender balanced sample of young people were interviewed. The survey instrument used is contained in Appendix 2.

The field researchers approached groups of young people on the island as they gathered during the day in a number of central areas - usually where food and drink were being sold. During the leavers' period there are very few other visitors to the

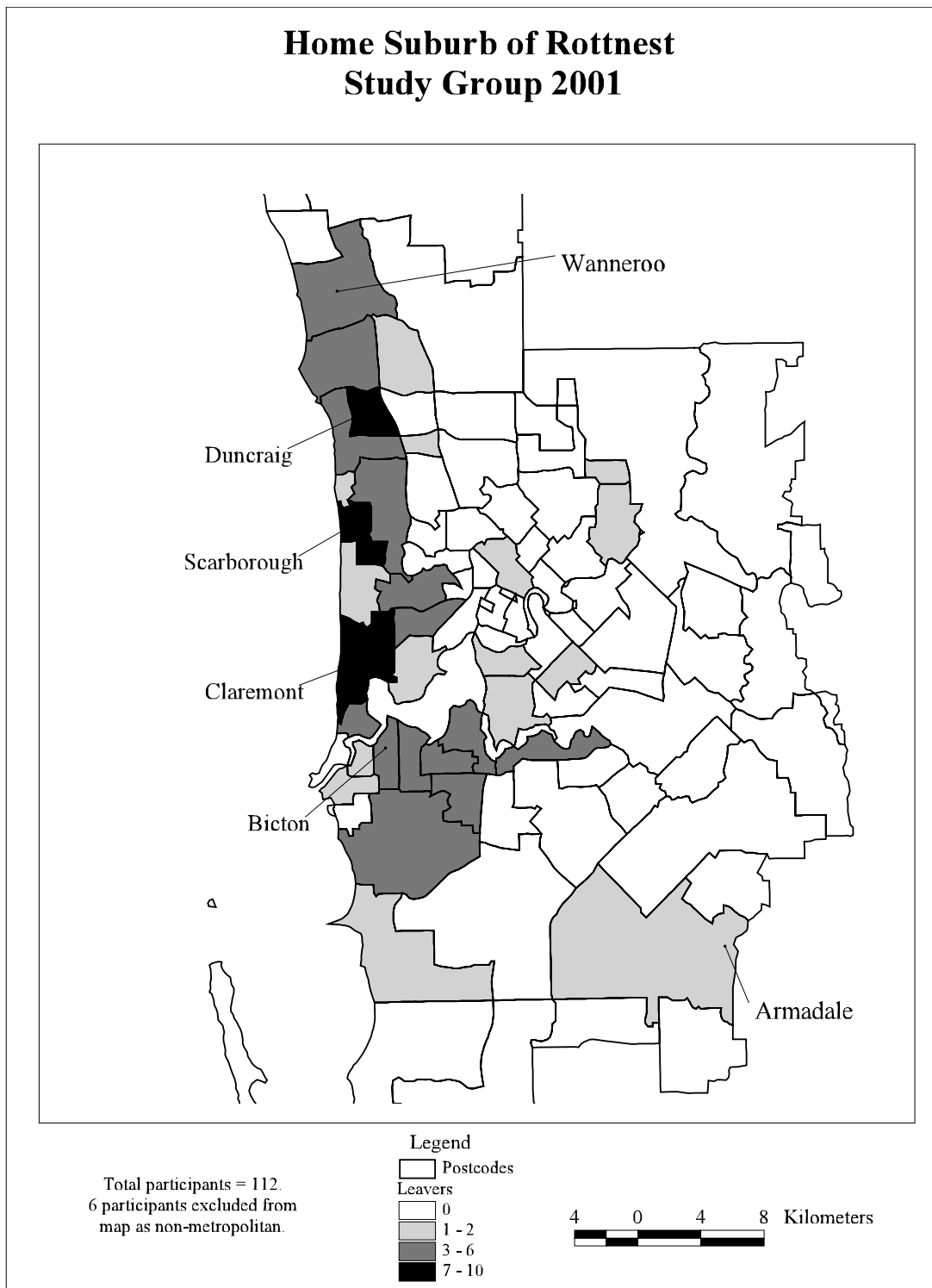
island and all of the young people interviewed were on the island to participate in the leavers' celebrations. Groups were approached rather than individuals, as the young people seemed less intimidated and more open to answering the questions when in the company of peers. The surveys were used to guide and prompt discussion rather than being administered verbatim. Responses were recorded as thoroughly as possible although at times this was difficult as a number of respondents answered the questions simultaneously. Generally a response would be given by one or two members of the group with the other group members agreeing and building on that response with their own experiences. Occasionally a respondent would add a contradictory or substantially varied opinion. *100% Control* hackey sacks were used as incentives for participating in the survey and the refusal rate in 2001 was zero.

The people interviewed in all three years tended to come from the same range of Perth suburbs. These home suburbs almost invariably clustered around the river or northern beaches and comprised higher socio-economic households (see Figure 1).

### **Major stakeholders**

Five key stakeholders were interviewed. The positions occupied by those interviewed in 2001 were the same positions as had been surveyed in both 1999 and 2000 although the actual person in most cases had changed. These key stakeholders were identified with the help of the Rottnest Island Authority. The managers of the Rottnest Tearooms and General Store were interviewed in order to provide the perspective of businesses on the Island. The major authorities were represented by the heads of the Rottnest Police Station and Nursing Post respectively and the Manager of Events from the Rottnest Island Authority.

The primary field researcher returned to Rottnest just under one month after the school leavers had departed in order to interview the stakeholders. It was thought the short time lapse would give the stakeholders a time to reflect on events, while still occurring soon enough for memories to be fresh. As in previous years the interview process was relatively structured with formal appointments being arranged before hand.



**Figure 1: Home suburb of leavers interviewed**

The same questions were asked of all stakeholders (Appendix 3) and there was opportunity at the end of the interview for any extra comments or suggestions. Responses were recorded in point form. Each interview was held in the stakeholder's suggested surroundings and individual responses were kept confidential.

### **Participant observation**

NDRI's two field researchers spent three days living on Rottneest during the leavers' period. In addition to gathering survey data from the leavers during this time, the primary field researcher also recorded proceedings. She talked informally with leavers, community stakeholders and staff involved in the conducting the activities and systematically observed the celebratory activity. Accordingly, this researcher experienced at first hand the various elements that went to make up the leavers' experience. Each morning observations from the previous day were recorded in point form on a portable computer.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **School leavers**

The primary field researcher collated the 2001 leavers' questionnaires. Responses to each question were coded into themes. These themes were then tabulated within a matrix in order to show how many times each type of group (i.e. male, female, mixed) identified each theme. Results from previous studies in 1999, 2000 have been incorporated so that comparisons can be readily made. Themes mentioned less than three times are not considered representative and have not been reported. Illustrative quotes from the leavers are provided in order to reveal the tone of the responses and give the quantitative data extra depth.

### **Major stakeholders**

The primary field researcher collated the completed interview schedules. Responses to each of the eight questions were scrutinised for common themes and these were then evaluated in terms of how well they represented the opinions and experiences of the whole group or special interest sections within the group. Selected quotes were used to illustrate salient opinions.

## **Participant observation**

Over the course of 3 days, observational notes were taken by the primary field researcher on events that illustrated the nature of school leaver celebrations on Rottneest Island. At the time, what was seen and heard in relation to school leavers was recorded without interpretation. Subsequently, comparisons were made between such important topics as: expectations vs. actual happenings; planned activities vs. actual activities attendance; estimated alcohol and other drug consumption vs. actual alcohol and other drug consumption; perceived harms vs. actual harms; and, stated harm prevention strategies vs. actual harm prevention strategies. The field researcher was able relate her first hand findings to the responses provided by the school leavers and make comparison between the two. This was found to be very useful in terms of validity checking and increasing confidence in the findings and recommendations of this report.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Every attempt was made to mirror the methodology used in previous years. However, a number of variations occurred over the three years due to changing circumstances and refinement in research methods with experience. The changes need to be borne in mind when making comparisons.

The 2001 study was conducted on a smaller scale because of resource limitations and the availability of previous research. The study was still designed to be of sufficient rigour and scope to provide a useful comparison with the larger studies conducted in the previous two years. In 2001 only 112 young people were interviewed as compared with 250 in each of the previous years. This limitation is offset somewhat by a corresponding change in the survey instruments.

In 1999 and 2000 four slightly different questionnaires were administered, depending on the day and time the leavers were interviewed. The consequence of this approach was that different respondents answered different questions depending on the stage of the celebrations, and therefore only a segment of the total number of respondents ever answered a particular question. In 2001 only one survey instrument was used (Appendix 2). Therefore all 112 respondents answered every question. This means that sample sizes for particular questions are not appreciably different across years.

Fewer questions were asked in 2001 and as a result fewer comparisons can be made with previous years. In 2000 16 tables data were presented. However, this report includes only 9. These tables relate to 9 of the 11 questions asked in 2001. Data on visits to the Chill Out Tent have not been presented in a table because there were no comparable data gathered in previous years, while the data about eating patterns were not particularly informative in terms of the purpose of this research. Instead the responses to these questions were used to form an impression of the leavers' reactions to these services and indicate changes that could be beneficial.

The field researchers spent three days on Rottnest by in 2001, as compared with five days in previous years, because less time was required to administer the smaller number of surveys. The shorter period is not thought to have influenced the quality of the data gathered. The days on which the researchers gathered data were specifically chosen as they occurred over the first weekend and constituted the height of the leaver celebrations when the largest number of celebrants was present.

Interestingly in 2000 a much higher percentage (52%) of leavers were interviewed in groups of mixed gender than in 1999 (21.2%) and 2001 (28.5%) (see Table 1). There is no ascertainable explanation as to why this difference arose. While this point is worth noting, the overall number of males and females interviewed was fairly even in all years and similar responses were gathered from all three groups on most questions. Accordingly the difference in the make-up of the groups is not considered to have substantially influenced the data.

**Table 1: Gender make-up of groups interviewed in each year**

	<b>Mixed Gender Group</b>	<b>All Male Group</b>	<b>All Female Group</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Total Leavers Surveyed</b>
<b>1999</b>	21.2%	37.2%	41.6%	N/A	N/A	250
<b>2000</b>	52%	30%	18%	47.2%	52.8%	250
<b>2001</b>	28.5%	39.3%	32.2%	49%	51%	112

There was a notable difference between the numbers of leavers and non-leavers interviewed in 1999 and 2000. In 2001 once again a large proportion of non-leavers was interviewed, but the difference was less substantial than in 2000 (see Table 2). It seems that the variations in the leaver to non-leaver proportions recorded over the



three years are likely to be due to the small sample size and random selection process. . The sample represented approximately 6.25% of the celebrating population in 1999 and 2000 and around 2.8% in 2001. The proportion of leavers to non-leavers in all three years was perceived as similar by the Rottneest island community and importantly the responses made by non- leavers were generally similar to those made by leavers.

**Table 2 : Proportion of leavers and non leavers interviewed**

	Leavers	Non-leavers
<b>1999</b>	96%	4%
<b>2000</b>	62.5%	37.5%
<b>2001</b>	74%	26%

An accurate overall gender division is not available for 1999, because the gender of individual respondents was not recorded, rather the composition of groups was noted as all female, all male or mixed. However in both 2000 and 2001 many more non-leavers were male than female (see Table 3).

**Table 3 : Gender and status of those interviewed**

	Male Non-leavers	Male Leavers	Female Non-leavers	Female Leavers
<b>1999</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>2000</b>	68 (27%)	64 (25.5%)	26 (10.5%)	92 (37%)
<b>2001</b>	22 (20%)	35 (31%)	7 (6%)	48 (43%)

It is important to note that a large proportion of the young people interviewed in 2000 and 2001 (especially males) on Rottneest during the intervention were not first time school leavers, but were either university students celebrating the end of their exams or apprentices and other young people taking time off work to join the festivities. Males were more likely to be above school leaver age and seemed to be attracted by the possibility of socialising with the younger female leaver population.

Different field researchers and data gatherers were employed over the three years, although the primary field researcher was the same in 2000 and 2001. The gender and interview style of the each worker does seem to have influenced the data gathered.

A male field researcher completed a majority of the surveys in 1999 with the assistance of a female, while in 2000 both the primary field researcher and the assistants were female. This difference is thought to have affected the kind of responses gathered on particular questions, especially those relating to discussions about sexuality and alcohol and other drug consumption. In 2001 the same (female) primary field researcher was used as in 2000, but a male assistant completed approximately half of the surveys. It was considered that this approach provided a better gender balance and mitigated any demand characteristics caused by females interviewing males and vice versa.

In 1999 and 2000 there was a difference in the speed with which interviews were completed. In 1999 interviews took up to an hour while in 2000 they were completed in 20-40 minutes. As a result of the shorter interview times in 2000, fewer responses were recorded for each question than in 1999. In 2001, in an attempt to balance time demands on the respondents and the level detail sought, interviewers tried to complete surveys in around 45 minutes.

Finally, only five stakeholders were interviewed in 2001 as compared with 13 in 2000 and 12 in 1999. The reduced number was again due to the smaller scale of this study. Importantly the five stakeholders surveyed in 2001 occupied positions that were surveyed in both 1999 and 2000. The five chosen were considered to be the key stakeholders and represented all of the major authorities and a number of local businesses. Unfortunately all but one of the individual stakeholders were new to their roles in 2001 and so could not provide an opinion about the 2001 leavers as compared to previous years. One of those interviewed had worked at Rottneſt before in another role which helped to some extent, while others relied on anecdotal reports in order to give their opinion when asked for comparisons of 2001 with previous years. This limitation was kept in mind when the stakeholder responses to questions asking for comparisons were analysed. Due to a medical emergency on the Island on the day the researcher returned to interview the stakeholders, the interview with the Senior Nurse had to be delayed until February 2002.

## RESULTS

The results are presented in four sub-sections. The first sub-section presents the findings from the interviews conducted with leavers. The second sub-section presents the results of the interviews conducted with key stakeholders. The third sub-section presents activity data from agencies/services dealing with leavers. The fourth sub-section presents field researchers participant observations.

### SCHOOL LEAVERS

The school leavers were generally keen to express their opinions and were remarkably consistent in the issues they identified as important from their perspective. Responses to each question have been presented as a summary table. Each table presents the number of male, female and mixed groups that identified each theme in 1999, 2000 and 2001. They provide a quick reference point for comparison over the years. It should be noted that N refers to the total number of persons in the groups interviewed. The figures in the columns indicate the number of responses recorded for a given theme. The discrepancy between the column total and the N total comes about because not everybody in a group expressed an opinion. It should also be kept in mind that often one person's response in a group was tacitly agreed with, so one response very often actually represents the opinion of multiple individuals. Additional anecdotal detail and quotes have been used to further illustrate common themes.

#### Leavers' expectations of the Rottneest experience

In 2001 expectations were predominantly similar to previous years (see Table 4). Partying and socialising was the most common expectation in 2001, with having a good time also frequently mentioned.

*Big socialising. Meet heaps of people – Female*

Drinking was the second most common expectation in 2001 whereas in previous years the theme had arisen less often than intentions to relax or unwind away from the pressures of home or school.

*Get absolutely maggot – Male*

*Have a good time – celebrate because we finished exams – Female*

*Come to unwind after the stress of the TEE – Male*

*Be away from parents, school with everyone on an island – Female*

In previous years this question was asked of young people before they arrived on the Island and so represented their hopes for what lay ahead. In 2001 all of the respondents were already on the island and most had experienced at least one night of celebrating by the time their opinion was sought. This variation in approach explains the two new themes which emerged; citing expectations of violence and expressing overall disappointment or surprise with their experience.

*Street fights – Male*

*We expected it to be ok but they broke our tents and stole our bags – Male*

Observations regarding the predatory nature of some of the celebrants arose, along with admissions by two respondents that their intention was to take advantage of younger women.

*Lots of devos trying to hook into pissed chicks – Male*

*We are the devos come to prey – Male*

**Table 4: Leavers' expectations of the Rottneest experience**

Theme	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=57	2000 n=9	2001 n=39	1999 n=35	2000 n=19	2001 n=38	1999 n=19	2000 n=22	2001 n=35	1999 n=106	2000 n=50	2001 n=112
Have fun / good time	18	3	5	18	4	7	4	3	4	40	10	16
Relaxing / unwinding	19	2	4	14	3	3	3	4	1	36	9	8
Partying / socialising with friends	19		5	12		16	4	3	5	35	3	26
Drinking	10		5	18	3	8	5	6	8	33	9	21
Sex / meeting opposite sex	10	1	2	17	5	7	3		4	30	6	13
Swimming / beach / sun	16	1	4	2			2	1	1	20	2	5
Meeting new people	7	1	4	2	1	7	1	1	1	10	3	12
See people from primary school	4									4		
Away from home hassles & study	3		3							3		3
Looking after Quokkas	3									3		
Hopeful certain girls will be there				3						3		
The overall experience				3						3		
Agro/ violence/ vandalism			1			3			1			5
Disappointed/ shocked			3			5			6			14

## Alcohol and drug use

The data presented in Table 5 indicates that alcohol was again widely consumed in 2001.

*A lot of drinking, quite a substantial amount – Female*

*A block - I drank a whole block. I'm known as the iron lung – Male*

*In the last 8 hours one bottle of bourbon and 8 beers – Male*

*Lots of alcohol. I've never drunk too much before, never ever but I have now - Male*

Many more respondents reported their parents had supplied the alcohol than in previous years. A new trend also emerged in 2001 as young people reported their parents were actually on the island overseeing their alcohol consumption. In one instance parents had journeyed to Rottneest in order to recover alcohol that had been confiscated by police

*I brought 14.4 litres of alcohol for me and my best friend – I only have 4 litres left after 3 nights. I think my bottle shop thinks I am 18. My Mum and Dad are here – Female*

*200 beers confiscated off the boat, but we got it back. Our parents came over and got it back – Male*

*Our parents get it - they are in the house with us – Female*

*Parents got it and we hid it in our bags – Female*

The Rottneest Police stopped some underage leavers as they disembarked at the main jetty, searched their bags and confiscated any alcohol found. Despite this the overall number of people reporting that they had obtained their alcohol from the mainland actually increased in 2001. Alcohol confiscation at the jetty may explain the fact that twice as many responses in 2001 indicated that alcohol had been purchased from the Rottneest bottleshop as compared with previous years when no systematic confiscation of alcohol was undertaken.

*Got it from the bottle-o here, someone else bought it – Male*

*Bought it on the mainland and we had an 18 y/o with us on the ferry - Male*

**Table 5: Alcohol and drug use**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=33	2000 n=22	2001 n=39	1999 n=34	2000 n=26	2001 n=38	1999 n=13	2000 n=71	2001 n=35	1999 n=80	2000 n=128	2001 n=112
Consumed alcohol	15	17	21	15	12	20	2	23	18	32	52	
Consumed spirits	15	5	8	9	6	8	1	8	9	25	19	25
Consumed beer	8	4	1	8	3	9	1	3	8	17	10	18
Brought alcohol from mainland	8	5	7	4	3	9	1	7	7	13	15	23
Expressed aversion to drug consumption	6	5	4	3	1	6	1	4	2	10	10	12
Did not drink to excess	7		2		2	4		2		7	4	6
Bought take-away alcohol at Rottnest		2	6	6	3	8		4	5	6	9	19
Consumed cannabis		3	4	5	1	4		8	7	5	12	15
Consumed illicit drugs (exclude cannabis)	2	4	5	1	7	7	1	2	5	4	13	17
Drank alcohol at Rottnest Hotel	2		2					1		2	1	2
Parents supplied alcohol	1	1	5					1	3	1	2	8

There was a substantial increase in the reported use of illicit drugs from 1999 to 2000. A further increase was observed once again in 2001, although not as substantial.

*Alcohol, cigarettes and ecstasy – Female*

*Drink and a bit of weed - Male*

Cannabis use was once again most commonly reported, followed closely by dex-amphetamines. ‘Dexies’ are commonly made available by young people who are prescribed the drug in order to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

*Dexies – my friends had them here – Male*

*Dexies my friend has ADD – Female*

From responses gathered in 2001 it seemed that more young people had obtained illicit substance on Rottneest as opposed to arranging purchase before they travelled.

*Pills- Es. Some guy just gave it to us – Female*

*Crystal Meth – got it here – Male*

*Speed – got it here and brought some over –Male*

As in previous years some young people expressed an active aversion to drugs and/ or a desire to drink in moderation.

*Only about 4 drinks - not to get drunk - Female*

*Drink a little bit – you don’t have to get out of your head - Male*

*Heaps of drugs, all the boys – it’s gross – Female*

*We drank and are not drug boys – Male*



### Concerns about personal harms/ safety

In 2001 a significant shift occurred regarding concerns leavers had for their safety. Far fewer respondents mentioned concerns about violence or sexual harassment or assault, while a massive increase in fears about trouble with various authorities was recorded (see Table 6).

*Taking too much beer and getting it taken off you – Male*  
*Getting caught street drinking – Female*

*Accommodation problems – there are too many people in our house – Female*

*I was worried about getting my alcohol taken so I hid vodka in a bread loaf – Female*

A new theme regarding worries about running out of money, drugs or fun also emerged.

*Running out of money, running out of fun – Male*

*Running out of illegal substances - Male*

**Table 6: Concerns about personal harms/ safety**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=63	2000 n=23	2001 n=39	1999 n=52	2000 n=49	2001 n=38	1999 n=35	2000 n=60	2001 n=35	1999 n=146	2000 n=132	2001 n=112
Violence / Intoxicated people	25	3	1	1	3	2	2	8		28	14	3
Rape / sexual harassment / taken advantage of	15		4		1			7	4	15	8	8
Big group / no worries		2	1	7	5	5	6	1	4	13	8	10
Stolen/ lost gear	5	2	4			3	2	1	2	7	3	9
Sunburn / sunstroke	5						1	1		6	1	
Pill / condoms / unprotected sex	3	1						3		3	4	
Cut feet / glass / no shoes / hurting oneself	3	2			1			3		3	6	
Trouble with authorities	1		7	1		5	1	1	7	3	1	19
Vandalism	3		3			2				3		5
Quokka safety	3									3		
Irresponsible drinking/ alcohol poisoning	2		1	1	1	1	1	3	2	4	4	4
Shark					1			3			4	
Running out of fun/ money/ drugs			1			4			2			7

## Harm reduction strategies

The data in Table 7 indicates the most common strategy to stay safe was to stay in large groups.

*Stick together at night time – Male*

An increased proportion of respondents had a plan to avoid excessive intoxication in 2001 as compared with 2000, although the proportion was similar to that recorded in 1999.

*Limit alcohol - don't put yourself in a situation where you get in trouble – Female*

*Don't take any drugs –Female*

*Drink a jug full of water every night before bed – Male*

Reporting that there was nothing to be concerned about arose as a theme for the first time in 2001.

*White male 18 year old – I think I am fine, nothing to worry about – Male*

Despite a massive increase in the number of worries regarding authorities in the concerns section, there were only a small number of strategies mentioned in order to avoid trouble with the authorities.

*Keep a low profile from the cops – Female*

Only two respondents mentioned the Chill Out Tent as a way to avoid harm. This suggests that leavers do not rely on the Chill Out Tent in place of personal vigilance to guarantee safety. The implication is that provision of a Chill Out Tent as a harm reduction measure does not encourage greater risk taking.

**Table 7: Harm reduction strategies**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total		
	1999 n=63	2000 n=23	2001 n=39	1999 n=52	2000 n=49	2001 n=38	1999 n=35	2000 n=60	2001 n=35	1999 n=146	2000 n=132	2001 n=112
Stay in big groups / don't stray / help each other	25	10	11	8	7	5	3	9	9	36	26	25
Drink in moderation / drink plenty of water	8	2	6	7	2	5	2	4	3	17	8	14
Screen predator guys / avoid weird older guys	6		2	1	1	1	2			9	1	3
Try to prevent gear / alcohol being stolen	4	1		2	1	2	1	1		7	3	2
Wear sunscreen / stay out of the sun	4			1	1	1		1		5	2	1
Carry / use condoms, pill	3			4	1		2	3	1	9	4	1
Hang around the house when drinking a lot	3			3	1					6	1	
Don't street drink/ avoid police	2		1			2	1			3		3
Avoid trouble / fights				2	2	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Not worried						5			2			7

### **Best part of evening activities**

As in both previous years, socialising was by far the highlight of the young people's experience on Rottnest (see Table 8).

*Socialising with friends and knowing there is no more school – Female*  
*Meeting a lot of new people – Male*

Drinking was not commonly recounted as a highlight, however it did appear.

*Drinking in the sun with the esky – Male*

A new theme about feeling free from constraints and able to relax emerged in 2001 for the first time. This would seem to indicate that the authorities' more hard line approach in 2001 did not detract from the sense of freedom experienced by young during leavers' celebrations.

*The fact that we didn't have to wake up at a certain time – the freedom – Male*

*Everyone is free to chill out here and stuff – Male*

Relaxed – let us have a good time and weren't too strict – Male

**Table 8: Best part of evening activities**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=33	2000 n=12	2001 n=39	1999 n=34	2000 n=12	2001 n=38	1999 n=13	2000 n=54	2001 n=35	1999 n=80	2000 n=78	2001 n=112
Mingling / Dancing / Meeting friends	15	5	11	5	5	13	2	13	8	22	23	32
Drinking	2			5	1	3	1	1	2	8	2	5
Atmosphere	5	1	4	1		3	1	4	3	7	5	10
Having sex	2	1		3	1	1		1		5	3	1
Freedom/ No parents/ Relaxing			3			7			4			14

## Negative experiences

Leavers responses summarized in Table 9 indicate that violence and tension were among the most common negative experiences in all three years, although there was a slight drop in numbers in 2001. During the most recent leaver celebrations there was substantial increase in the amount of people who reported feeling physically sick due to excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

*Some guy smashed a bottle over another guy's head. I saw a guy trying to hold onto him but he got away –Female*

*Agro going on – Male*

*People getting hell rowdy – really violent – Male*

*Seeing people that can't control themselves and drink too much and get stupid – Female*

Sexual harassment was reported significantly fewer times in 2001 than in both of the previous years

*Guys saying annoying things as we walk past – Female*

A similar level of grievance about being stopped by police and security was recorded in 2001, despite an overall increase in the number of fines and cautions issued.

*Security clamping down – too dominant. They need to respect – Male*

*Street drinking clampdown, but I s'pose you gotta realise its gonna happen - Male*

*Given cones laced with speed and it made me sick – I didn't know some guy just gave it to me – Male*

*Threw my guts up an hour ago –Male*

*The mornings – the hangovers –Female*

A low incidence of personal injury was reported in all three years and all were minor in nature.

*Drunk and fell off a toilet and cut my finger – Female*

*We walked into a tree – Female*

**Table 9: Negative experiences**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=41	2000 n=22	2001 n=39	1999 n=41	2000 n=26	2001 n=38	1999 n=23	2000 n=70	2001 n=35	1999 n=105	2000 n=118	2001 n=112
Violence / tension / vandalism / home invasion	6	8	8	18	15	10	3	12	3	27	35	21
Sexual harassment	15	3	3	2			1	9		18	12	3
Physically sick/ Hangovers	6		3	4	3	8		5	11	10	8	22
Lack of sleep	1	1	2	5	2	1	1	3		7	6	3
Nothing bad	3	1		3		4	1	4	1	7	5	5
Injuries to feet/ glass on the ground	3		2	1	3	1	2	4		6	7	3
Bored / waiting for something to happen	3			1		3	1		2	5		5
Stopped by police / security	4		1		3	5		6	2	4	9	8
Seeing others sick	1	2	1		2	2	2		3	3	4	6
Injuries excluding feet		2			1	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Things stolen			4	1	2	1			2	1	2	7



However in 2001 many leavers heard about an incident involving a young man who fell off a cliff and was airlifted off the island. He was not seriously injured, but because the incident was covered extensively by the media it created the impression of greater risk.

*Heard about the guy who fell of a cliff –Female*

*The fact that someone got raped and doodle head fell off a cliff – Female*

Perhaps most significantly in 2001 there was a return of the theme of boredom which had been present in 1999 but did not appear in 2000.

*It was pretty boring – Male*

*Boring – Male*

### **Parental warnings**

In comparison with 2000 there was a substantial increase in warnings from parents about drinking alcohol sensibly (see Table 10).

*Parents told us to stay in groups, watch for drink spiking and don't get dehydrated - drink water – Female*

Overall the warnings recounted by the young people were more comprehensive and practical than in 2000. A greater number of parents suggested staying in groups than in previous years.

*Balance yourself and don't do anything stupid – Male*

*Mum said to wear shoes - Male*

*Be safe and better not get a phone call – Male*

A considerable proportion of responses indicated that effective warnings had not been given

*No, my Mum just said to make sure I took clean clothes – Female*

**Table 10: Parental warnings**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=57	2000 n=9	2001 n=39	1999 n=35	2000 n=19	2001 n=38	1999 n=19	2000 n=22	2001 n=35	1999 n=106	2000 n=50	2001 n=112
Consume alcohol sensibly	17		4	4		3	1	2	4	22	2	11
Be careful / Avoid behaviour that will cause regret	16	1	3	4	2	6		2	1	20	5	10
Avoid arrest/ trouble	2		1	3	1	5	1			6	1	6
Wear sunscreen	3			2			1			6		
Lock up valuables	2			2						4		
Stay in groups/ look after one another	8		6		1	3				8	1	9
Stay away from sleazy males	5		1							5		1
Use contraception	4				1	2			1	4	1	3
No real talk		2	2	3		1		1	3	3	3	6
Referred to media reports as warnings		1	1		1	3		1			3	4
Watch out for sharks / do not harm quokkas					3			1			4	
Avoid drink spiking			2						2			4
Parents accompanied leavers			2			1						3

## Police warnings 2001

In 2001 respondents were specifically prompted about whether they had received any warnings from police. In both 2000 and 2001 many school leavers had been addressed at their schools by officers conducting a campaign in preparation for the leavers' period. In 2000 all of the leavers considered that these visits were positive and respectful (Young, Farrington & Midford, 2001), while in 2001 the impressions of the talks were more mixed (see Table 11).

*Police came to our school and told us to drink in moderation, to drink beer and not spirits – Female*

*The police came and had a yarn at school. It was a bit over the top, they said they would take our piss and called us a bunch of devos – Male*

*Two police came to our school one from here and one from Dunsborough. They were really direct and pissed off - Male*

*Police came to our school – showed us a video and told us the rules. They said they knew we would be drinking – they were good – Female*

**Table 11: Police warnings 2001**

Theme	Males	Females	Mix	Total
Factual/ Indifferent	6	6	5	17
Didn't Receive	6	5	2	13
Disrespectful/ Negative			5	5
Appreciative/ Positive	2	1		3

## Ways to improve the experience

Responses to this question are presented in Table 12. In 2001 the most common response was a call for less intrusive regulation by the various authorities, including police, security and the RIA with regards to the accommodation. This theme was unprecedented in its occurrence.

*Probably have more leverage – don't crack down as much coz that's when people want to rebel more. Don't kick people off for stupid things – Female*

*The 18 year old rule is stupid because they cause all the trouble - Male*

*Police need to change their attitude a bit. They won't give a wave or a grin. They are too negative – Female*

*The street drinking rule is ridiculous. Getting charged for crossing the street. It actually makes us drink more because you have to scull to get across the street – Male*

*The rule that you can't bring alcohol is stupid because people turn to drugs - it's easier to bring them. People are going to get alcohol anyway –Male*

*I think it is a massive invasion of civil rights – they search your bags when you come off the boat – Male*

In one response the safe drinking message had become confused with the police crackdown.

*Let people drink in a controlled environment – don't make it 100% control -Male*

Despite increased criticism of intrusive regulation, a substantial increase in positive comments about security was also recorded in 2001.

*Security was good – I felt safe – Male*

*It's been good – had a great time – been speaking to the police and the rangers – Female*

*The cops can't do anything more than they are doing now – Female*

The theme of extra first aid/nursing facilities arose, but generally related to making the Chill Out Tent services more convenient.

*More Chill Out Tents around the place because some people were far from it - maybe one near Tentland so it isn't as much of a trek –Female*

**Table 12: Ways to improve the experience**

Themes	Females			Males			Mixed			Total Comments		
	1999 n=41	2000 n=22	2001 n=39	1999 n=41	2000 n=26	2001 n=38	1999 n=23	2000 n=70	2001 n=35	1999 n=105	2000 n=118	2001 n=112
Centralised area with music	14	3		10	1	2	5	4		29	8	2
Free food/ drinks/ condoms/ products	12		2	8	2	2	4	2	5	24	4	9
Better/ healthier/ cheaper foods	5	2	1	8		1	3	1	2	16	3	4
More/ some sausage sizzles	3	1		3			1	1	1	7	2	1
More street lighting	2	2	5	1		1	3	1	5	6	3	11
Additional first-aid facilities	2		1	1		3	2		1	5		5
Lockers	2			1						3		
Extra activities	1	1	9	2	5	6	2	1	10	5	7	25
Cheaper/ better /more accommodation	3		1			1		1	6	3	1	8
More toilet paper	1	1			1					1	2	
Better advertising	1	5			2			1		1	8	
Less intrusive policing by authorities		2	9		2	11		2	7		6	27
Underage area needs improvement/ no good								4			4	
Pub open longer		1			3	1		2			6	1
Security and police were good		1	3		1	2		1	3		3	8
No more activities		1	8		1	8		1	5		3	21
Music at night/ different music			10			7			5			22
Provide drinking water									3			3

Provision of extra activities was the second most common response, although the actual suggestions were generally impractical or unspecified.

*Organise things/ organise activities – people just walk around at night because they have nothing to do –Female*

*Free food, free alcohol, free accommodation or prizes for a competition – Female*

*Beach volleyball, water slides, horse rides, mechanical bull- and it should all be free – Male*

*I'd like more to do but I can't offer any suggestions -Male*

The third most common suggestion in 2000 was to improve the initiative of bands on Heritage Common. Most people felt the music should be on at night, while some had ideas for different styles of music that could be played

*They should have bigger bands and more local bands – Female*

*They have a DJ from 5 – 7 – it should go later – Female*

A very large number of responses expressed that enough had been done, and that no improvements were necessary in order to make the experience better or safer overall.

*Not much more you can do – you can't stop dickheads – Female*

*It's up to you to stick with your friends – Female*

*Nothing more – they have tried to make it good for us – Female*

*There is plenty of stuff to do if you want – people do their own stuff - Male*

*Not a whole lot. I think they have done a really good job, especially with the Chill Out Tent – Female*

In all three years extra lighting was requested in and 2001 there was an increase in the number of times this theme appeared.

*Lots more lights down in Tentland. You can't see where you are going, and it's scary to walk by lots of guys when you go to the tent – Female*

A new theme appeared suggesting a more ready provision of water.

*Water stations –Female*

### Attendance at and evaluation of intervention activities

This question was not asked in 1999, because of the formative nature of the research conducted in that year. In 2001 there was widespread appreciation of the music initiatives, with criticisms mainly relating to music preference, rather than the idea itself. This was a similar pattern to that observed in 2000.

**Table 13: Attendance at and evaluation of intervention activities**

Theme	Females		Males		Mixed		Total	
	2000 n=22	2001 n=39	2000 n=26	2001 n=38	2000 n=70	2001 n=35	2000 n=118	2001 n=112
Didn't like music at Hotel (2000) or Heritage Common (2001)	1	1	9	2	6	8	16	11
Liked music initiatives	3	7	5	13	7	12	15	32
Didn't know about activities	3	3	3	1	2	4	8	8
Appreciated Chill Out Tent / First Aid	1				4	1	5	1
Appreciated food initiatives	4		1				5	
Didn't attend any activities	2	4	1	3	1	2	4	9
Went to the beach activities		N/A		N/A	4	N/A	4	N/A

*Liked the Ben Harper song – Male*

*Not my type of music – Male*

*This band stuff is really good to keep everyone interested and out of trouble – Female*

*They should have DJ Diamond Dave – Male*

*The music should have been at night – and all day really – Female*

*Yeah during the day hanging out at the shops for lunch, watched a band. It is good to have as a background – Male*

Many young people seemed to appreciate the entertainment from a distance rather than attending for any long period of time.

*The bands are awesome – even though people don't sit around and watch we can hear it all around – the wind carries it – Female*

*Yeah it was good, I walked by - Male*

Reasons for non-attendance in 2001 were due to lack of motivation and inability to drink

*No because we didn't even leave the house until 8pm*

*You can't be bothered, just want to be with your friends – Female*

*No because you want to drink in the house – Female*

Despite a more extensive advertising campaign and a far more central and obvious venue some young people still claimed to not to have known about the activities program.

*Got a little pamphlet from the Chill Out Tent – Female*

*We got fliers when we got the key – Female*

*Didn't know, didn't go -Male*

*Haven't seen it -Male*



## STAKEHOLDERS

Five major stakeholders were interviewed in 2001. Four were interviewed approximately one month after the celebrations in December 2001, while the Nursing Post interview took place in February 2002.

In 2001 the stakeholders reported a series of lead up meetings coordinated by the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA). These meetings involved bringing together representatives of the major authorities on Rottnest; the police, nurses, rangers and of course the RIA. This management planning was undertaken so that a coordinated approach to the leavers' period in 2001 was ensured. The RIA indicated that this type of inter-agency planning first began in 1999 and was expanded in 2000 when SDEP undertook a coordinating role in implementing the Leavers Live intervention. As part of the evaluation of the 2000 initiatives, the primary field researcher had attended a gathering of key Rottnest stakeholders in November of that year. Notably, the business community reported that they were invited to a number of meetings with the RIA in 2001, while in 1999 this had not been the case.

Of the five individuals interviewed in 2001 only one had been employed in their role in previous years. This impacted on the ability of stakeholders to provide comparison with other years. Three stakeholders were senior staff representing the Nursing Post, Police and the RIA while the other two managed businesses on the island. Their responses are summarised under the respective question headings.

### **From your perspective what are the major problems associated with leaver celebrations on Rottnest?**

Three of the five stakeholders were on the island during leavers' for the first time in 2001 and so were unable to draw on experience of previous years. The response to this question was generally answered with reference only to the 2001 celebrations.

Responses from the authorities were comprehensive and included comments on damage and vandalism, alcohol and drug abuse resulting in injury or arrest, sexual assault and crime. By comparison both business managers were low key in their responses, citing mess, graffiti and cruelty to wildlife as the major problems from their

perspectives. These kinds of responses were similar to those received from business representatives in 2000, but differed markedly to responses recorded in 1999 when comments were far more intolerant and critical of the leavers and their behaviour.

**Were you involved in any preparations for the Leavers' period?**

The Rottnest Island Authority representative indicated that employees had travelled to Queensland in order to learn first hand about the strategies in place in that State to address school leaver celebrations. The chaplaincy initiative implemented in 2001 was an outcome of this investigation and involved young people aged between 19 and 26 years walking about in the leavers' accommodation area, distributing 200kg of red frogs while befriending and advising young people. A number of stakeholders reported that they felt this initiative had been successful.

The three respondents from the service authorities reported that they had attended a series of planning meetings before and during the leavers' period, coordinated by the RIA. One authority member mentioned attending the Leavers Live Steering Committee meeting at the SDEP office. Another reported independently arranging inter-agency meetings. All three respondents felt well prepared for the celebrations as a result of these consultations and planning sessions.

The business respondents said they had been invited to meetings with the RIA. One had attended a number of these meetings, while the other had sent an employee in his place. A meeting of the Rottnest business community concerning leavers' week was also attended by one of the respondents. Both businesses undertook independent preparations such as hiring security and each said they felt well prepared.

**Can you tell me about the activities provided for leavers. Which ones worked best?**

The General Store Manager said he didn't do anything special in terms of extra service provision other than to provide security for the bottle shop. He was well aware of the range of initiatives being undertaken around the Island and felt that these were generally positive strategies that were working well. The Manager of the Tea Rooms oversaw the recovery breakfast initiative that had been begun in 2000. He felt that in

2001 the financial return made it unviable to repeat in the future. This respondent did not mention any of the other activities on the Island but in answering other questions it was clear that he did have a good awareness of what these were.

The three service authorities' representatives listed a comprehensive range of initiatives undertaken all over Rottneest including: the Chill Out Tent, St John's Ambulance, free water at the hotel, the jetty briefings by police and rangers and the food van. The food van was the only strategy that was regarded negatively. The proprietor experienced harassment and theft, similar to what had occurred in 2000. In addition one stakeholder reported that the location was used as an informal gathering area where drug dealing took place. The bands were a qualified success, with poor attendance being a disappointment to a number of the stakeholders. However most respondents indicated that this initiative could be reviewed and possibly improved.

**What were your impressions of this year's school leavers' behaviour? Was it better or worse than previous years?**

As has been already mentioned, detailed comparisons with previous years were not able to be made by most stakeholders as they were new to their positions. The response to this question by the service authorities' respondents involved accounts of specific incidents each had experienced or heard about. These reports were qualified by statements to the effect that the leavers' period had been managed well, many of the participants were well behaved and there had been no major surprises in what had occurred.

One business respondent reported

*In all honesty not a problem – only half a dozen kids were bad but mostly very good.*

The other business respondent gave accounts of minor incidents that had occurred on his premises, while giving the impression that these inconveniences didn't bother him to any great extent. The same respondent mentioned that reports he had received suggested that the behaviour had been better than in previous years.

**Do you think any of the measures taken by the Rottnest community made leaver celebrations safer for the leavers and/ or the community itself?**

All five respondents answered yes to this question. They felt that containing the leavers in one area, giving talks on the jetty, providing the Chill Out Tent and food van and increasing the security presence all contributed to increased safety. Each respondent clearly considered that the initiatives were complementary and that the program as whole was a well integrated package that prevented problems at a number of levels.

*Keeping them in one area where they are more easily contained keeps them away from residents and other holiday-makers while the increased police, security and ranger presence was very good and keeps everyone safe.*

**What do you suggest would make school leaver celebrations better for the students and the rest of the Rottnest community?**

Each respondent had specific ideas for further improvement of the initiatives already in place, although no singular theme emerged.

*Change the venue for entertainment*

*Shift focus from seizing alcohol to targeting drugs using sniffer dogs and everything.*

*Having a bus to get island children to their school without being intimidated by the leavers*

*Education for students.*

*A liaison officer responsible for coordinating efforts and initiatives by business owners on the island*

Other responses were general and reflected an attitude of acceptance and tolerance, which marked a change from responses in 1999 when there was considerable scepticism about the likelihood of success of intervention initiatives.

*It all comes back to that tolerance aspect*

*The Rottnest community know it can't be stopped*

*It is a tradition for students and they want to go and make their own fun. Rottneest is limited in resources and logistics and requires a balancing of the needs of regular holiday makers as well as the school leavers.*

**Do you think it would be worthwhile to take a similar approach to the leavers' period again? Why/ Why not?**

All five of the respondents answered that they would take a similar approach while incorporating the changes spoken of in the previous question. All five stakeholders indicated a willingness to continually improve their efforts.

*We can only get better – working very cohesively as a team*

*A similar approach is good and we can keep improving on previous years. These are still the preliminary stages in terms of management planning and it is evolving.*

*We need to develop further cooperation, consistency in approach and a common attitude.*

**POLICE STATION, NURSING POST AND CHILL OUT TENT DATA**

**Table 14: Formal Police responses during leavers' week 1999-2001**

<b>Police Responses</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
Liquor Infringements	52	30	104
Liquor Cautions	284	917	114
Island Evictions	8	23	45
Arrests		7	7
Summonses	4	5	7
Juvenile Cautions	5	11	19

These figures indicate that police took a harder line with misbehaviour in 2001 than in either 1999 or 2000. This is consistent with the young people's reports. There was with an increase of almost 350% in liquor infringements, whereas the less formal liquor cautions declined by almost 90%. Island evictions were at an all time high, with a 560% increase from 1999 and almost double the number in 2000. Juvenile cautions have also steadily increased.

**Table 15: Nursing Post occasions of service during leavers' week 1999-2001**

Nursing Post Data	1999	2000	2001
Total Occasions of Service	365	329	447

The substantial increase in occasions of service at the nursing post is most likely due to the fact that in 2001 for the first time the post was open 24 hours for the entire leavers' period.

**Table 16: Services provided by Chill Out Tent 2001**

Service Provided	Occasions
Provided cups of cordial and water	5000
Held educational conversations regarding drug and alcohol information	400
Assisted people having consumed too much alcohol	90
Treated cuts and grazes	70
Referred people to Nurses Post	40
Visited people in accommodation who had consumed too much alcohol	12
Total Services Provided	5612

These figures should only be considered approximate because individual instances of service were not recorded except in the case of visits to accommodation. Service provision was averaged over periods of time and then aggregated. However, it is clear that the Chill Out Tent's services reached many young people. The above figures do not include the counselling and advice service provided out of the tent by the AIDS Council during the day. These volunteers spoke to leavers informally about safe sex and high-risk behaviours. They also distributed condoms and pamphlets.

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

As in previous years the primary field researcher recorded observations each day during the leavers' period. This research was another source of data. However, the particular value of direct observation was that it provided an independent point of reference for the reported data and the opportunity to place the various elements that comprise leavers' week in context.

### ***The media***

Each year leavers' week tends to attract media attention. In 2001 media reports about leavers' week were once again prevalent and the message was clear; authorities on Rottnest and in the South West of Western Australia were taking a zero tolerance approach. These reports were in contrast to the 2000 articles which outlined the initiatives put in place on Rottnest and reported comments from community members and intervention coordinators that this extra effort was designed to engage the leavers and foster responsible celebrations. In contrast the articles about Rottnest in the lead up and early stages of the celebrations in 2001 emphasised the large amounts of alcohol that had been confiscated. As the week progressed two major incidents during the celebrations were reported by the media. Firstly there was an incident where a young man fell off a cliff in a state of inebriation and amazingly emerged relatively unharmed. Later in the week a boat that was stolen by a drug affected leaver was steered into a jetty at high speed, causing over \$100,000 worth of damage.

These media reports were well known to the leavers and seemed to give them a sense of identity and solidarity as a group. The young people seemed to revel in their collective infamy and the fact that they were important enough to rate mention in the media. The field researcher also heard many discussions amongst leavers about the 'cliff incident'. Here most young people were chastened by the potentially deadly consequences of irresponsible drinking.

### ***The hotel***

The trial in 2000 of providing live entertainment and de-licensing part of the hotel was not repeated in 2001. The researchers observed that there were not long lines of young people trying to gain entry to the hotel in 2001 as had been the case in 2000. In addition there was not the same constant stream of young people moving from the

accommodation areas towards the hotel as had been seen in 2000. It seemed the lack of entertainment and strict security measures at the hotel, coupled with the high probability of receiving fines for street drinking kept leavers in their accommodation in far greater numbers than the year before. The hotel was certainly not the focus of the celebrations in 2001. The strict security measures meant that it was impossible to enter without identification. This was evidenced by the fact that the two field researchers aged 29 and 35 were denied entry under the strict regime because they did not have proof of age. High temporary fencing was erected around the entire perimeter and numerous security personnel kept a vigilant watch over who went into the premises, as well as how they behaved themselves once inside. This high level of security seemed to effectively deter leavers from making the journey down to the hotel to try their luck at gaining entry.

### *The Chill Out Tent/ Nurses Station/ St John of God Ambulance*

Once again the patience and friendly helpful attitude of the Chill Out Tent made it a favourite spot for leavers to gather. Many were observed stopping by to get cordial and talk to the Drug Arm volunteers. There were a number of intoxicated people being attended to within the tent each time the researchers passed by. The St John's Ambulance stand was also well utilised. A security guard employed to stand at the front of the nurses' station meant that those needing treatment were attended to more efficiently. By not allowing patient's (often intoxicated) friends into the small waiting area a lot of confusion and noise was avoided and the whole process appeared to run smoothly. The fact that the nursing post was open for 24 hours throughout the celebrations meant that leavers were treated no matter what time they fell ill. This solved the problem that had been observed in 2000 when extremely intoxicated leavers were found lying on the ground around the accommodation areas late at night with no treatment available unless a nurse was called on the emergency number.

The AIDS Council once again staffed the Chill Out Tent during the day and discretely gave away condoms and education pamphlets as well as chatting informally with groups of leavers about their experiences and providing advice and assistance when necessary. They also moved around at night providing support.

The two field researchers never encountered any of those involved in the Schoolies Island Chaplaincy (SIC) program. This was probably due to the fact that the



researchers spent most of the day around the food venues and beaches completing surveys while the chaplains visited leavers in their accommodation.

### ***The Police and security personnel***

The attitude of the police in 2001 was very different to that of previous years. A change in the officer in charge was accompanied by a change in approach. The leavers welcome sausage sizzle held by police in 2000 was not repeated, and in 2001 the leavers first encounter with the police was on the jetty when they were given a stern talk and had their bags searched and alcohol confiscated if underage.

The field researcher observed police out and about in the accommodation areas at night issuing fines and keeping a watchful eye over the celebrations. Their approach was professional, but more detached than had been observed in previous years. The security guards were also businesslike in their patrols, however they were not observed being unnecessarily confrontational, as had been the case on occasion in 2000. As an example, during data gathering by the field researchers at Heritage Common the young people responding to a survey were approached by a security guard, who spoke in a low-key manner to the young males and asked them to get rid of the alcohol they were consuming surreptitiously. He was firm, but also talked socially with the young people and they complied without fuss.

The presence of security was much more evident in 2001. Security guards and plain-clothes police were continually present around the Bathurst area, where most leavers were accommodated. In 2000 the primary field researcher had had difficulty locating any security during her walks through the main 'party zone'.

### ***Heritage Common music initiative***

Live music was provided during the afternoons on the grassed area outside the general store. There were generally a number of groups of young people sitting around and talking while the bands were playing. However the researcher observed only 30 individuals at one time over Friday and Saturday. On Sunday (the changeover day) around 100 young people gathered while the bands played and they waited to take their ferries home or gain access to their accommodation. At other times there was a steady stream of leavers walking by, and the quad outside the shops from where the music could be seen and heard was usually full of young people.

*The leavers' behaviour*

As was the case in 2000, the accommodation area at night was full of young people dancing and mingling in large groups. Noise levels were high as music blasted out of many cottages and some minor scuffles were observed as the researchers walked through the melee. On one occasion a confrontation was witnessed within the grounds of the resort lodge. In all instances of aggression police and/or security were on the scene quickly and the young people dispersed.

During the day the leavers were seen sunbaking on the beaches and playing some soccer down in front of the villas. There were also groups of young people seen enjoying leisurely lunches at the tea-rooms and the Dome café. The Islander bus service that circles the island and provides access to remote bays and beaches was also patronised by young people.

On Saturday some wet and somewhat cold weather kept many of the young people confined to their accommodation. An impression of energy levels and behaviour standards was difficult to gauge over only three days of observation, fitted in between fairly intense surveying. However overall, leavers' behaviour seemed on par with the previous year. Those observed by the field researchers while surveying at the beach, around the shopping area and at Heritage Common seemed to be generally contained and responsible.

## DISCUSSION

In all three years that this evaluation research has been conducted the leavers' expectations have remained fairly similar; to have fun, relax and unwind after a hectic exam period and to celebrate the milestone of school graduation and passage into independence and adulthood. These expectations are in line with the expectations of other end of school celebrations around Australia. (Zinkiewicz et al, 1999). As with previous years the expectation was that drinking would be strongly associated with the socialising process and the intention to drink to excess was clearly present in the minds of both males and females.

In 2001 relaxing was not mentioned specifically as much and new themes of expecting violence and expressing disappointment arose. This is thought to have occurred because in previous years the question about expectations was asked prior to arrival on the island. In 2001 the leavers interviewed had usually experienced at least one night of partying and a day of relaxing, and so desires to unwind had probably been somewhat fulfilled and were therefore not at the forefront of their minds. In addition when they were asked about what their expectations had been, many leavers indicated their experiences were not what they had hoped. The leavers who said they expected to see violence probably said so because they had witnessed incidents during previous evenings, rather than because they wanted it to occur.

A number of self admitted predators were interviewed in 2001. These males were aged between 22 – 26 years old and had attended leavers' week primarily in the hope of having sex with female leavers. It was known that such people were part of celebrations in previous years, but in 2001 data were gathered from them in which they freely admitted their intentions. It seemed that they were amused by their reputation as predators, most likely brought to their attention by way of media reports.

It was clear that as in previous years alcohol consumption was a major feature of the 2001 celebrations and that many young people planned to drink to excess. Their planning included bringing a lot of alcohol from the mainland. Despite the fact that police confiscated large amounts of alcohol on the jetty as underage leavers arrived there was an increase in the number of leavers who reported bringing alcohol from the mainland – even from underage respondents. This is thought to be largely due to the

fact that every house is required by the RIA to have at least one person of 18 years or above age in order to secure the booking. As a consequence every group has an 18 year old who can claim ownership of the alcohol.

Many more leavers reported that their parents had supplied their alcohol than in previous years. This development occurred despite an education campaign for parents launched by SDEP aimed at reducing the amount of alcohol parents themselves supplied. The campaign may have been responsible though for the interesting development in 2001 of some parents actually accompanying their children to the island during the celebrations. The parental warnings in 2001 seemed to be more practical and fewer leavers reported that they had not received warnings. This improvement may also have been due to the SDEP parent education initiative including press releases.

Illicit drug use increased once again in 2001, though not as dramatically as the rise from 1999 to 2000. This finding may reflect increasing use of illicit substances amongst youth in the community. Of concern though was that many more drugs were reportedly obtained on Rottneest and use was not planned in advance. This suggests that a greater focus by police on drug dealing on the Island may yield good prevention dividends, and indeed the officer in charge of Rottneest indicated that he planned to adopt such a strategy in 2002.

The hard line policing of street drinking, a 'crack down' on underage possession of alcohol and a more intense monitoring of accommodation issues seemed to affect the celebrations in a number of ways. The leavers concerns for their safety swung dramatically away from physical and alcohol related harms towards fear of getting themselves into trouble. Authorities probably hope that this type of fear would be constructive: fear of getting into trouble leading to a reduction in risk taking behaviours. However the leavers were not overly concerned with reducing illegal activity, rather there seemed to be an emphasis on avoiding detection. In addition there was a new and strong theme in 2001 of leavers saying that they were not concerned enough to develop any harm reduction strategies at all. When expressing that they were not worried, some of the respondents did so with a tone of bravado. It could be inferred that these young people felt disempowered by this additional control, when in previous years they had taken more responsibility for themselves. The down side of a

stricter approach by authorities may be a less thoughtful approach to harm avoidance by the leavers.

When young people were asked how to improve the leavers experience a large number mentioned the 'crack down' and expressed a predictable desire for leniency and tolerance. In contrast some young people also commented that they had been happy with the security and policing provided. Interestingly in 2001 the best part of many leavers experience was recounted as being 'freedom'. This was often expressed as freedom from the cares of school and being away from parents. The appearance of this new theme seems to contradict any suggestion that the hard line policing detracted in a major way from the overall experience of release sought from the leaver celebrations.

Although alcohol was as common a theme in 2001 as previous years, there was a substantial increase in the number of young people reporting that their negative experience involved feeling physically sick. There could be a number of reasons for this, but one contributing factor may have been that the late night food provision was not as well utilised in 2001 as it was in 2000. The cost of takeaway food from the food van was substantially higher in 2001. The recovery breakfast offered by the tearooms also increased in price from \$5 to \$7. It would seem a sensible strategy to once again make foods available cheaply at night and in the morning to reduce intoxication and the after effects of drinking.

In 2000 the research indicated that leavers were not bored during their time on Rottnest, which suggested that the intervention activities had hit their mark to a great extent. In 2001 the theme of boredom did return once again. In the first year of data gathering boredom was thought to contribute to some of the antisocial violence and vandalism on the island, and it was hoped that by providing a broad range of activities in 2000, damage and harm could be reduced. Although boredom appeared once again as a theme there was no accompanying increase in damage or vandalism. There were isolated incidents including the stolen and damaged boat, but such incidents have occurred in all years. None-the-less the reappearance of boredom as a theme needs to be taken as an early warning of future problems. Interventions that reduce boredom are most likely to also reduce the risk of damage and harm and ought to be considered in future planning.

The proportion of leavers who suggested that the experience could be improved by the provision of extra activities was similar to 1999, when few activities were provided. However, the more extensive activities provided in 2000 and 2001 were not well attended. Other leavers pointed out that nothing more ought to be done and that the host community had provided enough. Participant observation indicated that many leavers made their own fun, using the bus to tour the island, organising informal games and going out for lunch.

Live music was the major entertainment initiative in 2001 and while many survey respondents indicated that they had not sat and listened to the bands, they had heard them or seen them as they had passed by. It is too difficult to determine whether the bands on Heritage Common relieved boredom in any way. However, it can be said that the initiative was very well received by the leavers; partly because it contributed to the celebratory atmosphere and partly because it created a sense that the community had considered their needs. This was exemplified by comments to the effect that they thought the community had done a good job for them and that nothing more was necessary. It would seem that such gestures of inclusion and regard could be a factor in motivating young people to 'do the right thing' in return. Reciprocal regard would seem to be a powerful factor in reducing problems. The importance of maintaining this connection cannot be over emphasised. The risk of harm and damage is likely to escalate if the relationship between a host community and celebrating young people deteriorates into control on the one hand and rebellious anti-social responses on the other. Interestingly, the stakeholders revealed that ways to improve the music initiative were being considered and it does not seem that it will be abandoned due to seemingly poor attendance.

The police talks given to leavers in 2001 received a mixed response and it seems that different schools may have received talks from different officers or at least delivered with different emphases. Some talks just seemed to create a negative expectation in terms of the how the community would treat leavers. If school talks are undertaken in the future they should be predicated on the expectation that leavers can behave responsibly and will be welcomed by the community if they do so. They should clearly state what the community expects from the leavers and what it will provide in return.

A better relationship between police and leavers is more likely to deter rebellious and antisocial behaviour.

The Chill Out Tent was once again a standout success and the statistics gathered in 2001 indicate the direct prevention value of this service. However, the fact that this is a service set up by the community to care for leavers also builds links between the two groups. There were suggestions that an extra tent should be provided if resources permit. This is likely to increase the coverage provided by a useful prevention initiative. Importantly, the presence of the tent did not result in leavers naming it among their harm reduction strategies, which means its presence is not lulling leavers into any false sense of security that they would be rescued if they fail to take care of themselves.

The planning and cooperation reported to have occurred between the service authorities and businesses on the Island in preparation for leavers' week seems to be getting institutionalised as a process, while at the same time the initiatives undertaken are constantly evolving in response to changing needs. The host community has taken a positive and cohesive approach to leavers' week that has been maintained even as the individuals in key roles on the Island have changed. In the lead up to the 2001 celebrations the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) once again organised a series of planning meetings attended by the police, nurses and rangers and occasionally also including the business representatives. There were reports of other meetings held by the Police for planning purposes. The business community also arranged meetings to discuss the leavers' period. All in all it can be said that there was substantial preparation, but better coordination may cut down the number of meetings organised and increase attendance by all stakeholders.

There is also some indication that the business community was under utilised in 2001. For instance Red Rooster had indicated in 2000 that they would be happy to provide vouchers for free food to be used as give-aways or incentives to collect rubbish but this offer was not made use of in 2001. In 2000 the General Store was involved in the provision of fruit packs at very reasonable prices and the tearooms ran a discounted recovery breakfast. In 2001 the fruit packs were not sold and the recovery breakfast increased in price from \$5 to \$7 and there was a decline in patronage. All stakeholders

seem increasingly aware of the benefits that come from working together and this process should be formalised and strengthened in future years.

The range of activities and initiatives put in place by the Rottnest community in 2001 was comprehensive, but different to what was provided in 2000. Some initiatives like the beach activities were abandoned, while others like the SIC chaplaincy service were put in place for the first time. Still others were modified. The Nursing Post restructured their opening hours and staffing levels, while the police targeted underage possession of alcohol. A comprehensive listing of what was actually done by the community in 2001 for the leavers' period is found on pages 4-6.

The Rottnest community clearly put together a thoughtfully planned and well implemented program of initiatives aimed at managing risk and reducing harm. Activities were advertised broadly and the leavers were made aware of what was expected of them during their stay through both talks at schools, on the jetty as they arrived and by distribution of pamphlets along with the keys to their accommodation. It is important to note that while the program grew out of a joint initiative by the RIA and SDEP in the previous year, planning and implementation in 2001 was completely controlled by the Rottnest community. This shows how strategic support for a limited period can produce long-term benefits by enhancing community capacity. It also shows how a motivated community can quickly take onboard new approaches. Local expertise was well demonstrated in the 2001 program. The previous year's initiatives were neither blindly followed nor abandoned. Rather there was a process of refinement that drew on previous evaluation findings. Importantly, the development of the 2001 program took place through a series of structured meetings between all the local stakeholding organisations. This fostered greater local ownership and further assisted in tailoring the program to the needs of the community and the leavers.

The community did not get everything right, but the act of providing for the leavers was a powerful factor in building a relationship between them and the Rottnest community. The implicit message was that the community cared enough about the leavers to try and make their stay on the Island enjoyable. The leavers' survey responses indicated that this in turn created a sense of reciprocal obligation to treat the community with respect. This sense of relationship seems to be the key to a well managed leavers' week. Leavers are going to continue celebrating on Rottnest and



while the Island community has clearly demonstrated the capacity to manage this event from its own resources, problems will never be completely eliminated. Fine tuning of activities will need to take place from year to year as circumstances change. In making decisions on how best to tackle a particular problem the community should always be mindful of its relationship with the leavers. From pre-celebration school talks to post-celebration follow-up, every opportunity should be taken to give the leavers a sense of ownership of the event and the setting where it takes place. This is likely to be the best foundation for reducing harm during leavers' week. It may also produce longer-term benefits, because if leavers develop a positive association with the Island this will be reflected during future visits as young adults.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are a summary of points made in the discussion section above. The Community now routinely undertakes a consultative process of planning and preparation for leavers' week and the following evidence-based recommendations are offered for consideration as part of the planning process that will be undertaken in preparation for the 2002 celebrations.

- **Police talks** - The program of talks by police at high schools should be positive and respectful in tone and convey clear messages as to expected behaviour during leavers' week. A corporate approach should be adopted so that the same message is given to all leavers.
- **Parents program** - The SDEP program of educating parents should be continued and emphasise practical warnings and harm reduction strategies parents can provide their children. The ramifications of providing alcohol to minors also needs to be stressed and the Rottneest community should have input into the messages given to parents.
- **Food** - Provision of cheap, convenient food late at night and in the morning is an important, practical strategy that reduces intoxication and its after effects. This initiative should at least be repeated with cheaper foods available and if possible expanded.
- **Chill Out Tent** - The Chill Out Tent is extremely well regarded as a means of dealing with immediate alcohol harm and provides low key prevention services for large numbers of leavers. If resources permit, an additional or expanded tent would broaden the reach of this service.
- **Management approach** – A management approach to leavers' celebrations that fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect will be more resource efficient and effective in reducing harm in the long term. It is suggested that widespread use of confrontational or punitive measures be carefully considered, as the immediate benefits may be outweighed by a reduced sense of obligation on the part of the leavers to care for the host community.



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**APPENDIX 1**

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**FROM 2000 EVALUATION**

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2000 EVALUATION

The following summary of recommendations to retain or modify the 2000 intervention strategies are based on the information obtained from the 2000 leavers and key informants.

- The de-licensed area at the hotel could be abandoned and replaced with a centralised area for music and dancing at Heritage Common.
- During the day a portable radio station or DJs could provide low key entertainment, run competitions and advertise activities.
- The Chill Out Tent initiative was a huge success and should be included in subsequent years. This initiative could be improved if the tent was larger with more volunteers.
- The police visits to schools were an outstanding success and should be continued in subsequent years and extended to include parents.
- A message based on the Department of Health *100% Control-Respect Yourself* campaign used in 2000 should be promoted in subsequent years.
- The coordinated media approach was very effective in 2000 and should be repeated.
- The extended trading hours of food outlets played an important role in minimising intoxication late at night and should be repeated
- The recovery breakfasts were also a great success and would benefit from wider advertising and more options (recovery sausage sizzle – mid morning).
- Greater food availability is required. Food vans selling a variety of reasonably priced filling meals (e.g. baked potatoes, kebabs or hot dishes with rice) at Heritage Common.



- The sausage sizzles were well utilised and also provided valuable food to intoxicated leavers late at night and should be continued.
- Water needs to be made much more readily available out in the settlement. Free water dispensers or bottled water would be ideal.
- Tension levels will be kept at a minimum if all authorities follow the firm but tolerant policing adopted by the Rottnest Police on the island.
- The rangers could in future leave rubbish bags be left at the front of the houses with a notice explaining that vouchers for free food will be given in exchange for bags of rubbish collected.
- Extra lighting is still required in many areas, especially tentland.
- A bus providing transport around the settlement in the evening would increase attendance at activities.
- Whatever is done in terms of accommodation periods in 2002, it is important that all intervention initiatives are available for the entire time that leavers are present on the island.



**APPENDIX 2**

**LEAVERS' SURVEY INSTRUMENT**









**7) What would you say has been the best thing about your time here?**

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**8) What would you say has been the worst thing about your time here?**

PROMPT -----> Has anything harmful happened to you or anyone you know?

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## **APPENDIX 3**

### **STAKEHOLDERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Leavers Research Project –Undertaken by National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University

Major Stakeholders Interview – Rottnest 2001

**1. From your perspective what are the major problems associated with leavers' celebrations on Rottnest**

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**2. Were you involved in any preparations for the Leavers' period?**

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**3. Can you tell me about the activities that were provided for leavers. Which ones worked best?**

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