

## **Let your hair down and have fun...in a healthy way**

There are many ways by which young people can have fun and enjoy themselves. However, are all entertainment methods targeted to youths of a positive nature? How are today's youths entertaining themselves?

### **Current trends amongst youths and adolescents**

The trend amongst the younger generations is that of consuming alcohol and other substances, in order to socialize and have fun amongst themselves. This is mainly the case during weekends, village festas and the so called parties. Long weekends are also an excuse to party. So are birthdays, Easter, *Santa Marija*, election celebrations, and so many other occasions. This may also be the case for those who are even younger than sixteen. The latter would not only be breaking the law, but also harming themselves. What they might not consider are the effects and dangers of alcohol abuse, both physically and emotionally. Some important questions arise. Are they aware of the consequences? What about their parents?

It might be the case that these youths and adolescents know about the harms of alcohol and other substances, but do not understand the gravity of the situation. They just pursue the "*imbaghad naraw!*" or '*mhux xorta*' attitudes. Peer pressure could be another factor. They pursue a lifestyle that combines with that of their friends so that they do not feel excluded or not part of the group. Students might also feel so pressured with their studies that they need something to make them feel better, happier and makes them forget. The reasons for using illegal substances or consuming excessive amounts of alcohol are never ending.

Some readers might already be asking: where are the parents in all this? There might be instances where they are totally unaware of what their children are going through and the reasons for the behaviour they are expressing. Parents may not always be in a position to help. Without knowing, they might be putting more unnecessary pressure with the consequence of their children rebelling even more. It might also be the case that a sixteen year old either tries to gain the attention of parents or else tries to get back at them by such attitudes and lifestyle.

### **How can all this be prevented?**

One possible way is through active participation in alternative leisure activities. This involves methods of entertainment that do not include the consumption of alcohol and other substances. It is important to convince the younger generation that there are very different ways by which they could have fun and enjoy themselves without consuming alcohol and other substances. This might be a bit difficult since attitudes are hard to change. As a result, we have to introduce the alternative leisure idea in their minds from an earlier age, when they are still forming their attitudes and lifestyle patterns. If they

learn how to enjoy themselves in an alternative way, it would lessen the chance for them to turn to alcohol and drugs.

### **What are the alternatives?**

One might be a bit skeptic on how he or she can have fun in an alternative way. Considering that younger generations are gaining the “adult” status much earlier than previous years, and sometimes the pocket-money/income to go with it, some might say such activities are too babyish for them. However, it’s not the type of activity that counts, but your ability to enjoy yourself in an environment in which you feel comfortable. Such activities may revolve around one’s hobbies such as sports, drama, movies, and books, amongst others. The challenge is to manage to organize group activities which create the necessary appeal for attendance.

The possibilities are endless. By working within youth organizations, doing voluntary work, getting started on a project and being creative, young people can really translate their youthful energy and enthusiasm into something rewarding for themselves and for others.

Today’s young people have a chance, more than ever, to get involved in society. Joining youth groups, doing voluntary work and finding social ways to stay healthy can be great ways to widen social circles beyond the people youths would normally meet everyday at school or at work. It can also allow them to explore their interests while making positive contribution within their communities.

They symbolize energy and creativity. Writing, music, dance, theatre, sport, and many other creative activities should catch a young person’s fancy and curiosity. Finding an interest could take some effort, but setting a task or getting involved in youth projects and interests can keep them busy in very good ways.

Experience can be a weakness in the young person’s work history, but voluntary work and participation is by far the best way of making up for it while showing enthusiasm and motivation. This also helps the young person in finding and maintaining employment while contributing towards a healthy work environment.

### **What is *sedqa* doing?**

**Sedqa’s** Primary Prevention Services team up with various organizations to setup such activities on a regular basis and thus promoting a healthier lifestyle free of substances abuse. Such collaborations in the past months have led to Judo tournaments, alcohol free get-togethers, music productions, drama, collaboration with ITS students for non-alcoholic cocktails, and several others. Throughout 2008, these events will go on with cooperation between **sedqa** and scout groups, MCAST departments, sports groups, and other NGO’s and youth organizations.

Apart from these prevention initiatives on a community level, **sedqa** also delivers programmes to students in both primary and secondary schools aiming to make children aware from a young age about the dangers and consequences of alcohol and drugs while offering them with skills for self development.

### **Grants to NGOs**

**Sedqa** offers financial help to those non-governmental organizations who organize activities aimed to raise awareness about a healthier lifestyle. There is a process these NGO's should follow. First of all its members should team up and discuss the ideas for an activity that promotes a healthy lifestyle without the use of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and gambling. **Sedqa** also offers an application form which can be downloaded from the website [www.sedqa.gov.mt](http://www.sedqa.gov.mt) or else a copy can be obtained from the Primary Prevention Services of the Agency in 5, Braille Street, Santa Venera. **Sedqa** evaluates the application form submitted and gives feedback to the NGO concerned about the decision taken.

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