

## WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

### Drugs

**The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) believes the development of social and personal skills is fundamental for girls and young women to be able to resist peer pressure and make informed choices concerning alcohol and drugs. As the voice of girls and young women WAGGGS has identified the danger of drugs as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out.**

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 144 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy and action. We aim not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.

#### Drug Abuse Globally

- Drug abuse is a global phenomenon with more people abusing drugs today than in any other time in history. Many of these are young people. The term ‘drug’ refers to any substance, solid, liquid or gas that changes the function or structure of the body in some way - affecting the way people feel, think, see, taste, smell, hear, or behave<sup>1</sup>. This can include prescription medication, industrial products and cigarettes or other tobacco products. Some drugs are legally available, such as approved medicines and cigarettes, while others are illegal, including heroin and cocaine.
- It is difficult to give an accurate picture of the extent of drug abuse among young people around the world due to a lack of information and data. However, overall, drug prevalence rates among young people in many countries can be up to three or four times higher than for those found among the general population<sup>2</sup>. The main reasons for this are that adolescence is a period of experimentation and search for identity.
- Amongst different kinds of intoxicants, alcohol is by far the most widespread<sup>3</sup>. The most widely consumed drug worldwide is cannabis. Three-quarters of all countries report abuse of heroin and two-thirds report abuse of cocaine.
- Substance abuse has many negative physiological health effects, ranging from minor issues like respiratory infections to potentially fatal diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C (when contracted through drug injection, cocaine use, or any substance where contact with blood is a possibility). Drug-related problems also include increased rates of crime and violence and a breakdown in social behaviour<sup>4</sup>.
- There has always been a concern that using alcohol or other drugs may lead to unwanted or unsafe sexual activity. A US study revealed that young people who use alcohol are seven times more likely than non-drinkers to have sex. Illicit substance users are five times more likely to have sex. 23 percent of sexually active teenagers and young adults reported having unprotected sex because they were drinking or using illicit drugs<sup>5</sup>.
- At the UN General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem held in 1998, Member States recognized that reducing the demand for drugs was an essential pillar in the stepped-up global effort to fight drug abuse and trafficking. They committed themselves to reduce significantly both the supply of, and demand for, drugs by 2008.

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1 World Health Organization

2 Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 2001

3 United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC

4 United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC

5 United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC / Kaiser Family Foundation

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**WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to provide leadership and concerted action on drug control by:**

- **Implementing** supply reduction strategies to decrease the availability of harmful drugs, including setting a minimum age for alcohol purchase, supporting actions against illegal sale of drugs, and restricting advertising on alcohol and drugs targeted especially at girls and young women
- **Ensuring** harm reduction strategies are in place to reduce the impact of drug use and drug-related activities on individuals and communities
- **Providing** access to youth-friendly health and counselling services that respond to the specific physical and psychosocial needs of girls and young women, with particular attention to the abuse of drugs/alcohol
- **Involving** young people in the design and development of services which affect them

**WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:**

- **Play** an important role in creating an environment where girls and young women have the possibility to be involved in healthy activities, and where substance abuse is not promoted by peers, family, the media and other influential actors in the community
- **Demand** action at the local and national level against young people’s drug and alcohol problems
- **Raise awareness** about the danger of drugs, and influence the lifestyle choices of girls and young women, in order to strengthen their self esteem and help them resist peer pressure on drug and alcohol usage
- **Develop** appropriate policies on how to address the danger of drugs so that every Girl Guide, Girl Scout and leader knows their Member Organization’s position and can implement a programme on the issues
- **Involve** young people in developing policies on drugs and alcohol to ensure ownership of them
- **Undertake** an advocacy role in discussions with decision makers and other NGOs on the issue

**How WAGGGS is addressing the issue:**

- As the voice of girls and young women around the world, WAGGGS is committed to ensuring that members, staff and volunteers have the opportunity to address substance abuse and drugs under the umbrella theme of “Let’s talk about the danger of drugs”.
- WAGGGS thematic areas of work include “The right to be me” aimed at improving self esteem and personal skills in girls and young women.
- WAGGGS has been represented in the working group established by the European Youth Forum to develop its policy on Alcohol Related Harm in young people and contribute to the policy of the European Union on this issue.
- WAGGGS’ UN team, Vienna contributes to the Commission on Drugs and Trafficking at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.



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#### CASE STUDY

##### **‘Living Drug Free’**

As part of its efforts to develop long-term drug prevention programmes for girls and young women, the Swedish Temperance Guide and Scout Association developed a non-formal educational project called ‘Living Drug Free’. This included producing extensive materials and resources to motivate teenagers to lead an alcohol and drug free life. The aim is to assist leaders, teachers and youth workers in their work to help children and young people avoid alcohol, narcotics and other intoxicating substances.

The material includes 18 leaflets on different topics and comes in a rucksack ready to use. It is used by WAGGGS members and non-members in Sweden and will be promoted to other Member Organizations around the world.

**"We need to keep children and drugs apart, and to teach young people that drugs are not child's play.....Lets keep the gate to substance abuse firmly shut."**  
*Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, June 2006*

***Please also refer to WAGGGS Position Statement on Smoking***