

CLEAR SPIRITS



ISSUE
ONE

BEYOND THE BUZZ

EDITORS LETTER

Welcome to Clear Spirits — a magazine dedicated to building a community rooted in clarity, connection and courage.

Whether you're fully sober, just starting to explore sobriety, or simply curious about what a life with less alcohol might look like, this magazine is for you. We know that choosing a different path in a world where drinking is the norm can feel isolating, and even overwhelming at times. That's why Clear Spirits exists, to create a space that's honest, open-hearted, and free of judgment.

Inside, you'll find real stories about people's sober experiences, expert advice, and creative alternatives for living a positive, alcohol-free life. But more than anything, we hope you find a sense of belonging — a reminder that you're not alone on this journey. There is a group of people like you that are choosing presence over numbing, connection over conformity, and clarity over chaos.

We're here to celebrate the freedom that comes with saying yes to yourself. This isn't about perfection; it's about intention. It's about discovering who you are when you remove what no longer serves you, and finding people who see and support that version of you.

Thanks for being here. We're just getting started.

With love,
Kate Dening
Editor-in-Chief

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GENERATION ALCOHOL-FREE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR LUCY WEBB

It's a Friday night in Manchester, and the usual suspects are out. The bright, neon white light of signs flicker out onto crowds of people spilling out of the doors of bustling bars.

Amongst the crowds, there is a quiet shift taking place. The nights that once belonged to blurred vision, spilled drinks and messy decisions now make room for something steadier and more gentle. With mocktails in hand and sparkling water on the table, there is a generation redefining what it means to go out.

Something is shifting.

Dr Lucy Webb, a researcher at Manchester Metropolitan, specialises in substance use, mental health, and recovery. Alongside her colleague Gemma Yarwood, she has been leading a project for the Greater Manchester NHS Integrated Care Board, exploring young people's relationship with alcohol.

The research explores seven different boroughs in Greater Manchester and includes a survey of around 600 people and four focus groups.

Dr Webb told me that her findings all share similarities and in turn provide some reliable data that mirrors national trends.

To start off, Dr Webb asserted that the research could confirm that alcohol consumption levels are declining for younger people.

A YouGov survey in 2024 found that 44% of drinkers between 18-24 regularly order low or non-alcoholic drinks.

"But there is a shift in who is continuing to drink or what people are drinking", Dr Webb explained.

So, although, generally, alcohol use appears to be declining, it is declining more for boys than girls. The research shows that girls who are more affluent tend to be drinking and using other substances at a higher level than their male counterparts.

When considering the social and cultural context of these trends for underage drinkers, Dr Webb was certain that younger people's drinking habits often reflect that of their parents'.

"We're a bit concerned about the exposure to alcohol because it's really been driven by the family home".

Findings supported the idea that young people from working class backgrounds are drinking more because of normalised attitudes to alcohol consumption in their home.

Turning the conversation as to why younger people are choosing not to drink, the topic of alcohol-related harms was explored.

Dr Webb said: "The literature absolutely suggests that young people are choosing not to drink because they are becoming more aware of potential harms, they're becoming more risk averse".

When asked about the risk of violence and sexual exploitation for girls, Dr Webb could affirm that this played a key role in many young women's decision not to drink.

A 2024 report by Stamp Out Spiking shows that 70% of 18-24-year-olds have experienced or witnessed drink spiking, with the majority of the victims being young women.

It comes as no surprise that the increased risk of danger in settings where alcohol is consumed has resulted in a decline in consumption.

Dr Webb was asked about whether she believed the rise of wellness culture is influencing the decline of alcohol consumption, and whether the growing trend of sober curiosity could be linked to broader concerns about physical and mental well-being.

In response, she pointed to a clear cultural shift: young people today are increasingly health-conscious, and the values promoted through wellness culture are aligning with this generation's alcohol-free lifestyle choices.

Gen Z, in particular, is widely recognised for its growing commitment to health and self-optimisation. Social media platforms have amplified this movement, with wellness influencers promoting habits such as clean living and healthy eating.

"The awareness of health and well-being was coming up in several studies as a key factor to choosing not to drink," Dr Webb explained. "There was an element in there as well that people with aspirations are also being more wary of using alcohol".

This link between aspiration and abstinence reflects broader social pressures. Research indicates that younger people are acutely aware of their futures and feel a strong drive to succeed academically and professionally.

Dr Webb described the trend toward ambition and moderation as an "artefact of growing up". As students approach the end of their university years, many begin to reconsider their relationship with alcohol.

For many, being aspirational now means being go-getters, avoiding hangovers and seizing the day.

"I've been there, done that, got the t-shirt, and now I'm grown up", one student in the study remarked.

The three pillars underpinning the decline in alcohol consumption appear to be a focus on health and wellness, increased awareness of risks and harms, and a growing sense of aspiration.

The uncertainty of Gen Z's future massively plays into the cultural and social shift towards the rejection of alcohol. Soaring house prices and the fear of never being able to own a home, along with rising anxiety-inducing statistics around disease, especially in the wake of COVID, seem to fuel our collective worries.

Are we becoming the most anxious generation yet?



Photography: Alex Petch



AWake Up Call

HOW CHRONIC FATIGUE LED TO A JOURNEY WITH SOBRIETY

Bella was perched on the end of her red sofa, with the biggest grin on her face. The sun was shining through the sliding doors adjacent to where she was sat, with golden ribbons of light draping themselves over the colourful artwork on the walls.

Bella has a face full of life and a smile that radiates across a room. What most people wouldn't guess about her from face-value is the life-changing diagnosis that plagued her last year.

After a prolonged period of not quite feeling like herself, unable to get out of bed and engage with several aspects of her life, Bella sought out help from the GP on multiple occasions. Offered antidepressants and painkillers for the body pain, Bella described how "this felt much more like a plaster for the problem rather than a cure".

After months of not feeling better and coming to a dead-end with her illness, Bella caught the train up from London to Dundee to meet a doctor who infamously specialises in chronic fatigue, and other invisible fatigue conditions.

Within her first appointment, Bella was diagnosed with chronic fatigue, and a plethora of other conditions.

The doctor prescribed Bella a wellness overhaul consisting of new meds, supplements, and a radical diet that cut out dairy, gluten, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, and anything overly processed.

The idea of cutting out alcohol comes with a bank of reasons as to why; it limits the amount of sugar that Bella consumes, avoids issues of poor sleep due to alcohol, and helps improve her overall mood and mental clarity.

In many ways, Bella's sobriety is not just a physical detox, it's an emotional unveiling. Sobriety presents her with every emotion, stripped of all filters and no longer blurred by hangovers or numbed by a glass of wine.

Bella explained, cupping her mug of steaming herbal tea, "this just allows every day to have the capacity to be a very good day".

After having to pause her studies in what would have been her final year at university, Bella is now re-taking her last term a year on. Being thrown back into that university culture of binge drinking and going out, Bella has had to completely reshape her year around her sobriety.



Photography: Isaac Laing

"I FEEL I AM ABLE TO ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE AND WHAT I AM DOING WHOLEHEARTEDLY".

Tapping away at her mug, clearly exuding some anxiousness around the topic, Bella admitted that she hasn't always stuck to her sobriety.

"Especially in February this year, I felt like I had been sober for long enough to lose touch with the reasons that I had done it in the first place, leading to some resentment of it and therefore quite a few nights of drinking".

After the toll that this period of drinking had taken on her mental and physical health, Bella had to work on reaffirming to herself why her sobriety was fundamentally important to her wellbeing.

"I think with choosing to go sober, it is so important to remind yourself why you are doing it and ultimately remember that you are doing it for you. With any kind of restriction, it is easy to feel resentment or as though you are missing out".

Restriction and guilt have been very familiar topics of conversation between Bella and her housemates. Living with other girls who have also experienced periods of being sober-curious, they try their best to understand Bella's lifestyle.

Talking through the situation with complete clarity, Bella described how the guilt she felt about breaking her diet by having a glass of wine could easily lead to the mentality of "well I've broken the diet now and I'm going to feel bad tomorrow so I may as well keep going".

Again, Bella had to stand in her own corner and remind herself — this was for her, no one else. She'd come too far to forget that, and kindness towards herself was part of the deal.

Albeit an uncomfortable part of the conversation for Bella, she is able to share her feelings with an untouched honesty that provides a safeness for the conversation to go in any direction.

She speaks with an unclouded-ness about her experiences being more selective about what she does, exuding her self-assured attitude.

"I do not force myself to do club nights or events that I would not want to do go, and I am much more in tuned with myself when I am doing things: if I am tired, I go to sleep. If I am feeling anxious, I can ameliorate this in some way or just call it a day".

For many students at university, succumbing

to that binge-drinking culture is tantamount to making friends and having a healthy social life. The pressures of this can open the doors to a mentality where you do not prioritise yourself but rather prioritise a culture that does not best fit you.

Among this university crowd, Bella's sober lifestyle might seem unimaginable or at worst, impossible. However, what most don't realise is that her sobriety hasn't stopped her from doing drinking-based activities that are normalised for students.

Bella finds her freedom in music and movement, gravitating toward night-time events where she can let go completely and dance until dawn.

She jokes, "I do not need any Dutch courage for that!"

When her friends suggest that they go to the pub in the evening, Bella is always sat there, laughing away over a glass of sparkling water or a mug of herbal tea.

"I feel like I am able to engage with people and what I am doing wholeheartedly as a result. I am fully aware and conscious the whole time I am with my friends".

Being around drunk people doesn't pose an issue for Bella either. If anything, she describes feeling more relaxed because she knows that, when people are drunk, they are less focussed on others and have a more inward focus.

"It also means that chilled nights with my friends aren't followed with anxiety the next day, or the overwhelming feeling like I have said or done the wrong thing. Both of these combined means that my mental health is a lot better".

After picking Bella's brain for some time in her living room, it is hard not to feel unbelievably proud of what she has achieved for herself in just under a year. From struggling to get out of bed to rising each morning and giving the day her all, she's proof that progress isn't always easy, but it's always powerful.

Bella's journey isn't just about the lifestyle shifts she embraced — it's about the way she carries hope and encouragement for others, showing them that transformation begins with self-belief.

SOBRIETY & SISTERHOOD

In today's digital age, where loneliness is reported at an all-time high, people are increasingly seeking out communities built on shared values and experiences.

According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, 58% of adults in the UK report feeling lonely at least occasionally. Alarmingly, the issue is most pronounced amongst the younger generation, with 10% of individuals saying they feel "lonely most or all of the time".

For many young people, especially those spending their evenings scrolling aimlessly through social media, building a sense of community is not just important, it's essential. The feeling of belonging can be a powerful antidote to isolation.

One space where this sense of connection is thriving is in the growing movement toward sobriety and sober curiosity. As more individuals explore life without alcohol, the lack of welcoming social spaces becomes increasingly clear. In response, a wave of online communities is bridging that gap by creating inclusive environments that extend beyond the screen into real-life events and friendships.

Two standout groups leading this charge are the Sober Sisters Club and the Sober Girl Society. While each has its own style and approach, both are united by a shared mission: to empower women to live authentically and connect deeply – without alcohol.

THE JOURNEY TO FINDING A COMMUNITY

Founded by Tasha Coleman, the Sober Sisters Club began as a personal journey and turned into a public platform. "Just one sober girl wanting to inspire others," Tasha started by documenting her own challenges with alcohol and the emotional growth that came with quitting.

"The hardest part," she says, "was having to deal with my own emotions, anxiety, and stress without alcohol to numb me." Like many, she had used alcohol as a coping mechanism. But when it began to affect her relationships and wellbeing, Tasha knew she had to make a change.

In her first month of sobriety, she launched the Sober Sisters Club Instagram page to stay accountable and offer motivation to others on a similar path.

What followed was an outpouring of messages – stories from women struggling, rebuilding, and searching for connection. The page quickly became a hub of support, honesty, and inspiration.

"The connection with others has played a huge part in my journey," Tasha says.

From online encouragement to dreams of future in-person meetups, her community has been instrumental in transforming her life, and the lives of others. She hopes to continue expanding the group through events, YouTube, and eventually a podcast.

In the long run, Tasha hopes to have helped thousands of people give up alcohol, helping them live a better and more fulfilling life.

"Sobriety has enriched my life in so many ways, the list is endless. I am much happier and healthier in every way. I now enjoy my own company and actually like the person that I am. I'm a better person to the people I love the most, I show up and don't let people down. I have a better social life and better memories. I'm just an all-round better person when I don't drink alcohol".

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR SOBER GIRLS

On a larger scale, Sober Girl Society (SGS) is one of the most well-known communities for sober and sober-curious women worldwide. Founded by Millie Gooch in 2018, SGS blends advocacy, education, and events to challenge the stigma around sobriety.

With experience as a lifestyle journalist, Millie has authored a bestselling book, *The Sober Girl Society Handbook*, and continues to be a vocal advocate for alcohol-free living.

Molly Barton the events assistant at SGS, joined the team after finding solace in Millie's book during her own sobriety journey. Coming from an alcohol-dependent household, Molly was drawn to SGS because it openly addressed the very issues that had long been shrouded in silence.

"Being 20 and a woman deciding to quit drinking was a big decision," Molly says. "Millie's words really resonated with me."

Today, Molly helps organise both virtual and in-person events, from fitness classes to creative workshops, that emphasise not just sobriety, but connection. "They're about creating an environment where everyone feels supported," she says. The goal is to help attendees leave with a new skill, a new friend, or a renewed sense of self.

Contrary to misconceptions, SGS events are exciting and energising. "People sometimes assume sober events are boring," Molly laughs, "but it's the opposite. They're full of life."

In her personal life and journey, Molly explained how her role at SGS has given her a deeper determination to make change in how society views alcohol. Her contribution to the movement is helping to actively shift the conversation around society.

For all of the difficulties that have arisen from the journey, Molly is now able to approach her work with a sense of presence that she has never felt before.

ONE MISSION

Though different in scale and style, both Sober Sisters Club and Sober Girl Society reflect a larger cultural shift.

They demonstrate the power of community in transforming lives, especially for young people navigating sobriety in a world that often glamorises alcohol.

Their stories show that social connection doesn't have to come with a drink in hand. For many women, these communities are more than support networks, they're lifelines, launching pads for personal growth, and places where they feel they can be authentically themselves.

In a time when loneliness hangs over people's heads, these sober spaces offer something invaluable: real connection, without the hangover.





‘I WENT TO A RAVE SOBER’

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Photography: Katya Summerfield