

Community Campaign for Secondary Supply Laws in WA

Sam Menezes

The issue

Prior to late 2015, most Australian jurisdictions other than WA had 'secondary supply laws'. The laws prevented the supply of alcohol to a minor on a private premise without parental permission. WA was falling behind other states and territories in protecting children and young people.

Secondary supply laws provide legal penalties to those who serve alcohol to minors without parental permission and support parents to control their child's access to alcohol. They also encourage more open communication about how best to manage gatherings of young people and recognise that many parents are not comfortable with their children being supplied alcohol.



Overview of what happened

- There was significant concern about alcohol and young people.
- Various organisations (including the McCusker Centre) were calling for action on alcohol and young people, including secondary supply laws.
- Sam created a petition in March 2013 to urge the WA Government to introduce secondary supply laws.
- The petition quickly gained momentum and attracted significant media coverage.
- Peter Abetz MLA tabled the petition in Parliament in July 2013.
- The WA Government was reviewing liquor laws at the time. Following significant community concern, submissions, and representations from and discussions with concerned organisations in health and law enforcement, the Independent Review Committee recommended that secondary supply laws be introduced in WA.
- The WA Government supported the recommendation and the Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 (which included secondary supply laws) was successfully debated and passed through the Parliament.
- Secondary supply laws came into effect in WA on 20 November 2015. They were accompanied by an education campaign associated with the Mental Health Commission's *Alcohol. Think Again* campaign.

How Sam's involvement started

Sam's 16-year-old son was given alcohol at a gathering by an older sibling of a friend (a parent was home at the time). Upon investigation, Sam realised it was legal in WA for alcohol to be supplied to minors without parental permission on a private premise.

It wasn't until a few years later, in March 2013, at a talk by Paul Dillon from Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia that Sam's campaign began. Paul highlighted that WA didn't have secondary supply laws, unlike most other Australian states and territories; Sam thought this was a disgrace.

The next day Sam started an online petition to call for the introduction of secondary supply laws in WA to prevent the supply of alcohol to minors without parental permission.

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Change.org petition

The timing of Sam's petition coincided with the window of opportunity provided by the review of the Liquor Control Act (announced in December 2012), when secondary supply laws were being considered. The petition complemented the work of many other groups who actively supported secondary supply laws, including health groups, WA Police and community organisations. The petition aimed to:

- Encourage the WA government to introduce secondary supply laws;
- Raise awareness of alcohol-related harms among young people, particularly the effects of alcohol on the developing brain and other short and long-term harms;
- Support the WA Government's *Alcohol. Think Again* campaign and the national guideline 'for under 18s, no alcohol is the safest choice'; and
- Support the Criminal Law Amendment (Out-of-Control Gatherings) Act 2012.

The petition gained momentum quickly, with over 6000 signatures collected. Sam kept the petition open throughout the campaign to update supporters and to encourage calls to action via a direct email. Calls to action generally involved asking people to write letters to relevant Members of Parliament (MPs) and to share petition updates. The petition was tabled in Parliament by Peter Abetz MLA in June 2013.

Working with the media

Sam originally linked her petition to The West Australian newspaper article about an out of control party that involved 300 underage teens. She sent her petition to The West via a Facebook private message; Sam was interviewed and a story appeared shortly thereafter. This was the beginning of extensive publicity of the issue and promotion of the petition that went beyond Sam's own personal networks. The West Australian published several articles and supportive editorials about the campaign, and reported on its progress.

Sam spoke many times on radio, mostly on ABC 720 and 6PR. She wrote notes before each interview to help her remain on topic and deal with some curly questions. At times there was potential for controversy and Sam was always very careful to stick to the facts and key topics.

"Being interviewed by TV for the news, you never quite know what questions will come your way," says Sam. With no formal media training, Sam used each opportunity to improve. She says you quickly become savvy about what the media are after and whether you need to respond to every interview requested. Sam suggests that "if you are going to be an advocate that speaks out publicly, you have to be prepared to put your face to the campaign and go through some uncomfortable situations". However, she feels that the fun and thrill of advocacy, and the people she met along the way far outweighed any challenges.

Thousands sign alcohol petition

Beatrice Thomas | June 12, 2013, 6:23 am

Share



Mother-of-four Samantha Menezes' push for secondary supply laws in WA has reached new heights after her petition with almost 6000 signatures was tabled in Parliament and Labor formally backed the move with its own Bill.



Social Media

Social media was an important element of this campaign. Sam set up a Facebook page to provide updates on the campaign, information about alcohol harms, and to promote similar campaigns in Australia and elsewhere.

Twitter provided a way for Sam to connect with others across the globe with similar interests. Sam reflects that it is a wonderful way to support others who work so hard. "Sometimes advocacy can be lengthy and at times isolating, so support from others is well received."

Social media was a successful channel for Sam because of its ability to reach so many people who share her concerns. Here are some things that worked for Sam:

- Searching for organisations or individuals with similar interests and following them.
- Posting regularly on relevant topics.
- Posting before lunch or in the evening from 6pm onward. This is when many people are cruising through their newsfeeds.
- Supporting and acknowledging other people's campaigns. For example, Sam's other interests include Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and controls on alcohol advertising and promotions.
- Regularly checking social media accounts.



Meeting politicians and key influencers

Sam initially met with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Michelle Scott, and her local MP, Sean L'Estrange MLA. Both were very receptive to Sam's concerns.

Sam then organised a face-to-face meeting with the Hon Terry Waldron MLA, Minister for Racing and Gaming (at the time), and the Hon Helen Morton MLC, Minister for Mental Health (at the time), in May 2013 to discuss secondary supply laws and the petition. At the meeting, Minister Waldron expressed strong interest in the laws and said he would consider them as part of a broader review of the Liquor Control Act.

Throughout the review process Sam maintained contact with the Minister for Racing and Gaming's office, who provided updates on the progress of the secondary supply issue within the review. Meeting the Minister early in the process helped to establish a line of communication. Here are some things that worked for Sam when meeting with politicians:

- Being well prepared by knowing the subject, preparing for possible questions and offering a solution.
- Always being friendly and polite but at the same time confident and strong.
- Being nicely dressed in clothes suitable for an important meeting.
- Taking a pen and paper to note important points.
- After the meeting, writing a summary of what was discussed for her own records.
- Emailing the MP to thank them for their time and letting them know she looked forward to discussing the issue further.

Sam noted that the prominent and well-respected roles of these decision makers, who were also personally supportive, enabled their support to positively impact on the campaign, particularly by providing advice and reassurance for Sam.

The importance of making and maintaining relationships

Sam maintained contact with the office of the Minister for Racing and Gaming. When the then Minister, Terry Waldron MLA, retired from the position, Sam established contact with the new Minister

– the Hon Colin Holt MLC. She wrote a letter to introduce herself and the purpose of the campaign. Minister Holt promptly replied and was supportive of the campaign.

Asking for advice from experts

Sam sought advice from a range of public health experts and organisations regarding strategies and next steps. Various organisations were concerned about alcohol and young people, and supported secondary supply laws.

Contacting experts was important because she valued and trusted their opinions and constructive criticism. The advice Sam received helped her to stay focused, to feel supported and encouraged, and to maintain motivation through challenges and over time.

Sam worked closely with the McCusker Centre, which was also pressing for action and found Sam to be a wonderful ally who ensured that her advocacy was consistently evidence-based, while conveying to politicians, media and others the importance of this issue for parents.

Writing letters, emails and submissions

Sam wrote to many WA MPs and received many supportive replies. Throughout the campaign, Sam wrote timely letters to the Minister to remind him of the benefits the laws will have for parents and young people in the WA community.

Sam wrote to a range of groups to request their support, including church groups, youth groups, drug and alcohol and family counsellors, sporting groups, health professionals, local schools, government organisations, mental health groups, Indigenous health organisations, women's and children's services, and men's services. Sam says this was useful to build momentum for the petition and helped to generate community discussion of the issue.

Sam, along with other health and community groups, wrote submissions to the Liquor Control Act review calling for secondary supply laws to be introduced. Many submissions mentioned the petition and strong community support for the laws. The submissions were important to formally register support for secondary supply laws through the public consultation for the review. Supporters of secondary supply laws were well-cited in the final report of the review committee; 3 of the 141 recommendations related to secondary supply. The Minister for Racing and Gaming said that the need for secondary supply laws was the "strongest message" to come out of the review.

Writing opinion pieces

Sam wrote a number of newspaper opinion pieces and online blog posts throughout the campaign, which helped to raise her profile on the issue. She often wrote from a personal perspective, as a mother and community member, supported by evidence. Sam says this was useful because by sharing her experiences, thoughts or feelings people could relate to her message and her commitment to seek change.

Sam's relationships with various experts meant that she could send drafts to others for constructive criticism. Sam says this improved her writing skills and provided reassurance that what she had written was appropriate for a wide audience.

Public Speaking

Sam describes public speaking as the most challenging part of her campaigning. She says, "I can talk underwater and on radio no problem but in front of a crowd – well let's say I hope

Parents receive cold hard facts from alcohol expert



practice makes perfect!” Sam has presented at a number of university lectures and many forums for parents and schools as well as the general community.

Public speaking was an important part of the campaign because it enabled Sam to spread the message about the need for secondary supply laws. It also enabled her to build support for the laws, as supporters were able to see her passion and were more likely to support the campaign. Sam was also able to reflect on the campaign and pass on learnings to others working or studying in the field.

Tackling ups and downs – dealing with delays

Through the process, there were many times when Sam and other supporters of secondary supply laws were faced with delays and uncertainty.

The WA Premier expressed his doubts about secondary supply laws in early 2014, saying they would be “nigh on impossible to administer.” This required some quick reactive advocacy with radio contacting Sam for her opinion on the matter. Sam also wrote a Drink Tank post that was published online soon after called *Why WA needs to catch up with secondary supply laws*. Sam kept the focus on the campaign’s objectives, the health and wellbeing of WA’s youth and the educational benefits behind such laws. By the end of the year, the Premier came around and the government supported the independent review committee’s recommendation to introduce the laws. Though the legislation still had to be debated and passed through the Parliament, the community campaign helped to shift the government’s position on secondary supply laws.

Example of reactive advocacy

On 12 August 2015, media reported that the introduction of secondary supply laws would be (again) delayed after the party room rejected the staged approach to reforming WA’s liquor laws. This delay would jeopardise the introduction of the laws before school leavers’ celebrations.

Leavers 2015 provided somewhat of a deadline for the laws to be implemented. Around half the school leavers were going to be 18 years old; without secondary supply laws there would be no penalties for providing alcohol to underage friends on private premises.

Professor Mike Daube, Director of the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth and Sam reacted quickly to the news of the delay. They drafted, co-signed and hand delivered letters to all members of the WA Parliament the day the delay was reported. Prof Daube and Sam expressed their disappointment about the delay, explained why secondary supply laws were important, confirmed community support for the laws and urged all MPs to “take whatever action they could to ensure the laws were introduced into the WA Parliament as speedily as possible”. Many MPs responded by sharing their concerns and noting their encouragement for the laws.

The win

The Bill containing secondary supply laws was introduced to the WA Parliament on 19 August 2015. It was debated and, being strongly supported by both sides of the Parliament, was passed. The laws came into effect on 20 November 2015, just 3 days before the official 2015 Leavers event. This was a great result.

Sam was recognised for her campaign with three awards: the Injury Control Council’s Outstanding Achievement Award in 2013, the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth Community in Action



Award in 2013, and the Public Health Association of Australia (WA Branch) President's Award in 2015.

Key factors contributing to Sam's success

Being passionate and persistent

Sam's passion and commitment was a significant factor in the success of the campaign. Sam's genuine concern and commitment to creating change came through in all of her activities and helped bring the community on board with great success. She was persistent in the face of challenges and over the length of the campaign.

Being open to windows of opportunity

Sam was very effective in using windows of opportunity to get her message across and increase awareness of the petition. The timing of the campaign coincided with the Liquor Control Act review and there was a real opportunity for the government to act.

Reactive advocacy

Sam kept on top of media coverage of alcohol-related issues so she was well-informed and ready to act on any issues that popped up.

Creating and maintaining partnerships

Sam was great at creating relationships and partnerships. These relationships contributed to the success of the campaign in many ways, including providing progress updates (MPs and advisors), getting the message into the media (journalists) and valuable advice on strategies and next steps (health and community organisations).

Working with the media

Sam was prepared to be a spokesperson for the issue. She formed good relationships with journalists, developed sound judgement on when to provide comment (and when not to), and stuck to key messages. Sam understood that media was important in gaining attention to the issue and support for the petition.

Community voice

Sam spoke as a mother and a concerned community member. She gave a unique voice to the campaign and complemented the work of organisations and experts involved in the issue. She was genuine in her concern and spoke in a way that other parents could relate to – many community members resonated with her concerns.

One person can make a difference

Sam has showed us all what amazing things can be achieved by just one dedicated community member. Community voices are important because they can often bring others along who share similar concerns and show that they are not alone in their concerns.



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VICTORY

New laws to tackle teen alcohol harm introduced

Well it is time to claim an official victory! Western Australia now has secondary supply legislation. I would like to thank each and every one of you for signing the petition way back in 2013 and for your ongoing support throughout the... [More](#)

Samantha Me...
Perth, Australia

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New laws to tackle teen alcohol harm introduced

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