

FAITH, LOVE, AND UNITY

Floor Van Bakkum

Unity, Jellinek, Netherlands

I am going to talk about the finer details and the achievements of the Unity project that Annie Bleeker spoke about earlier. Our philosophy comes down to these three or four points (referring to screen); 'Just say no' is that we want to improve the knowledge that people have about drugs; 'less is more' is about putting some norms and values to drug use, for example: what is a good amount of ecstasy to take? – Many people do now know what to do about this and we are trying to set some boundaries for everybody; and 'Prepare, repair, improve safer use' is about giving people skills and information on what they can do to 'use' more safely. We are also trying to do some trend spotting, because we are always there in the parties and we are practically given that information, so we should do something with it.

This is our project structure (referring to screen). The Dutch government now finances us and we have funding of 115,000 euros (AU\$184,000). We were not always this wealthy; beforehand we had only AU\$50,000 so in the last few years we have managed to increase our finding, which makes it possible to do a lot of different things.

The project manager, Jaap Jamin, manages the project, and we have a steering committee of which dance organisations, first aid organisations, the dance press and professional drugs organisations are a part of. They play a very important and active role, and because of this they also tend to be really concerned with the project and try to do the best with it. Then we have a layer of peer educators, who are now being paid to help us do the parties because there are so many parties that one person cannot go to them all. But the most important thing about this project is that the volunteers make the project, they are the ones who decide what we are going to do, and it all comes down to them.

We recruit peers from the target group, so we recruit them at parties; they have to speak the same language as the people at the parties; they have to be very committed to the community, and they have to have non-judgmental attitudes towards drug users and consumers - we cannot have people who are totally against drugs working as peers as this does not work with people who use drugs. Most of the peers in Unity are either drug-consumers or former drug-consumers, which makes them more credible to the target group.

Recruiting and selection of peers - we do not actually have to do any recruitment activity because the project is so well known, and gives out such good energy, that most peers approach us and say they want to join. At the moment we have 45 really smart and active peers; it is a very close group and they really work together even though they come from totally different places and backgrounds, are different ages and have different educational status. However we have very strict rules regarding drug use during working hours; no drug consumption is allowed between working hours - after hours they can do what they want but while they are working, drug use is not allowed. What is really good about the group is that they keep each other in

check; if someone steps out of line, they point out to each other that they cannot show this kind of behaviour.

One of the very important things about the peer method is finding the quality in the peers, finding out what makes them good peers, and trying to encourage that so that you can empower the peers to work to become something better. Many of the peers that work in Unity end up going into some other drug work later on in their life.

Training is very important for Unity. The peers are obliged to follow the training activities, which start with a basic training programme including eight hours of drug knowledge, in which we try to teach them as much as possible about what kind of drugs are on the market and what their effects are, and four hours of communication training, which tells them how you should answer questions and how you can start a conversation with someone in a party. Then four times a year we have expert meetings on certain subjects, which are really important - for example when the cocaine market increases, we have an expert meeting on cocaine, so people attend to update their information on that subject. And then once a month there is a general meeting in which we discuss the parties, but in which we also try to put some extra time into looking at what is actually going on and the things that are in the news. For example, if there is something about ketamine in the news we try to emphasise what the reality is so that they always have this up to date drugs information.

At dance events, we display an information stand. We actually only go to parties that have more than 2,500 visitors; we need to get more into the club scene - this is one of things we need to do in the future because we are not really well presented there. When we go to the big dance events we display an information stand, and we do drug and alcohol quizzes where people can answer 10 questions about drug and alcohol, which for us is an easier way to get in touch with them, and after that a lot of people have their own questions that we can answer as well.

We also launched a web site two years ago, which we updated a few months ago, and we get about 2,000 hits a day. One of the good things about getting people to the web site is that we take photographs at parties of people who want to have their photograph taken and we put these on the website and give them the address of the website, and in this way they come to the website to pick up their photographs and so might also pick up some of the drug information that is on the site. We also have a page once a month in a magazine run by a big dance organisation (IDNT), in which we can write anything we want about drugs - which is really good because it goes out to 70,000 people and thus gives us good publicity.

The stakeholders in this project are of course Jellineck, because they provide us with everything, and first aid organisations - and I have to say in Holland we have a very professional first aid organisation which is really well known in the drug field, so we don't do any of the first aid work at parties because they are really good at it, but we talk about it with them a lot because they see what kind of problems there are, and what kind of drugs are creating problems for them. Other stakeholders include police and security - in Holland, security are already obliged to have a licence so most of the security people already have a first aid degree or something similar; and for Unity, the dance organisations are a really important player in the field.

So working with dance organisations is very important. It was one of the big problems in the beginning of the project that a lot of dance organisations didn't want drug information in their parties because they felt that if they gave out drug information, they were admitting that there was drug use within the parties. So in the first few years we had trouble getting into the parties, but then after four years we talked to some of the dance organisations and they found it was a good thing to have drug information in the party - now we have no trouble getting into the dance parties anymore.

In Holland, the dance organisations even formed an organisation to do formal guidelines for safer dancing, so they are all talking together to make guidelines and to put some kind of trademark on party organisations to show that they organise safe parties. Because we have a lot of contact with politicians, we also became a link between dance organisations and politics. Now, also, dance organisations are talking to the Dutch government about what they should do to make the parties safer, and this is really good.

The monitoring system: we are working to make a good data system for the Amsterdam monitoring system, which Jaap Jamin talked about, Antenna. We are trying to get reports from peers and parties, in which they look at what is going on in the party, they look at the hardware (as I call it). Is there free water? Is there first aid? They also look at different trends - are people passed out on the dance floor, or are they all happy and dancing around? Additionally, we have our questionnaires filled out at the stand, which we collect together and make a monitoring system out of.

The results of 2003: we attended 27 raves and talked to 5388 people and what we saw was that 72.9% thought that Unity information was very credible, and 78.5% thought that it was very interesting; 95% reported that they considered the risk of drug use much more than before, which doesn't mean that they changed their behaviour, but at least they thought about it; and overall they ranked Unity positive at 8.3 - we have a scale from 1-10 and 10 is the highest.

In our sample, 70% were male and 30% were female, which is about the same as you see at the big raves - they're mainly male dominated parties that we attend. The average age was 22.5 years, which I think is a bit old. What we found was that 81% asked questions about their own use, so most of the people visiting the information stand were users themselves; A lot of questions were about ecstasy - 40% - which has to do with the fact that a lot of people were really worried about the news they hear about ecstasy and brain damage - while actually, more people use alcohol and we hardly get any questions on that. The questions concerned mainly long term effects and risks, and were mainly regarding ecstasy - a lot of people are worried and asking 'If I take ecstasy now, what is going to happen to me in 10 years?'

(Referring to screen) These are the figures that we got out of the drugs and alcohol quizzes - so this is what people told us that they were using in the last 24 hours at the party; what we see is that only 7% of the people that we spoke to hadn't used anything in the last 24 hours, so I think we got the right group to talk to.

Unity is actually at the moment still an Amsterdam based organisation, although we do tend to go to parties outside of Amsterdam. In the future we would like to

implement the system in the rest of Holland and we would like to become a key organisations in the dance scene. Right now we are already becoming part of the dance scene, but we would like to be the main people who are consulted and to become part of the Amsterdam monitoring system 'Antenna'. A lot has happened since the start in 1996; it evolved into a big project and even though guidelines have been developed, and everything is going well, we are still a very fragile project - especially with recent changes to the Dutch government, which has gone from real left wing to right wing, so we have to wait and see what happens.

Thank you.