

## **DESIGNING A FRAMEWORK THAT EVALUATES THE IMPACT AND QUALITY OF THE DANCE DRUG SAFETY PEER EDUCATION OUTREACH PROJECT**

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Good afternoon everybody. I would like to introduce my colleague and myself. This is Jennie Smith and I am Melanie Hesketh and we both work for Drug-Line Lancashire Limited. It is in the North West of Lancashire in England, and Jennie and I are both 'Dance Drug Safety project co-ordinators', working in both Preston and Blackpool.

In this presentation we aim to discuss the following: The Dance Drug Safety Peer Education Outreach Project; the working partnerships; and discuss the initial findings from the evaluation on the impact of the Dance Drug Safety Peer Education Outreach titled *Outsiders 2000* and *Outsiders 2004*.

I will give you a bit of background first. Drug services have traditionally been tailored to meet the needs of opiate drug users, a legacy of the 1980s, when many of the agencies were established as a response to the widespread panic surrounding HIV. However, with a rapidly growing dance club culture and many young people using drugs on a recreational basis, there has been recognition that drug agencies need to evolve to accommodate the young people with the non-problematic drug use. Young people using drugs on a recreational basis are reluctant to approach the traditional drug agencies in order to access the information and support, so this project was undertaken in recognition of the need for a new approach to service provision for young recreational drug users. Also recognised was the importance of enabling those whom it might seem had been neglected from the traditional drug agencies to voice their own needs.

The emphasis of the research, therefore, needed to lie in identifying the needs of young recreational drug users through feedback from the young people themselves and this research was titled *Outsiders 2000*. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised, incorporating case study interviews, focus group interviews and a questionnaire survey conducted through many dance venues across the north west of England. And here are some of the recommendations from the *Outsiders 2000*.

A constant overview is needed when accessing the needs of young recreational drug users. Information support needed to be available, not only from the drug agencies, but many different venues. This could be achieved by the provision of credible, non-sensationalist information and resources; the provision of training around issues of recreational drug use for young people's services; and regular credible and accurate media education campaigns. So the findings of the project, relating to levels of drugs and drugs of choice, largely corroborate contemporary research, with young people accepting recreational drug use as a normal part of youth culture. Young people using drugs on a recreational basis sought to differentiate between their drug use and that of the more problematic user; young people are also sceptical about messages in the media and usually like to obtain their information about drugs from friends, learning through observation or experimenting.

The research was absorbed and the following outreach packet was developed. And here were some of our objectives:

- To support the existing volunteers and further recruit, train and support peer educators

- To utilise and update the extensive training package combining listening; outreach work; communication skills; health education, giving - drug, sexual health, alcohol and personal safety awareness
- To utilise and develop a comprehensive package comprising of the leaflets posters, banners, fun packs, utilising the peer educators' experience and focus to ensure credibility and appropriateness in the ever-changing face of drug use
- To offer irregular support, attendance and guidance to appropriate forum, example the Dance Safety Partnerships and here listed (Refers to screen)
- To offer regular outreach work provision to young people attending the bars and clubs
- To work in partnership and offer awareness and guidance to venue owners, managers and their staff
- To monitor the impact of the service using both qualitative and quantitative methods; and
- To further the implications of the 'Safer Clubbing' protocols

The outreach package is offered to licensees in venues that hold a public entertainments' licence and it is the decision of the licensee as to which package he or she feels is most relevant for their venue.

So then we start with Tier 1. This tier does not require our presence in the venue but we do hand out what we would ordinarily do when we were doing outreach, which is the drop cars, the safety tips, personal information contact numbers, etcetera. (Can I just point out at the front there are some of our packs that we do hand out and more information that we would love you to take away with you.) All the materials and practice are focused around supporting club goers having fun but doing so with increased safety and information, a focus being on general health and safety issues as well as that specifically occurring through drug use.

We then have Tier 2. This is our monthly pub-crawl, as we like to call it, where we go to a number of venues throughout the evening. We aim to spend about 10 – 15 minutes in the venue, handing out the afore-mentioned literature, also the fun packs and wallets that are at the front. The consistent theme is easily identifiable from the posters and leaflets, and the T-shirt-wearing outreach workers (here modelled by Jennie and I). The volunteers distribute the fun packs containing drug and sexual health material, talk with clubbers and look out for people who need specialist help or support.

We then come to Tier 3, which is where we would spend an entire evening in one venue. We would take out everything we have got, the fun bags, we just throw it all at you and then we engage with clubbers should they wish. The outreach worker should always wait to be approached, offering listening time, information, service awareness - but not encroach on the enjoyability focus of the evening. Presence is low key and our outreach workers engage in the evening, their T-shirts and ID cards identifying them for contact when necessary. This ensures fun safety and that the clubs are not feeling that they are being watched, policed or recruited.

Following on from the recommendations made from *Outsiders 2000*, we decided it was time to re-evaluate the project to make sure what we said we would do we are doing and are we having a positive impact on young people accessing bars and clubs. We used *Outsiders 2000* as a building block but added our own fresh ideas, which have come to light as the project has developed (Refers to screen.)

The same research methods were used but in order to meet our aims we added a licensee questionnaire to test their service satisfaction. I am going to talk through our findings but due

to time constraints we have highlighted the most relevant findings - but the report is currently being produced if anybody would like a copy.

A series of case study and focus group interviews were the first element of the research. The participants were recruited using a quota sampling approach, aiming to involve young people, who despite all being recreational drug users, came from diverse backgrounds and with different drug careers. Points of contact for the participants were clients already engaged in drug line.

For the first part of the interview we did not want to appear as though we were interrogating or intimidating the participants, so we asked them a series of general questions relating to their classification of dance and recreational drugs; and as you can see (referring to screen), if they felt a drug fell into the category of dance it also fell into the category of recreational, apart from alcohol and cannabis. When asked which could not be classed as either dance or recreational, these were the responses. And what made these different to dance and recreational drugs: "It is the more scummy side", "It is the lowest of the low" and "Feeling like you are wrapped up in cotton wool." Heroin is associated with constant use.

All of the participants stated they had used the dance and recreational drugs that they had mentioned and were currently still using, with the majority beginning to use at 14 or 15 and the main drugs of choice being alcohol, cannabis and ecstasy. The observation of friends using drugs on a recreational basis, before using themselves, was a common pattern among the young people, whether this was purely experimental or an initiation into more long-term recreational drug use.

The topic of very long- or short-term concerns regarding their drug use was raised and these were put into good and bad effects, with the good being: "enhances your sexual drive", "enhances your night out", and "it boosts your confidence". Against: "the paranoia", "increases blood pressure" and in some drugs "reduces your sexual drive". However, a discussion took place, which raised several other points. It depends on the person using the drug, some people go out to work all week and pay for the drug, while others turn to crime to use the drug. Short-term and long-term effects would be different for different groups of people and it is a slippery slope into more drugs, to avoid 'come down'.

We then went on to discuss the problems associated with recreational or dance drugs and these were what came through: "Your ego is massaged by the drug", "Supplying is part of the buzz", "The buzz is heightened by the risk factor", and "everybody's committing an offence", whilst the main concerns were highlighted as: "Getting hold of them", "Thought of people dying is minimal", "Everybody has a different line", "Financial concerns", "Need to know your drugs are sorted before you go out on a night out"; and "It becomes a crutch".

According to the groups, recreational drug users are portrayed by the media as "people who take drugs are going to die", or they are portrayed as a nuisance or a threat. However, some films show recreational drug users or taking drugs to be cool and some TV programmes like *The Osbornes* and especially Ozzie, who has had many years of hard drug use but is still well liked and very much respected.

A member of the group described recreational drug use as: "On one side it is glamorous, but on the other side, it is the rock-bottom green side." When asked, the minority had received a small amount of drug education, but the majority said they had learned from friends, older siblings, what they were exposed to and Zammo from Grange Hill and his 'just say No' record. They all felt to approach a drug agency, as a recreational drug user, would be unnecessary, as they see a drug agency for a dependent heroin user and recreational drug use is not a problem or certainly not to the interviewees. The group was asked if they had seen us doing outreach or they had seen any of our materials in pubs and clubs and if they had felt this

to be a reliable service. All of them said they had seen us outreaching and found us to be reliable and 'on the ball'.

A second element of the research involved asking clubbers to fill in a questionnaire in a pub or club environment. We asked a hundred clubbers what drugs, how often and where they used. The responses are in the afore-mentioned report but some of the bigger issues were: Where would they like to access their drug information from? Had they come into contact with the outreach workers? And, Did they find it a valuable service?

The answers to the questions proved that the service we provide is benefiting young people accessing bars and clubs. The places clubbers would like to access their drug information from is: newspapers, dance magazines, friends, TV, radio, and pubs and clubs being a very popular choice.

We also devised a questionnaire for pub licensees to check their service satisfaction and from the feedback we received the average programme has been very well received by all licensees, who have stated that the dance drug safety project has been very beneficial and valuable in their venues. The initial response from licensees was negative, as they thought, to be offered the outreach, it meant their venue had a drug problem; but over the time, the licensees have come to welcome and appreciate our work, and the benefits we offer them, with the majority of them opting for the Tier 2 or Tier 3 approach, again highlighting our success.

In conclusion, we have discovered that the service is benefiting recreational drug users, young people accessing bars and clubs and venue owners and managers. The project development and success has been made possible through our excellent partnership working and these are some of the partners that we are currently working with.

Also, although they are not here, we must acknowledge and show our appreciation to the volunteers of the project, because if it was not for them, then we would not be near enough as successful as what we are.

Thank you.