

## Chemical Realities

taking public health seriously in Scotland's nightlife

### Reaching Out to Recreational Drug Users

Crew is a specialist drugs agency focusing on psychostimulant drugs and alcohol – substances used by hundreds of thousands of people to enhance their experience of parties, festivals, clubbing, music and other entertainment, and socialising.

Many people experience their drug use and their nightlife positively, but for some there is a down side. Inexperience and misinformation can cause people to use drugs unsafely and experience their worst effects. Others may compound existing physical and mental health problems with drug and alcohol use. Many more will use excessively. A minority will begin to use compulsively, unable to contemplate socialising without drug use. Drugs themselves are unpredictable and interact with individuals uniquely, and occasionally drugs are adulterated.

For all of these reasons, Crew believes that information, advice and support are necessary features of our approach to health promotion. But above all, a pro-active approach is necessary. Younger people tend to want information at the moment it is most important to them, and need information to be immediately relevant to their feelings, circumstances and experiences. That is why we believe our outreach service is important, and why it works.

### What we do

**Crew provides five main services within our outreach:**

**Information and advice** – specialist, credible, relevant and portable, with condoms

**Chill out space** to allow revellers to rest and pace themselves

**Crisis intervention** for revellers who are experiencing negative effects of substances or partying – anything from overdose to exhaustion

**Roaming** – an approach to 'spotting' people in crisis amongst the revelling masses, and encouraging them and their friends to accept our help in the chill out or crisis zones

**Water** – an important preventive resource helping keep revellers hydrated and to avoid using alcohol for thirst, and the 'water message' reminds people to drink water to stay safe and well, as many drugs have a dehydrating effect on top of that caused by dancing, crowds and heat.

*intr. v.:* **Revel**

1. to take great pleasure or delight
2. to engage in festivities, to make merry

*n.:* **Reveller**

1. a celebrant who shares a noisy party
2. one who enjoys revels or festivities

### On a typical outreach:

We will see over 1500 revellers in total in our chill out and crisis support tents

We will provide water directly to around 750 revellers and over 2000 water cups for use of site water taps

We will provide information and advice on drugs, alcohol and sexual health, and condoms, to around 250 revellers

**In an average year Crew serves eight major events attended by over 50,000 revellers.**

Our approach is “**benefit maximization**” – maximum fun for the maximum number of revellers, helping them have a great time without the downside of drugs and alcohol, or the aftermath of overdoing them, and promoting safe events for everyone. It's “**harm reduction**” presented in a positive way that revellers support.

## Economic Growth, Social and Cultural Capital

### A promoter's perspective:

“Outreach services provide back up to services on site such as ambulance and first aid and in most cases provide a service that neither of these agencies are prepared and trained for. Festival goers are often more comfortable talking to members of an outreach service as they are not uniformed.

The safety and wellbeing of the festival goers are at the forefront of the promoters' minds and having the reassurance that outreach services are on hand to support the audience is invaluable.

The support to back up the services such as ambulance, first aid and even police is very important. These services in the worst case scenario could prevent someone from an overdose or suicide.”

Many festivals are an established part of Scotland's cultural scene, for Scots and visitors alike. Encompassing all kinds of music and performance, in all kinds of venues throughout Scotland, large and small, people of all ages participate at all levels.

In addition, many events are a form of social provision for young people and young adults, both creating and responding to demand. Attendance at some of the major festivals in Scotland is considered an important rite of passage for some young people, who create a temporary bonding and shared sense of identity while at the event. At best we hope they create new friendships, open themselves up to positive new experiences from which they can learn, and have good memories to share.

Nightlife and festivals are also a thriving part of Scotland's economy. Communities throughout Scotland are

considering means by which festivals and events can be used to bolster local businesses reliant on visitors. Event management on large and small scales has become a legitimate area of vocational and academic study and attracts many people keen to learn how to share in the kudos and profits of the established promoters.

We believe that nightlife and festivals are here to stay. Traditionally celebration in Scotland has been associated with alcohol, and over the decades, drug use has added to the choice available to people who want heightened or altered physical, mental or social experiences.

Our challenge, from a public health perspective, is to match the growth in nightlife and festivals with a growth in proactive harm reduction, and to prevent the downside that can be associated with events, for both participants and promoters.

## Growth in Drug Choice and Availability

Over the years Crew has seen trends in drug use change, but increasingly we are working in a climate where 'anything goes' – poly drug use, which means using different types of drugs and alcohol together either in a planned way (to experiment with drug interactions) or an unplanned way (where intoxication lowers inhibition and control, leading to more experimentation).

The main challenges Crew experiences during outreach are:

**Inexperience** – people using drugs that are new to them (and people who are new to drugs) cannot anticipate their effects

**Pacing and moderation** – people misjudge the time it will take to feel the effects of drugs, so they often misjudge dosage. Younger people may want to experience an immediate rush which is impossible to sustain throughout a whole festival or long club night, so they meet their comedown too quickly, try to stave this off with even more drugs and eventually burn out

**Alcohol** – the most common substance, and whether mixed with other drugs or not, we notice is one of the most common features of cases needing crisis support, and is certainly prevalent in violent or aggressive behaviours

**Quality** – where 'pills' are being used, the level of active drug contained can be very variable, and in some cases different drugs than those it is 'labelled' can be present, leading people to take more than they can handle

**Environment** – people often arrive at events completely unprepared for the weather and for the level of energy they will expend. Mixed with the effects of drugs and alcohol, loss of body heat and energy reserves can be a lethal combination leading to hypothermia

The most positive thing we see during outreach is '**Good Mate**' syndrome – where people are willing to keep an eye on friends, stick together and bring people to our tents for help. Without Good Mates, most services at large events would find it impossible to reach people who need help, and events would be far less positive experiences for everyone.

## Contain or Control?

Crew recognises the value of a police presence at events, providing for the safety and welfare of participants and liaising effectively with other services.

We also recognise the 'drugs dilemma' – many of the drugs used at events are illegal, for those taking them and those supplying them. The question of balance, in 'containment' (some level of tolerance at events) or 'control' (search and detain), will always be a hot topic for debate.

Crew's experience shows that regardless of a containment or control approach, drugs always do find their way into events. We deal with the more negative effects of people using them, while neither condemning nor condoning use (although we operate a strict policy of 'no using or dealing' while within our tents).

We also see that a heavy handed approach (sniffer dogs or 'raids') has an unwanted effect of making those in possession dispose of their drugs by eating them – a sure way to encourage overdose and ill effects.



## A night in the life of Crew's Outreach Team

### Preparation:



Kit and Logistics



Trained Team



Comprehensive Service

### Accessibility:

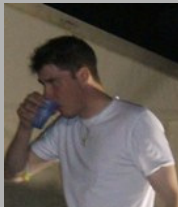


Easy to Find



Outreach

### Ready for Anything:



Water & Information



Support and Advice



Care

### Recipe for success:

Take one large team of well trained volunteers

Use shifts to keep people fresh – outreach is physically and mentally hard work, often in difficult conditions

Add a selection of essential resources:

- A stack of pocket-size, credible and relevant information on drugs, alcohol and sexual health
- A sprinkling of condoms, hold the blushes
- Plenty of warm gear – blankets are a must, old clothes to keep scantily clad revellers' core temperature safe will be handy
- Provide accessible and identifiable tent space, floored if available, with chairs and airbeds (place sick buckets on the side)
- Liberal quantities of water and plenty of cups
- Use radios to communicate
- Add a shift leader in control with calm and common sense

Mix together, brief well and be ready for anything!

## Voluntary but not amateur – specialist support requires investment

Crew is an '**Investor in Volunteers**' organisation – the service we provide is possible because of our good practice in:

- Good volunteer recruitment, with clearly defined expectation of roles skills and aptitudes
- Excellent training in all aspects of peer support
- Detailed planning for events and thorough briefing for volunteers
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Communication, lots of it
- Volunteer support during and after events
- Team debrief and implementation of what we learn after every event

Crew's volunteers come from all walks of life but have one thing in common – they believe in the 'maximising benefit' approach and many have enjoyed nightlife and festivals themselves, so have a passion for helping others to enjoy them safely.

### Training for outreach

Our training is extensive for volunteers, in recognition of the demands of their role. Volunteers become specialists in their knowledge of drugs and understanding of their effects. They also cover first aid and health and safety.

In addition, volunteers are trained in listening and helping, and know how and when to use a counselling approach.

Our training includes personal safety and handling 'tricky situations'.

### Guidelines

Volunteers work to clear guidelines to ensure the quality of our service and to ensure revellers are well cared for. We ask volunteers to stay straight and sober themselves on and off shift. Interaction with service users is strictly professional. Volunteers must apply our rules for service users fairly and consistently: no

using or dealing in our tents, and no exploitative behaviour towards revellers who are vulnerable through intoxication (or otherwise).

### Sustaining energy

In a single shift a volunteer will be on his or her feet 95% of the time. He or she will deal with hundreds of different people in all stages of intoxication and with all sorts of attitudes to our help and support. Without doubt this is tiring work! We keep up people's pep by preparing for their needs – an 'off-duty' space with good food and a comfortable environment; support when service users are difficult or scenes are upsetting; warm gear (we provide all camping gear when needed, hi- viz vests and Crew t-shirts and hoodies); and decent shift length – 6 hours is about right.

### The right ratio

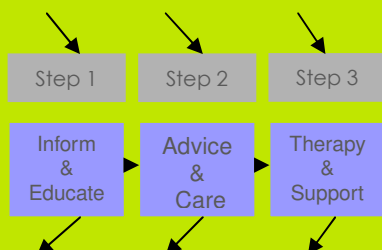
A safe, high quality service requires sufficient volunteers to meet demand. It is our estimation we need a ratio of one volunteer to every 300 people attending an event, to ensure we can provide information, water, roaming, chill out and crisis support to all who want/need it.



## Crew: appropriate and proportionate

Crew provides services to young people to promote their health and wellbeing and enable them to make informed choices about substances.

Our support is offered in a stepped care approach.



*People can access any step of our service when they need to. They may use one or more steps. Choice and flexibility are essential.*

In **step 1** Crew aims to provide credible information through our shop to young people using, or thinking about drugs. We do not judge young people's choices, our focus is on enabling them to be safe and healthy, whatever their choice.

In **step 2**, we reach out to young people at times and locations where drug use is likely (festivals, clubs etc) and provide advice and care when young people's experiences are negative or when they need further advice. In our shop, we also provide time and space to listen, and some alternative therapies to promote health and wellbeing.

In **step 3**, we engage with young people who ask for support or counselling to help them regain control over their drug use. We take a holistic approach and work in partnership with other agencies to ensure young people regain a sense of health and wellbeing, and access any further services they may need.

Crew and Outreach – the fit

Crew believes that our outreach service allows us to provide support to recreational drug users in an appropriate way, and in a proportionate response. It is:

- Proactive – we go to where people experience drugs and alcohol
- Low threshold – we are relevant, credible and user-friendly, as thousands of revellers who use our services each year show
- Specialist – we have information resources, well trained personnel and bags of experience in the experiences of revellers and the logistics of event management
- Gateway – many people experiencing crisis at events will use our information, advice and support as a learning experience. Some will go on to access planned support, for a brief intervention (more help and advice) or to discuss problematic use with more intensive support (counselling)

## Crew recommendations for safer nightlife: maximising benefit

### Checklist for new promoters and new outreach services:

- Tents large enough for chill out (seating for large numbers) and crisis support (airbeds for smaller numbers). Where available, a separate building or portacabin for crisis support is ideal, or tent flooring to keep people dry/warm
- Co-location with First Aid is very helpful, allowing both services to refer to each other
- Access to water and toilets is important

### For all promoters, remember:

- A good ratio of staff to revellers is essential – 1:300 is about right, don't stint on passes, it's a false economy, as we are there to keep people safe and well
- Radio contact also helps with health and safety of staff as well as revellers, around 4 handsets per team is good
- Advance briefing between all event staff and services helps enormously – but at the least, all stewards should be issued a hand held layout plan of the event site with location and role of services identified
- Recognition of cost is helpful – we invest in the volunteers and resources we bring
- Advance advice to ticket holders – prepare for all weathers, transport plans etc

### For the police, consider:

- Outreach services are there to help revellers not to hinder policing. But a police presence suddenly appearing in our chill out or crisis tents can put intoxicated people seriously on edge and make their experience of ill-effects worse. Respect our guidelines – no dealing and no using – will be enforced by us.
- Sudden, unplanned ingestion of quantities of drugs, in response to sniffer dogs or 'raids' at events can cause casualties and at worst, fatalities, an outcome none of us want.

### For licensing authorities, consider:

- The minimum legal requirement of water and First Aid is outdated. The range of drugs used at events and their different interactions and effects requires a proactive and preventive approach and an experienced response. We recommend Safer Nightlife recommendations are used by licensing authorities to ensure events are safe and enjoyable.

### For all stakeholders, consider:

- Joint marketing of the 'Be a Good Mate' concept – all our jobs are made easier when revellers look after each other and take some responsibility for health and safety themselves.