

The HSE 'Safer Nightlife' Programme 2022

Volunteer feedback on the provision of harm reduction outreach in Irish festival settings



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Safer Nightlife Volunteer Programme 2022



3

FESTIVALS

1

new pilot training
programme developed



3

volunteer training days

50

VOLUNTEERS

Drug service workers, youth workers,
psychologists, pharmacists, peers, students

60

hours delivered
on outreach

1

'Back of house'
drug monitoring pilot

19

completed
volunteer surveys

Background

In response to Strategic Action 1.3.11 of the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy: 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017–25', a Working Group was formed in September 2019 to review evidence in relation to health responses applicable to the night-time economy and drug checking provision to help inform recommendations on developments on these areas in Ireland.

The Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group was coordinated by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office, with the Department of Health identified in the National Drug Strategy as the main partner for the delivery of this action. A cross-sectoral group was formed to consult and inform deliberations on this area and an extensive report was published in September 2021. Overall, the group recognised that the nightlife environment offers a unique opportunity for health services to engage with drug using cohorts that they normally have no contact with in Ireland. There is currently an identified gap in service provision, as there is no dedicated organisation providing on-going information and support to groups within nightlife spaces. Despite documented increases in the use of stimulant type drugs associated with social settings such as MDMA and cocaine (Mongan, Miller & Galvin, 2022), there have been limited responses targeting new user groups in new settings.

A harm reduction approach was selected by the Working Group as the HSE response relative to festival settings. This approach would be based on examples reviewed by the Working Group of other services provided internationally such as in the UK (The Loop) and Scotland (Crew 2000), the Netherlands (The Drug Monitoring Information System and Unity), Austria (Check It) and Portugal (Kosmicare).

While it is recognised that the provision of prevention and harm reduction materials are often well received by user groups, in isolation, information provision alone is unlikely to be effective in changing behaviour (EMCDDA, 2017). Emerging evidence shows the benefits of drug checking services whereby people can obtain resources, information and customised interventions alongside substance analysis. This style of approach has the potential to influence drug taking behaviours, such as people modifying their use to leave longer wait periods between doses, reductions in poly use and less volumes consumed (Measham, 2019). In some cases, people will choose not to consume the substance and will safely dispose of it after identifying the contents, particularly if it does not contain what they thought they had purchased (Makkai et al., 2018; Martins et al., 2017; Measham, 2019). By providing analytical confirmation on what substances contain, health care professionals can support service users to understand and mitigate potential health risks.

Considering the available information and taking into account the Irish setting, the Working Group proposed 15 recommendations on the topic of nightlife responses and analytical monitoring for harm reduction purposes including actions on the development of a national volunteer programme and a pilot 'back of house' drug checking programme (Keenan, Killeen and the Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group, 2021).

Key recommendations



Pilot a 'back of house' drug checking system in a festival setting through a collaborative agreement with law enforcement, health care providers and other relevant stakeholders. Support from the Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána is required. Should the pilot evaluation of a 'back of house' system prove positive, a comprehensive 'front of house' approach should be considered.



A dedicated service is required to provide education, prevention and harm reduction services in the night-time economy, similar to services provided in other European countries. In the absence of a dedicated service, a national volunteer training programme should be established for delivering interventions within nightlife settings.



Government consideration is required for the development of a dedicated laboratory for drug market monitoring purposes. Stationary laboratories utilising robust technologies were considered to provide the most accurate results.



On-going funding should be sought from Government for further developments in the area of emerging drug trend monitoring.

The HSE Safer Nightlife Programme 2022

In response to an identified service gap in this area, the HSE National Social Inclusion Office launched a multi-component programme in May 2022 to engage with people who use drugs specifically in festival settings. This approach involved a media campaign, the development of resources, recruiting and training volunteers and coordinating outreach teams at three specific events, Life Festival, Independence (Indie) and Electric Picnic Festival. The aim of the programme was to engage with and support festival attendees in a non-judgemental way on the topic of substance use and related issues that emerge in nightlife spaces. The programme was based on a harm reduction ethos to support people to implement practical steps to reduce drug-related harms.

As part of the development of this programme, a proposal was submitted by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office to the Department of Health, The Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána for the implementation of a pilot programme to monitor drug trends in three festival settings in 2022. The proposals detailed the HSE concern in relation of the current direction of the drug market and concern for Ireland's preparedness to respond to emerging health threats associated with new substances on the market. It was proposed that a 'back of house' approach would be implemented in 2022 as part of the Safer Nightlife outreach programme through the use of a designated bin in a HSE service at nominated events.



Media
campaign
& resources



Partnership
with
3 festivals



Volunteer
recruitment,
training & outreach



Proposals on
'Back of house'
drug monitoring

The sign-off of the proposal was provided to allow the HSE to quickly develop a small pilot programme for implementation at the Electric Picnic festival on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of September, 2022. The results from the pilot 'back of house' programme were published in October 2022 to highlight the main drug trends identified at the event (Killeen, Mc Namara, Stokes and Keenan, 2022).

The Volunteer Programme

The foundation of the HSE Safer Nightlife Campaign was the development of a volunteer outreach programme. It was central to the programme to ensure direct engagement with people who use drugs, given the known limitations of mass media campaigns.

The aim of this new programme was to engage with professionals currently working across substance use, community, youth and other relevant areas as well as students, peers and nightlife representatives to develop diverse teams which could support the establishment of services within festival settings.



The aim of the HSE volunteer teams established for events was to:

- Offer non-judgemental support and information to festival attendees at a designated site and through outreach
- Discuss the topics of drugs, mental health and related issues
- Provide high quality drug information and harm reduction in festival settings relative to that community, including the communication of the latest drug trends of concern and poly drug interactions
- Deliver brief interventions to influence behaviour change and encourage safer choices
- Identify cases of concern and sign post to medical services where necessary
- Gather information and report to the HSE on interactions/ discussions and drug issues arising at the event for further evaluation

The Advisory Group

An Advisory group was established for the duration of the Safer Nightlife programme. The aim of the Advisory Group for the Safer Nightlife Programme was to advise on actions in the festival setting 2022 project plan, including the volunteer programme. Membership included representatives from the HSE National Social Inclusion Office, the Drug and Alcohol Task Forces, HSE Emergency Management, Medic networks and a Festival Safety Consultant.



The Application Process

The Festival Advisory Group agreed a set of competencies for volunteers at Life festival, and these formed the basis for the Expression of Interest forms (EOIs) (Appendix 1).

The agreed competencies for volunteer applicants were:

- An openness to learning, working as part of a volunteer team and accepting feedback from team members and appointed team leaders
- Ability to apply professional boundaries, work within HSE Festival Policy for volunteers and confidentiality policies to protect festival attendees identities
- Have experience either working with people who use drugs, delivering welfare or be a peer who understands health and social issues relative to nightlife settings
- Maintain a basic understanding of harm reduction principles and drug cultures specific to festival communities
- Ability to deliver non-judgemental support and work as part of a harm reduction ethos
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills with the ability to quickly gain rapport with festival communities
- Ability to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of festival participants and the pilot programme
- Ability to work in a busy environment, remain calm and direct to medics if crisis arises

The EOIs clearly outlined the volunteer competencies, the expected commitment and the training provided. The HSE National Social Inclusion invited EOIs through stakeholder networks, student channels, service provider networks and Drug and Alcohol Taskforces in advance of each of the three festivals.

Three members of the Advisory Group, using an agreed competency-based scoring matrix (Appendix 2) in line with the EOI, reviewed the EOI forms received. Successful candidates were then contacted with information on the festival, the volunteer policy and the volunteer agreement.



Volunteer Policy

Each volunteer received a copy of the volunteer policy in advance of the event they were participating in. The policy was amended for each of three festivals in line with the service agreement for that specific event. Based on this policy, the volunteers signed a contract agreement with the HSE National Social Inclusion Office (Appendix 3).



HSE on-site managers were present in the HSE drug tent and at all times were available by phone to support the volunteers, event organisers and medical teams as required throughout events.

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Volunteer Training

Three separate training days were delivered online throughout the festival season in 2022. The overall aim of training programme was to ensure that the HSE provided standardised outreach teams for three events, starting with Life Festival in May.

It was central to the training to convey the importance of socio-cultural influence to understand behaviours and patterns of use when responding in festival settings. Based on an evidence review and local research, the Safer Nightlife Campaign and volunteer training programme were based on the specific needs of nightlife populations and subcultural groups, with an aim to remove barriers to health services and engage from a harm minimisation perspective. This area had been extensively reviewed by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office and the Emergency Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group with these reviews utilised to inform the direction of the approach.



The volunteer training programme aimed to prepare participants to have discussions with different types of user groups based on the current drug landscape in Ireland. Similar to the situation across Europe, use patterns in Ireland have significantly changed, with drug use now observed across all social demographics in society and risky patterns such as poly drug use becoming a concern. New populations of people using drugs will have different needs to those currently presenting to traditional Addiction Services. We are aware that populations using in festival spaces are more likely to be third-level students or employed, with some reporting the use of a diverse range of traditional and newer drugs (Ivers et al, 2021). We also know from extensive reviews of drug checking services delivered in festival settings that many attendees will never have engaged with health services regarding their substance use, with interventions in festival spaces being the first time they discussed their use with a professional (Measham, 2019). In relation to the Irish situation, we are mindful that some festival attendees may have never presented to traditional substance use services and as a result may have never received a health intervention relating to their use. Therefore, it was essential for the volunteer programme to understand this group and meet their needs to support the Health Service in developing rapport and a longstanding relationship with this community.

While the underlying skills of drug workers remain the same regardless of the setting, those working in traditional addiction services in Ireland may not encounter drug trends which present in festival or other nightlife spaces. It was essential that the training programme was tailored with a focus on relevant drug trends, subgroup populations and tailored harm reduction information. Topics delivered covered basic pharmacokinetics, review of drug categories and new drug trends, possible contents and how to speak to this community about these drugs in a meaningful way with an aim to encourage harm reduction practices.

The learning objectives for the participants of the training programme were to:

1. Describe different types of drugs and the impact the different drugs have on a person including the risks associated with drug use in the festival environment
2. Recognise and respond to the signs of overdose
3. Deliver harm reduction information
4. Deliver an adapted form brief intervention suited to festival settings
5. Recognise health and mental health difficulties and make appropriate referrals to on-site medics
6. Communicate effectively with on-site medics and other team members
7. Record and report on key information on interactions
8. Demonstrate professional behaviour as a volunteer representative of HSE/drugs.ie

The training plan was developed based on the learning objectives agreed by the Advisory Group. Each volunteer was required to attend the training, which consisted of presentations and group discussions online. Training days were facilitated on the weekend and consisted of a half-day commitment (4-5 hours).

It should be noted that the 'back of house' drug monitoring proposals for Electric Picnic were not agreed among stakeholders in time for inclusion as part of the volunteer training programme in 2022. It was also not possible to adapt and deliver specific training related to this in advance of the event. The 2023 training programme will be amended to include guidance on the delivery of 'back of house' analysis and further support will be provided to volunteers on communicating drug trends and alerts.

About You

- * Pronouns
- * Brief intro about you to your team
- * A skill/experience you are bringing or 1 thing you want to learn?
- * Anything you are really looking forward to from the experience? (Other than the music ☺)

 **DRUGS.ie**
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support

MDMA

Chemical name: 3,4-MethyleneDioxy Methamphetamine

What is it? Synthetic substance first created in 1912 / 70's popularised

Popularity: Rise in popularity with acid house and dance scene, new proliferation of the dance music scene

Consumed: Swallowed, snorted, dabbed, 'dropped'

Some effects: Connection with others, euphoria, well-being, increased heart, increased energy, jaw clenching

Acute risks: Over stimulation/overdose, overheating implications with SSRI medication, serotonin syndrome, over hydration, come down

 **DRUGS.ie**
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support

Ask and Assess

- * Can you tell me a bit about what happens for you when you use cocaine?
- * What would a typical session look like for you? Is it different from your experience this weekend?

 **DRUGS.ie**
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support

Adaptation of SAOR Training

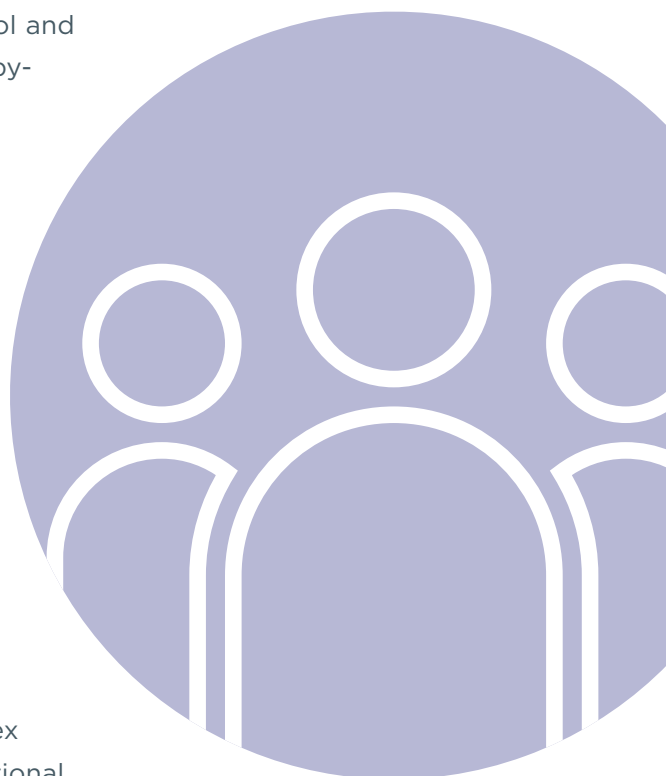
SAOR Screening and Brief Intervention for Problem Alcohol and Substance Use (O’Shea, Goff & Armstrong, 2017) is a step-by-step guide for practice developed in response to problem alcohol and other drug use. Originally developed in 2009 for responding to alcohol use in hospital emergency settings, the successful application of the model led to the addition of problem drug use and the promotion and use of the model in a wide variety of settings, including community, statutory, voluntary, justice, sport and education services.

SAOR is a brief intervention model which uses a person-centred approach based on Motivational Interviewing to have a conversation with a person about their drug or alcohol use. SAOR supports workers from their first point of contact with a person to enable them to deliver brief interventions and then, if necessary, to facilitate those presenting with more complex needs with entry into specialist services in line with the National Drugs Rehabilitation Framework (2010).

SAOR training is delivered through a short eLearning module followed by a one-day skills practice workshop under the guidance of an established SAOR trainer. It was not possible to fully incorporate the SAOR training programme into the volunteer training plan and it was recognised that the volunteers may not be in the position to deliver a brief intervention at each event. It was also recognised that volunteers who are project workers may already have brief intervention skills which would be identified through the EOI process

A short overview of SAOR in the context of festival settings was tailored and delivered specifically for this volunteer training plan. This was to give the volunteers some basic skills to create a safe space to talk about drug and alcohol use and to:

- **Be understanding and empathic**
- **Ask how we can be of help at events**
- **Respect festival attendees opinions and decisions**
- **Get welfare or medical help if necessary for someone’s safety**





Outreach

A total of 60 hours outreach were provided by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office and volunteers over three events from May to September 2022.

The volunteer outreach roles and schedules varied based on the tailored agreements with organisers. As per the HSE Festival Volunteer Policy, outreach was provided in pairs of two. The outreach pairs were developed based on skillsets to ensure greater diversity was provided when interacting with the public. This approach also proved to help volunteers engage in peer based knowledge exchange to learn from each other as part of the programme.

Outreach was provided throughout the both campsites and music arenas at all events. At one event, the volunteers were embedded within the wider safety plans and were provided with radios with a direct link to medics so they could report cases of concern if they were to emerge. Through this approach, by embedding the volunteer programme within wider medical and operational structures, information from the public on drug trends, patterns of use and concerns gathered on outreach was used to inform planning for the medical team regularly throughout the festival. Moving forward, the HSE would recommend that the programme is adapted in this manner at all events they attend so greater knowledge exchange occurs.

Volunteer Feedback

Volunteer input, learning and development are important components of the HSE Safer Nightlife Programme. All volunteer feedback which was communicated orally at events, through email and through follow up surveys have been reviewed and will be considered as part of overall improvements for the 2023 programme.

A follow up survey (Appendix 4) was shared with volunteers to obtain their feedback on the training programme, HSE resources, their experience of outreach and general engagement with the public. Additional questions were included in the survey for Electric Picnic volunteers to review the pilot 'back of house' drug monitoring programme. A total of 19 responses were submitted from volunteers who worked across three different events.

Training

Overall, volunteers were satisfied with the training and support they received from the HSE National Social Inclusion Office throughout the duration of the programme which is reflected in survey feedback.

In terms of the main objectives to prepare volunteers to deliver drug information and harm reduction, the majority of the volunteers felt that they could deliver information about different types of drugs following the training. Similarly, the majority felt they could deliver harm reduction interventions following the training (73% strongly agree).

The nature of working at live events means that interactions need to be short and concise.

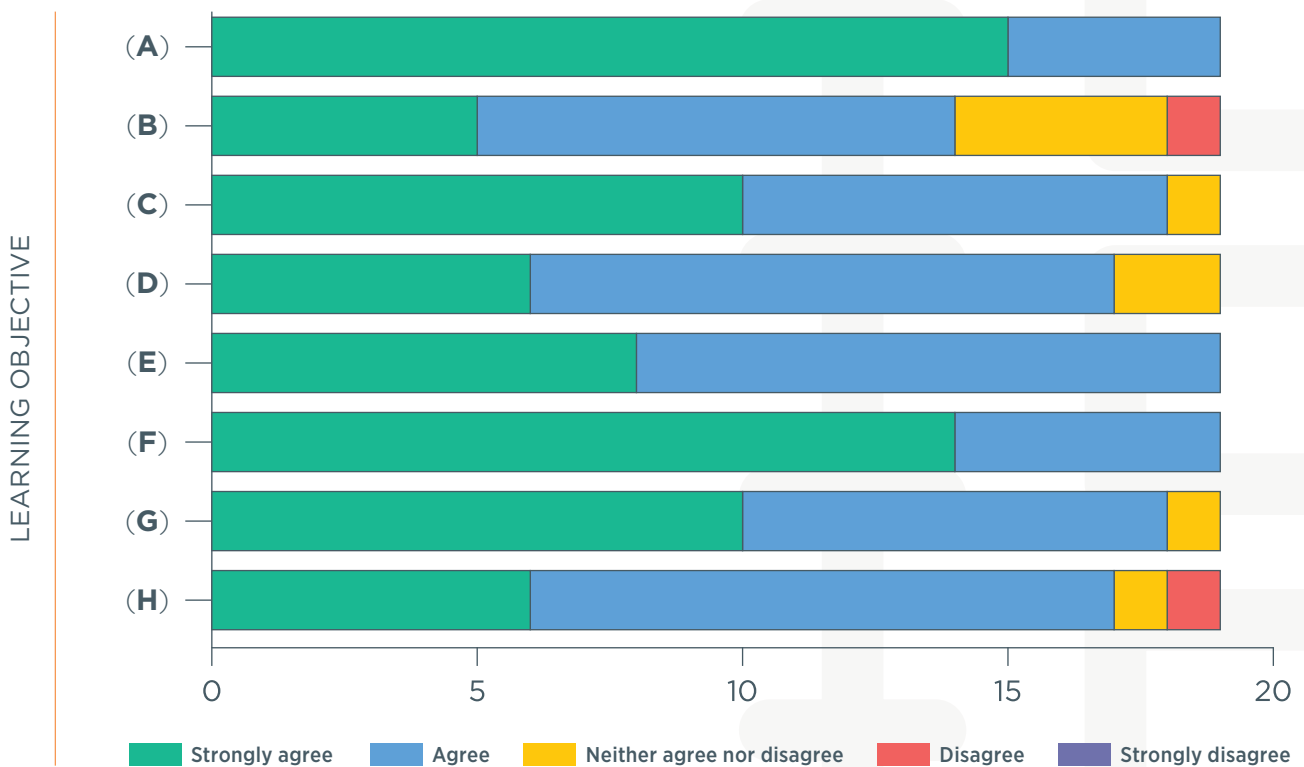


The training provided oversight on short, non-judgemental interactions through an adaptation of the HSE programme SAOR.

While the volunteers were not acting as first responders at events, it was important that they were prepared to identify, offer support and sign post if drug and mental health emergencies were to emerge. Training was facilitated to support volunteers to recognise and respond to the signs of overdose as well as the signs and symptoms of mental health concern.

All training objectives were reviewed based on feedback received in the volunteer survey. Overall, the survey showed that volunteers (n=19) either agreed or strongly agreed that they were prepared to deliver outreach following the training in line with our objectives.

All recommended areas of improvement will be considered and we greatly thank our volunteers for taking the time to provide this feedback.



(A) I was able to demonstrate professional behaviour as a volunteer representative of HSE/drugs.ie.

(B) I was able to record and report on key information on interactions.

(C) I was able to communicate effectively with on-site medics and other team members.

(D) I was able to recognise health and mental health difficulties and make appropriate referrals to on-site medics.

(E) I was able to deliver a brief intervention.

(F) I was able to deliver harm reduction information.

(G) I was able to recognise and respond to the signs of overdose.

(H) I was able to describe different types of drugs and the impact the different drugs have on a person including the risks associated with drug use in the festival environment.

What worked well in the training?

The 2022 Festival Harm Reduction Volunteers came from a diverse range of backgrounds such as substance use professionals, psychologists, pharmacists and youth workers. We also had a number of students and nightlife peers involved with the programme. This meant that there were various degrees of knowledge and skills among the group. Based on this, there was different feedback in terms of the training needs. Overall, common themes on “what worked well” as part of the training were based on the information provided about different types of drugs, volunteers felt supported throughout the training and that they could ask questions and share opinion and their own personal knowledge among the group. Input was warmly welcomed from a festival Safety Coordinator and previous festival volunteers, which will be an approach we implement in the 2023 training. Of the more experienced volunteers, it was important for them that they knew they’re limited with the role in festivals so they could adapt their skills, an area which will be prioritised as part of the 2023 training programme.

“They actively encouraged any questions that anyone had and I was even learning on site during my shifts”

“The staff were incredibly knowledgeable, patient and professional”

“This was my first harm reduction event and I felt through the training I was able to provide exceptional service to anyone that needed help or anyone that wanted to have a conversation about drugs and or harm reduction

“Trainers are very informative and made the information about each class of drugs easy to understand

“Having volunteers from previous festivals speak about their experiences was helpful and gave a good insight into what to expect”

“Supportive approach , boundaries were clarified and role definition clearly set out”

“Supportive atmosphere amongst peers & trainers- made it easy to ask Qs and have discussions”

“The training was very professional and the information was very up to date and current, I think next year it will be even better given that findings from the previous year will be available to present and discuss”

“The information on the different types of drugs and their effects was very useful and the guidance on what to do in different scenarios, especially in utilising the medical tents as it assured you that you were not expected to give medical interventions but rather direct people towards the help they needed”

What did not work well in the training?

It is important for us to review constructive feedback from volunteers to improve the 2023 training and outreach programme.

Based on feedback, additional areas will be added to the training to provide support on queries which may arise. The training will now be held as a full day training in person as opposed to online and additional support will be provided to new or less experienced volunteers, should they feel they require it.

“Possibly not enough for individuals with little to no experience in the field. This was not an issue on site as experienced team members were paired with less experienced team members. However, additional training may have benefitted if I was very new to the field”

“While it was efficient having the training on zoom, as I had not been involved in the program before it would have been nice to have it in person so I could meet the other volunteers”

“Being online it was hard to keep focused the whole time, particularly as there was a lot of information condensed into a short period of time”

“Providing some prior reading to prepare before people attend the training would be beneficial I think (although no guarantee that people will read it, but just might help retain/follow the info if they do!)”

“There was some emphasis on getting the friend of a person who may need medical help involved in this process and to come with them. However no aspect on what to do when the friend is doing the opposite to this and is intervening negatively and not co-operating where their friend may need medical care”

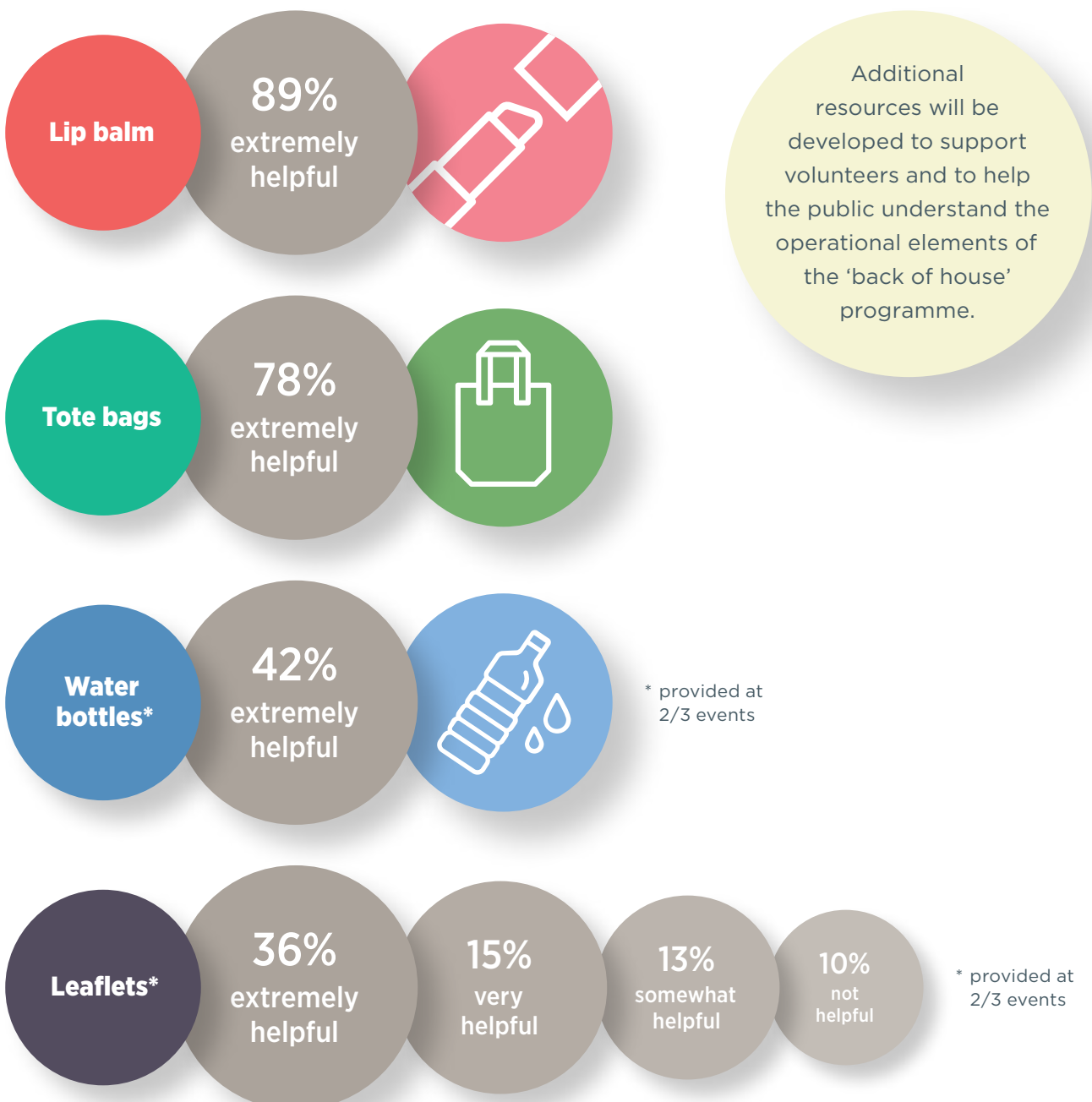
“A lot of technical/ medical info about drugs. It was interesting but I think some more basic information might have been better”

Resources

The HSE developed a series of different posters, booklets, pocket cards and merchandise for volunteers to use at events to support their roles and to initiate discussion. Merchandise included lip balms, tote bags, water bottles and rain ponchos. The dissemination of resources and merchandise varied per event based on their internal environmental policies.

The 2022 materials have proved hugely successful with the public. Based on public and volunteer feedback, the HSE will continue to use their 2020 resources and merchandise. Further, the HSE will review new additions to their resources and the use of screens within their tent to convey messages at events where leaflets cannot be disseminated.

Volunteer feedback: How useful were resources for interacting with festival attendees?



Common discussions about drugs and drug trends

One of the main objectives of the volunteer programme was to engage with the public to provide a high level of drug information so attendees can make informed decisions about their behaviours and patterns of use.

Most often, volunteer engagement related to attendees obtaining resources or merchandise. Festival attendees were extremely receptive to the programme's approach and attendees were keen to know how they can share information to help others throughout the campsites.

Queries generally related to people asking what they needed to know about drugs in general, seeking what advice was needed for those planning to use drugs and they could generally look after themselves and their friends for the duration of the event. It is also worth noting that in some situations people would seek advice on how to avoid use.

Throughout the three events, MDMA, cocaine, ketamine, cannabis and alcohol appeared to be the drugs most commonly discussed with volunteers, often in combination.

“A lot of people told us they were taking stimulants of some kind. We spoke about dosage in regards to this and not mixing this with other substances. We spoke about how the stimulants they were using had very different effects”

“Most people we spoke to were using alcohol with either one or both MDMA or ket”

“Concerns re “E” tablets. General harm reduction ideas discussed “low and slow” was an excellent slogan. Questions re what we were doing and why we were doing it, a few concerns re garda presence”

“Ecstasy was popular and people were interested in talking about types and dosage. Practical tips like eating regularly, staying hydrated and getting some sleep as well as the ‘start low, go slow’ motto were well received. Many people asked about the possibility of testing their own drugs which often led to good conversations about the value of this and other harm reduction strategies”.

While stimulants remained a dominant theme, feedback from the 2022 pilot identifies the need for tailored information on both psychedelics and dissociative type drugs with some volunteers requesting more detailed information on these topics to support their roles.

Some niche and novel discussions did emerge across the three events showing the potential of this style of outreach to reach hidden groups such as those consuming new psychoactive substances. This is evident by a number of new psychoactive substances and psychedelics being deposited in the HSE drug surrender bins at Electric Picnic. Overall, within the Irish festival scene, ketamine appears to be substance increasing in popularity based on discussions on outreach, particularly among younger populations, with a noticeable knowledge gap among attendees on risks and strategies to minimise harms.



“People seemed comfortable in their knowledge of alcohol, ecstasy tablets and cannabis. There seemed to be a lack of knowledge about ketamine, MDMA and no one I spoke to had heard of GHB. Almost everyone I spoke to knew someone who was taking ketamine and many spoke of seeing people go into ‘a K-Hole’, where they were unable to fully control the use of their limbs and appeared disorientated”.

Similar to what we have identified in research on festival substance use patterns (Ivers et al, 2021) volunteer discussions identified a common theme of poly substance use across Irish festivals. Often people were unaware of drug interactions or the dangers associated with how they consume substances as part of a poly drug pattern. A main aim of the programme moving forward should therefore focus on supporting the public to minimise the number of substances consumed.

“Trends on outreach interactions were large amounts of alcohol mixed with cannabis and ecstasy/mdma. Main topics were around the welcome of the new back of house approach (what was coming up so far), the harm reduction message of start low, go slow and sign posting to tent”

“Main trends I noticed were increased use of ketamine and cocaine, and powders generally. Lots of mixing between drugs and mixing with alcohol also”

“A lot of young people were not knowledgeable about drugs, but were at the festival to experiment and to take drugs. Several young people had planned on taking MDMA but stated if they could not get it they would take another drug offered to them even if they were unsure of the effects of this drug. Several young people I spoke with were unaware of the dangers of mixing alcohol and drugs”.

Concern was raised by the public at all events in relation to the contents of drugs, certain reactions and the need to access substance analysis services. At two events, no substance analysis was available on-site to support the public and medics. The harm reduction volunteers were well positioned to act as a point of contact between the medics and the public to review patterns of concern emerging among attendees.

The provision of harm reduction interventions

Based on interactions across events, it was obvious that it was the first time that many young people were being provided with drug information materials and health information on the topic of substances. Many wanted to discuss drugs in general, their friends or wider community with an aim to bring materials from the Drugs.ie Tent to help educate others. The resources and approach selected by the HSE was generally welcomed, with many young people thanking volunteers for dedicating their time to support people on the topic. There was various degrees of information disseminated and interventions delivered across the three events with some conversations being more detailed than others. Given the fast paced nature of the festival environment, it was important for volunteers to convey key harm reduction messaging in a brief timeframe to ensure key and necessary messages were circulated widely. Resources and merchandise were used to initiate conversation which otherwise may not have emerged organically among volunteers

and attendees. Overall, the public at events welcomed the volunteers and provided them with positive feedback.

“People told us that they felt more safe that we were there and understood that the safest route is not taking drugs at all. However, you cannot stop people from consuming substances and everyone had a story about someone they loved being harmed from dodgy gear or not having harm reduction services at these events”

While it is difficult to measure and record the impact of interventions throughout campsites at large events, the interactions recorded through volunteer feedback indicate that their presence had an impact on reducing stigma, health discussion and access of medical services as well as encouraging harm minimisation practices.

“I had several people approach us to inform us of someone potentially feeling unwell that they did not know. They knew they could come to us and because of this we were able to provide a more safe environment. We were able to efficiently check in with the attendees to make sure they were okay, some of them were by themselves having a lie down in the middle of the campsite”

“You could tell we all had a huge impact and loads of people just thanked us for being there even if they told us they were only consuming alcohol and no other drug”

“People spoke about practical harm reduction tips being helpful. For example, remembering to eat, drink water and when using drugs, starting low and going slow was the most popular, well received piece of information. People really liked to talk about this point”

One main area of discussion which arose for volunteers throughout events was the misconception that they will be removed from the event or prosecuted if they access medical services following the consumption of substances. At each event, situations emerged for volunteers where they had to support and reassure attendees to access the medical tent when they or a friend appeared unwell following use. In some cases, the public reported the benefits of being reassured by supporting volunteers who met them with a non-judgemental approach which helped motivate people in some cases.

“Many people didn’t know that the medics wouldn’t call the police”

“It was more making them aware the tent was there and what the service was about and promoting the start low/go slow guidance.”

Fear of prosecution was one issue identified in Irish research on festival drug use (Ivers et al., 2021). In response, the HSE have developed a series of resources titled ‘Medics are your mates’ as well as badges for medics ‘Talk to me about drugs’, but recognise that further work is required on this area in 2023 to reassure the public to get help in medical situations.

At each event, volunteer feedback highlights the need for drug analysis with requests for the expansion of this service communicated from the public.

“Almost everyone we talked to wanted or needed a drug testing service”

The HSE 'Back of house' drug monitoring pilot

The use of 'surrender bins' positioned within a HSE and medical tent was chosen as the preferred approach by event organisers and Gardaí for the pilot 'back of house' drug checking programme at Electric Picnic. Central to the pilot was agreement with the HSE and An Garda Síochána that these spaces would remain as health-led settings, meaning that law enforcement would have no involvement unless necessary, such as situations of violence or threat towards staff or the public. Therefore, people could attend, discuss substance use and securely submit substances, should they wish. This agreement with An Garda Síochána was successfully upheld throughout the weekend as people attended the HSE tent to surrender substances.

However, a negative article with inaccuracies published online in a popular culture magazine (later retracted) in the lead up to the implementation of the pilot, was named as one of the main challenges by volunteers for them to overcome with festival attendees.

"There was mistrust due to the misinformation that spread around. Lots of festival participants telling us it was a "trap" and that the police would be there. Many people did not fully understand what we were doing. Potential promotion before the festivals would help this"

"They believed that the police would be there to catch people. Also participants did not want to give up their substances"

"The fact that there was a mistrust in regards to the drug bin. Most people believed that they would be asked to leave the festival or confronted or followed by security, or the police if they were to hand drugs into the HSE tent"

Volunteer outreach across the event was essential to help reassure the public about the operational plans for the pilot monitoring programme. Overall, the majority of questions for volunteers related to law enforcement and access of the bin as a result of media communications. To overcome these issues in 2023, a series of resources and media campaign will be developed to discuss the 'back of house' operational plans.



What were the main questions you received about the 'back of house' drug monitoring programme?

100%

About law enforcement and access

50%

How 'back of house' approach works

50%

About the drugs found/harm reduction

25%

Communication of results - where to get information

38%

Why 'back of house' was selected as approach

38%

How and where to access drop box

Partnership with festivals and their support sharing risk communications has proven an important mechanism as part of the programme to quickly reach attendees with health messages. Volunteers reported that festival screens appeared to be the most commonly reported channel where attendees saw alerts. However, it should be acknowledged that not all events in Ireland will have the capacity to share messages on large screens throughout the event and therefore the development targeted approaches such as mobile risk communication applications will be considered by the HSE.

Based on interactions, where did attendees discuss seeing drug alerts?

100%
Festival screens

63%
Festival app

25%
Social media

13%
Mainstream media

13%
HSE volunteers



Further observations from the HSE, relevant stakeholders such as Gardaí, festival organisers, medics and volunteers will be collated to improve the delivery of the 2023 'back of house' drug monitoring programme.



2023 Actions

- **Establish Festival Oversight Group:**
In line with recommendations from the HSE Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group Report, develop a festival oversight group chaired by HSE Emergency Management with an aim to provide guidance on drug responses and safety in festival settings.
- **Expand the HSE online campaign and improve communications from May – September:**
Increase awareness of the programme through frequent engagement with the public. Develop resources based on the trends identified by volunteers as well as detailed media communication plans and materials to explain the operational and logistical components of the ‘back of house’ drug monitoring system.
- **Continue to expand the HSE Safer Nightlife Volunteer Programme:**
Utilise stakeholder and volunteer feedback to further develop programme and support volunteers.
- **Formalise HSE training programme for those working in nightlife settings:**
Explore partnership with an academic institution to develop the HSE training as formal training for those working in the night-time economy, HSE volunteers and those who with deliver health and harm reduction responses across nightlife settings.
- **Expand ‘back of house’ analysis:**
Partner with a minimum of 3 festivals to deliver ‘back of house’ drug monitoring.
- **Increase visibility at events:**
Review placement of volunteer teams and surrender bins at event to maximise engagement based on volunteer feedback.
- **Review the development of a drug alert application for festival season 2024.**
- **Review expansion of harm reduction to wider nightlife settings in partnership with the Department of Health and Department of Culture.**

Appendices

Appendix 1

Expression of Interest Form

Please only complete and submit if you are available to attend (festival name and date)

Volunteer teams will be selected based on HSE review of the below application form. We ask that you complete all sections within the form to highlight your suitability for the post.

Please note, due to high volumes of applications, all may not be successful.

Please complete all sections below and return it to xxx no later than close of business on xxx

Name

Email

Phone

Why are you interested in
volunteering?

What are the strengths you feel you
will bring to this volunteer post?

Have you experience of:

- Working with people who use drugs
- Held a welfare related post or
- Worked in a festival or nightlife setting?

Please give short description of your
experience.

Or

Are you a peer who understands
health and social issues relating to
drug use in the festival setting?

Please give short description on
applying this experience to festival
settings.

Please provide details of your current
role within this drug and alcohol
service. (Including job spec and length
of time in this role)

CONTINUED →

Expression of Interest Form (continued)

If working outside of drug and alcohol services (for example, nightlife professional, student union officer, mental health services, medical services etc) but feel your role is of relevance to this volunteer post, please provide details of your role. (Including job spec and length of time in this role)

Have you done first aid training?
If yes, when was the last course you attended?

Are you available to attend a full day training on Saturday 13th August?

Are you committed to working within HSE Festival Policy which includes a 'can do' attitude and being sober for the duration of the festival?

Have you undergone other relevant training or volunteer posts which you feel may benefit your role as a volunteer in festival settings?

Volunteer Schedule

Do you have preferred dates and shift times for the weekend?

Please select availability below

Date: Friday

Y/N

Date: Saturday

Y/N

Date: Sunday

Y/N

Appendix 2

Volunteer Agreement to participate in the Drugs.ie Safer Nightlife Pilot Programme at xxx Festival 2022

Volunteers are an important and valued part of this pilot programme. We are committed to promoting positive, mutually beneficial volunteering arrangements that meet the needs of service users, the volunteer and the organisation.

This agreement tells you what you can expect from us, and what we hope from you.

Volunteer Name:

Title of the volunteering role:

Harm reduction Worker, Safer Nightlife Programme

Supervisor name and role:

Nicki Killeen, Project Manager HSE

Volunteer shifts

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Tasks to be Undertaken

Create a welcoming and safe space for people to talk about drugs

Provide high quality drug information in festival settings relative to that community, including the communication of the latest drug trends of concern and poly drug interactions

Deliver brief interventions to encourage safer choices

Offer non-judgemental support and information to festival attendees at a designated site and through outreach

Identify cases of concern and respond appropriately by either sign posting to medical services or contacting medical services where necessary

In cases of emergency, call for medical help

Gather information and report to the HSE on interactions/ discussions and drug issues arising at the event for further evaluation

Communicate emerging drug trend information and alerts identified by the pilot back of house drug monitoring programme on-site

CONTINUED →

Volunteer Agreement to participate in the Drugs.ie Safer Nightlife Pilot Programme at xxx Festival 2022 (continued)

In line with our Volunteer Policy, the HSE National Social Inclusion Office affirms your right:

- To know what is expected from you
- To be offered appropriate training
- To have your voluntary contribution recognised
- To receive support from a HSE Manager
- To know who to go to if there is a problem
- To be able to activity contribute your knowledge to the pilot review and inclusion in future work in this area
- To be able to make mistakes and learn from them
- To be treated fairly and not to experience discrimination
- To be able to say 'no' and to leave without feeling guilty
- To be consulted with and kept informed of changes within the organisation.

I, _____ agree to do my best:

- To help fulfil aims and objectives of the Safer Nightlife Programme at Electric Picnic Festival 2022.
- To perform my volunteer role to the best of my ability
- To uphold professional boundaries in the festival setting
- To follow HSE rules and procedures, including health and safety, equal opportunities and confidentiality
- To abide by the Volunteer Policy.

Volunteers will not engage with the media on any aspect of their role or experience as part of the HSE volunteer team. Volunteers will not post details of interactions with festival attendees, including drug emergencies or emerging trends, on social media. The communication of emergencies will be managed by the festival organisers, An Garda Síochána and HSE Communications. This is to protect the identities of all involved and to facilitate appropriate and accurate communication.

The HSE may, at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to end volunteers' relationships with the organisation. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to end their relationship with the HSE. Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

Note: this agreement is in honour only and is not intended to be a legally binding contract

Signature of volunteer: _____

Date: _____

Signature of supervisor: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3

Volunteer Survey Questions

SECTION 1: TRAINING

1. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to describe different types of drugs and the impact the different drugs have on a person including the risks associated with drug use in the festival environment.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to recognise the signs of drug overdose.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to deliver harm reduction information.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to deliver a brief intervention.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Volunteer Survey Questions (continued)

5. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to recognise health and mental health difficulties

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to communicate effectively with on-site medics and other team members.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to record and report on key information on interactions and drug trends

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. Please rate the following statement:

Following training, I was able to demonstrate professional behaviour as a volunteer representative of HSE/drugs.ie.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. What worked well in the training?

10. What did not work well in the training?

11. What could be included or improved in this training in 2023?

Volunteer Survey Questions (continued)

SECTION 2: RESOURCES

1. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: Lip balm

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

2. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: Tote bags

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

3. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: High-vis vests

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

4. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: T-shirts

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

5. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: Leaflets

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

Volunteer Survey Questions (continued)

6. Please rate the following resources regarding their usefulness for interacting with festival participants: Posters

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful

7. In your opinion, were there resources that the public needed which were not provided?

SECTION 3: DRUG TRENDS

- 1. What were the main topics/themes and drug trends you identified emerging at EP Festival based on your interactions with festival participants?**
- 2. Were there any issues presenting that you found challenging at EP Festival?**

SECTION 4: BACK OF HOUSE PILOT MONITORING

We would appreciate your feedback on the first pilot 'back of house' drug monitoring which was part of this programme at EP

1. How would you rate the first pilot 'back of house' monitoring?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

2. Based on your interactions, were attendees aware of the 'back of house' programme?

3. What were the main questions you received about the 'back of house' drug monitoring programme?

- About law enforcement and access
- How and where to access drop box
- Why 'back of house' was selected as an approach
- How a 'back of house' approach works
- Communication of results - where to get information
- About the drugs found/harm reduction
- Unknown/not discussed

CONTINUED →

Volunteer Survey Questions (continued)

4. Based on interactions, where did attendees discuss seeing drug alerts?

- Festival screens
- Festival app
- HSE volunteers
- Social media
- Mainstream media
- Unknown/not discussed

Please provide feedback on what you feel could be improved as part of the 'drug monitoring' pilot programme for 2023 implementation? _____

SECTION 5: ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

1. Based on your experience, how do you feel this overall harm reduction outreach programme can be improved, if we could support you in other ways, or any other feedback you feel would be useful for us to know for 2023?
2. Please rate your overall experience volunteering at EP Festival:
 - Very satisfied
 - Somewhat satisfied
 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - Somewhat dissatisfied
 - Very dissatisfied

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