

DanceSafe

MAPS speaks with DanceSafe Board President Bryan Oley

www.dancesafe.org

DanceSafe's 28 chapters and affiliates in the United States and Canada consist of young people from within the dance culture itself who have a sincere interest in bettering their communities and educating themselves and their peers. Volunteers staff harm reduction booths at raves, nightclubs, and other dance events where they provide information on drugs, safer sex, and additional health and safety issues concerning the electronic dance community. DanceSafe also provides adulterant screening or "pill testing" services for Ecstasy users. Pill testing is an important harm reduction service that saves lives and reduces medical emergencies by helping ecstasy users avoid fake and adulterated tablets that often contain substances far more dangerous than MDMA.

What does DanceSafe think about drug education; are there any programs or approaches it endorses?

DRUG EDUCATION is our primary goal and it is the most effective tool we use. We believe people make healthier decisions about engaging in risky activities if they have access to accurate information about risks. Though we primarily focus on drug use and safety concerns such as heat stroke and hearing loss, we also provide information and peer counseling for many life issues that may relate to drug use.

Our approach is a combination of harm reduction and popular education methods. We receive many requests asking how schools, government agencies, and cities around the world can implement their own youth-driven harm reduction organizations. While harm reduction requires an individualized approach that caters to the specific needs of a local community, we provide new groups a base to start from.

Do you have age limits or requirements related to who can be a volunteer or have a position of leadership in your organization?

Chapters set their own age requirements and limits. DanceSafe as a national organization requires that the group founders be 18 or older, so they can sign chapter bylaws and be in a better position to handle situations that may arise when dealing with local authorities and health groups. Most chapters do allow volunteers under 18, with signed forms indicating permission of their parents. We also encourage chapters to limit pill testing to volunteers over 18.

What laws do you think there should be regarding young people and drugs? Do you have any thoughts about the age of consent, or any distinctions made between different psychoactives or classes of psychoactives?

DanceSafe's commitment to harm reduction principles means we recognize every individual's right to choose for themselves what activities they participate in. However, there must be a balance between safety and risk when dealing with potentially harmful activities. We refrain from taking a specific policy stance on issues unless we feel that the specific issue may influence the safety and health of our patrons.

As for distinctions between different psychoactives or classes of psychoactives, DanceSafe believes that government tendencies to blur the distinctions between drugs limits users' ability to accurately gauge the risks involved with drugs that are similarly grouped but produce widely varying effects.

What kind of feedback, breakthroughs, or insights have you had with regard to the involvement of minors in your organization?

The continual influx of youth into our organization brings new ideas and perspectives, and we are constantly reminded of how much more worldly today's youth are compared to previous generations. Frequently we come across 14- or 15-year-olds who are considering experimenting with drugs or who have friends who are experimenting with drugs. Peer pressures and a lack of resources means they often depend on rumors for information about drugs. We find, after they attend a few meetings, they begin presenting health and safety information to their friends. As a member of their peer group, they gain more respect on drug issues than an older "authority figure" has. •