

Setting Up a New Drug Checking Service

Challenges, requirements and
valuable experiences

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26/09/2018

Trustee for



Contents

- What is “The Loop”
- Gaining public and political support
 - Using the media advantageously
- Exploiting new technology
- The importance of data & research

All reflecting The Loop’s experience



What is “The Loop”?

- Started in 2013
- Non-profit, non-government organisation
- Volunteer driven
- “Focused on reducing harm and enhancing health and wellbeing through the night-time economy and leisure industry”



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What is “The Loop”?

Achieved using:

- Welfare provision
- General training for event staff
- Specialist drug education training
- Education of partygoers
- Drug safety testing



Not quite that simple

- Drug safety testing is a core part of the service
- A new concept in the UK
 - Unfortunately still controversial
- Government policy is abstinence focused
- Initially we were precariously placed
 - Despite this, we are still here

“Drugs can devastate lives, ruin families and damage communities. Our approach remains clear that we must prevent drug use and support people through treatment and recovery.


No illegal drug can be assumed to be safe and there is no safe way to take them.”



The Loop's Strategy - Starting

- Working *with* authorities from the beginning
- Not presenting as an opposing force
- Important because there is no licence for The Loop's work
- Slow & steady, starting with amnesty testing only
 - demonstrate professionalism and expertise
 - results to issue alerts

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The screenshot shows a news article from the Daily Post. The header is dark blue with the 'DAILY POST' logo in white. Below the header is a 'NEWS' tag. The article title is 'Why police boss thinks drug users should get to test their substances at clubs and festivals'. The sub-headline reads 'Arfon Jones says there are safety reasons for introducing testing'. There are social media share icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email. The author is 'Shane Brennan', a Local Democracy Reporter, and the date is '16:49, 26 MAR 2018'. At the bottom of the article is a video player showing a man in a suit and glasses, with a 'Watch again' button and a circular arrow icon.

DAILY POST

NEWS

Why police boss thinks drug users should get to test their substances at clubs and festivals

Arfon Jones says there are safety reasons for introducing testing

SHARE     

By [Shane Brennan](#) Local Democracy Reporter
16:49, 26 MAR 2018


Watch again

(Article from 2018)

Starting technology

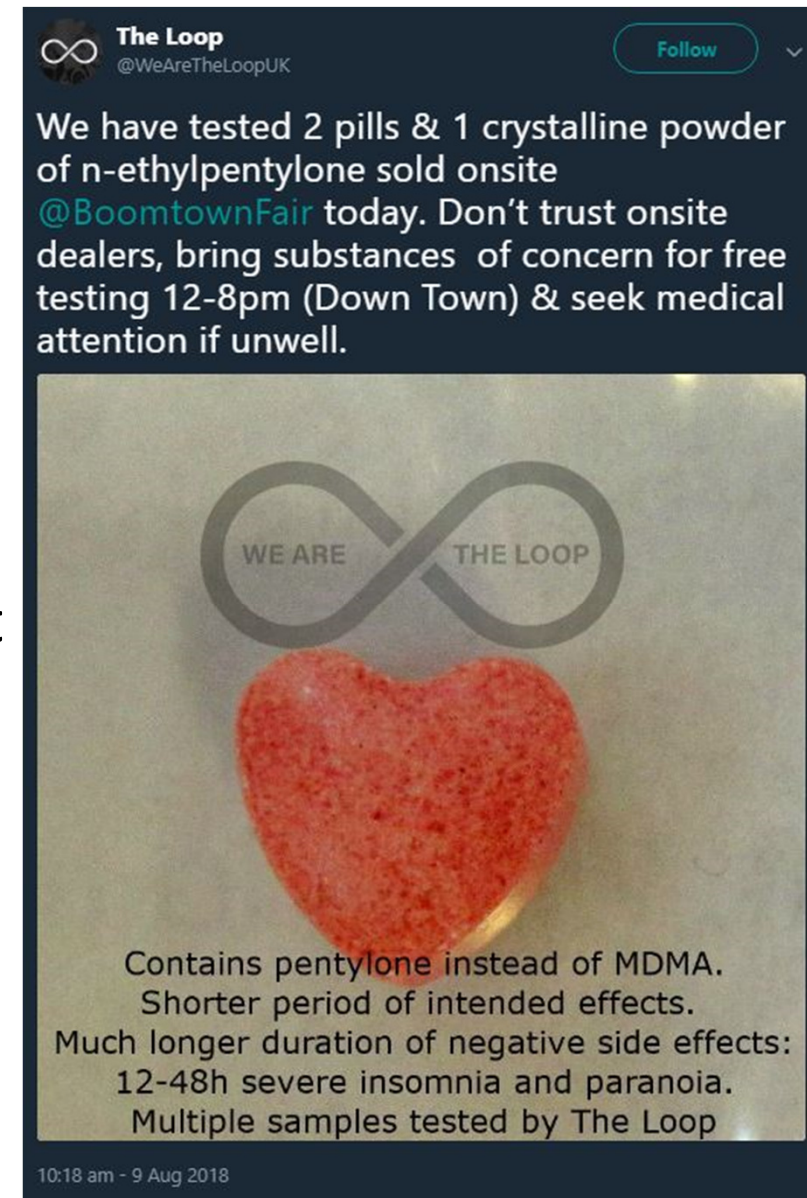
- Fiona first worked with the UK Home Office to see their testing
- Inspired to use the same FT-Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy technology
 - Not used by any other drug checking organisation at the time
- Turned out to have ideal compromise of cost, accuracy and speed
 - Enough accuracy to be able to give a compelling healthcare consultation
 - Enough speed to give 100s of consultations/day



The Loop's Strategy - Media

- Alerts aim to warn the public about “substances of unusual concern”
 - 2013 was the start of 200-300mg pills in the UK
- Carefully considered
- With the agreement of police, medics, event
 - Always working with, not against

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Effective drug alerts

- Specific and actionable
 - No “bad drugs on site, don’t take drugs”
- Avoid fear-mongering
- Including photo where appropriate
 - Don’t overstate importance of appearance – telling people to avoid brown crystals ignores the fact that something dangerous could be any colour
- Factually correct

Fear is a bad counsellor: bit.ly/2oWiVi5

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The Loop
@WeAreTheLoopUK

Follow

"Smiley" and "Hofmann" LSD blotter sold on site @BoomtownFair actually containing much higher risk: 25x-NBOMe (significant overdose risk) and DOx (12-24h duration). Speak to @ChillWelfare if you are feeling unwell on site - all festival staff are here to keep you safe. #LoopAlert



Actual contents:
25x-NBOMe
10 hour duration with significant overdose risk.



Both sold as: LSD

No LSD Detected



Actual contents:
DOx - up to 48 hour duration of strong psychedelic effects. Higher risk of physical discomfort.



Media

- Journalists very interested in drug testing
- Important to make sure that they understand the service
 - Done by selecting journalists who want to understand it and aren't looking for a "Drug panic" scoop
- Started to build a list of journalists who will represent the service fairly
- Offering press releases to these people by priority
- Use of AP newswire journalists was valuable for first event

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Media

- Media has become somewhat of an insurance policy
 - If the loop has already won in the “court of public opinion” then the chance of the government *pushing* for a police intervention is lower
 - Obviously not impunity
- Press involvement has expedited political progress
 - ACMD takes many years to progress legislation
 - The Loop has started from 0 to a point where politicians are fighting our corner

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News > UK > Home News

Government will not 'stand in the way' of drug testing at festivals, says Home Office

‘Clarity from the government is a win, but we can go even further. Let’s make it a requirement that festivals and, if possible, nightclubs, have to ensure there is drug safety testing available’

Mattha Busby | @matthabusby | Monday 9 July 2018 12:00 |



[News](#) › [UK](#) › [Home News](#)

Drug-testing facilities should be used at all UK festivals after Mutiny deaths, urge experts

'We find that about half of the people we see then go on to throw away their drugs or take less – if you identify adulterated drugs people don't take them'

Mattha Busby | [@matthabusby](#) |
Tuesday 29 May 2018 16:04 | [28 comments](#)



Today's strategy

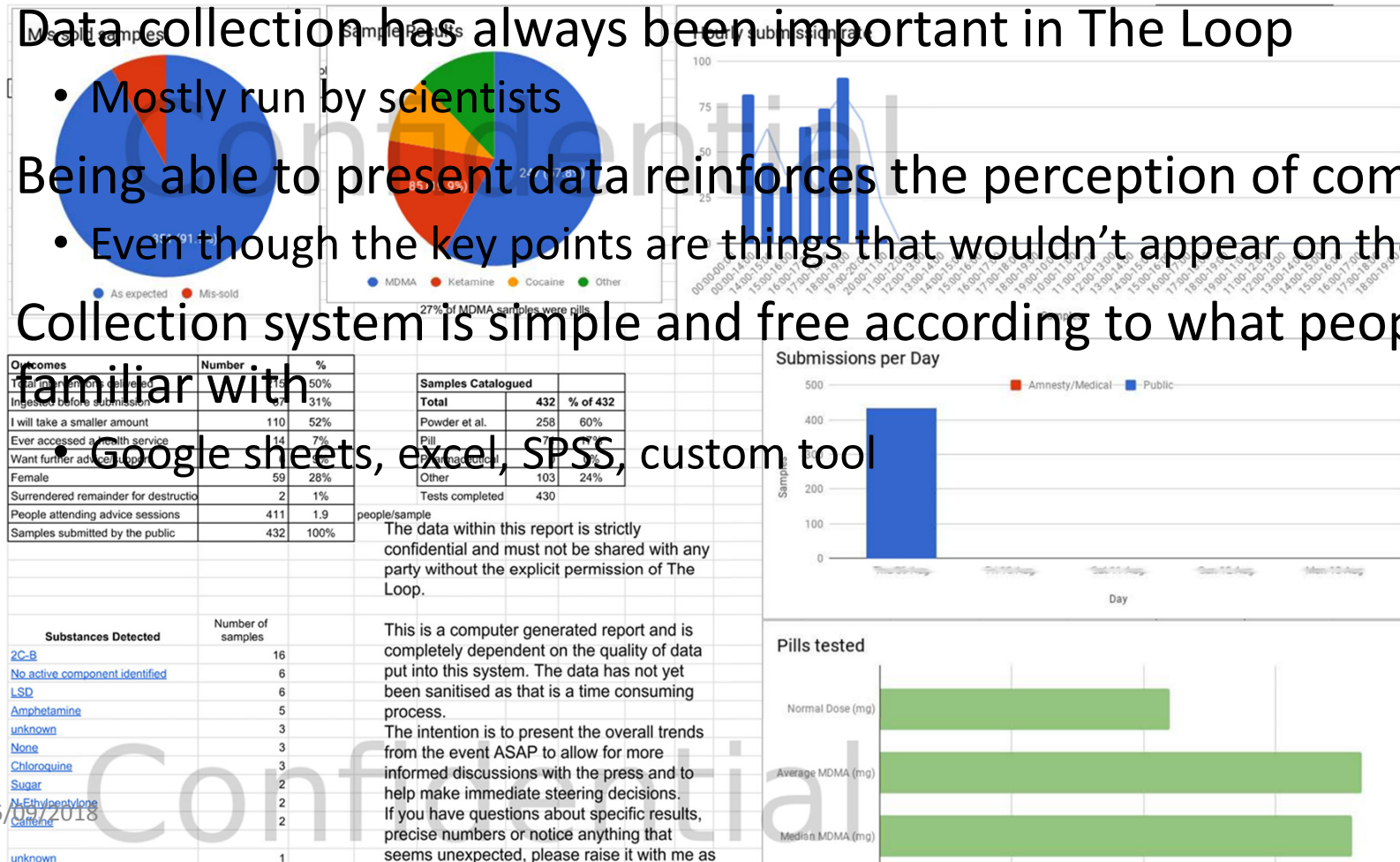
- The Loop is increasingly seen as a viable option
 - Sometimes seen as a panic button after a tragedy
 - Some calls for safety testing to be a licence requirement
- Very limited information is given to the press
 - 1 or two stats from each festival
- Peer-reviewed research is increasingly being asked for
 - UK government won't accept research from other EU countries
 - Already-published data may be rejected from scientific journals

Data & research

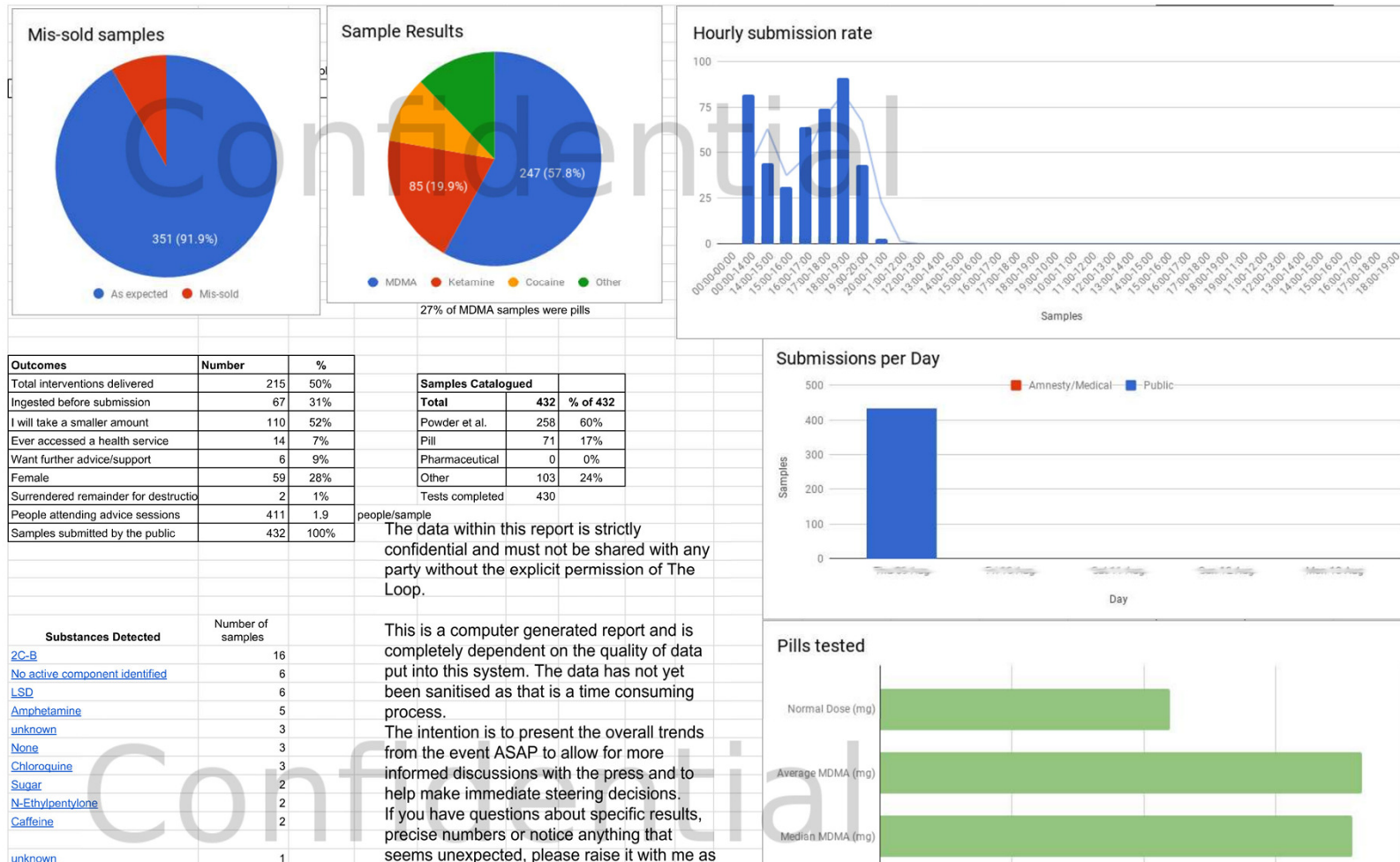
- Data collection has always been important in The Loop
 - Mostly run by scientists
- Being able to present data reinforces the perception of competence
 - Even though the key points are things that wouldn't appear on the template
- Collection system is simple and free according to what people are

Familiar with

- Google sheets, excel, SPSS, custom tool



Example report



Final pointers

- Framing is important
 - Increasingly “drug counselling with testing” rather than just testing
 - Benefit of properly crediting healthcare workers
- Emphasis of high qualifications of volunteers
- Always working with, not against
- Events are willing to contribute financially



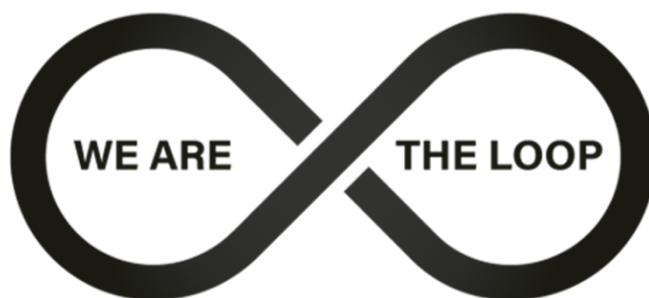
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WWW.NIGHTS-CONFERENCE.ORG



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Questions?

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