

UK music festivals restate zero tolerance to sexual assault with new ‘Safer Spaces’ campaign

- More than 25 festival websites, including Bestival, Boomtown Fair, End of the Road, Parklife and Secret Garden Party, to be “blackout” for 24 hours on May 8th to increase awareness about sexual assault
- Festival organisers to promote safety messages online and sign new declaration committing to staff and volunteer training on issues related to sexual violence, and to continue providing clear welfare provision for victims
- Campaign launched by the Association of Independent Festivals, with guidance from experts at Rape Crisis England & Wales, Girls Against, Safe Gigs For Women and the White Ribbon Campaign

At 9am on Monday May 8th, more than 25 UK music festivals, including Bestival, Boomtown Fair, End of the Road, Parklife and Secret Garden Party will “blackout” their websites for 24 hours as part of a new initiative to promote an increased awareness of sexual assault.

As part of the campaign, the events will also share a short eye-catching animation over social media with the hashtag [#saferspacesatfestivals](#), encouraging festival-goers to play an active role in promoting safety, with three key messages:

1. Zero Tolerance to Sexual Assault
2. Hands Off Unless Consent
3. Don’t Be a Bystander

[CLICK HERE FOR THE GIF](#)

The full list of festivals participating in the blackout are: 2000trees, Always the Sun, Ampthill Festival, ArcTanGent, Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival, Bestival, Bluedot, Boomtown Fair, Electric Fields, End of the Road, Eisteddfod, Festival No. 6, Field Day, The Fling, Hanwell Hootie, Heb Celt Fest, Kendal Calling, Nozstock The Hidden Valley, Pangaea, Parklife, Rewind, Secret Garden Party, Standon Calling, Strawberries & Cream, Tramlines, Truck, The Vicars Picnic and Y-Not Festival.

Complementing this awareness-raising drive, more than 60 members of the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) have signed a Charter of Best Practice committing to uphold best practice through a series of measures including:

- A zero tolerance policy towards any form of sexual harassment at their events
- Provision of confidential welfare services to any victim of sexual assault
- Ensuring staff and volunteers are trained to deal with issues relating to sexual violence

- Taking a victim-led approach to sexual assault incidents

The campaign, which aims to connect with music fans in the run-up to this summer's festival season, builds upon a number of existing initiatives by AIF members [see case studies below]. It has been supported by guidance from experts at Rape Crisis England & Wales, Girls Against, Safe Gigs For Women and the White Ribbon Campaign.

Renaë Brown, Campaign Manager at the Association of Independent Festivals said:

"This campaign is building upon the positive measures that are already being taken by our members. We are reiterating that we have a zero tolerance towards any form of sexual harassment or assault at our events. Our members already take very seriously their responsibilities as event organisers, and by taking guidance from Rape Crisis England & Wales, Girls Against, Safe Gigs For Women and the White Ribbon Campaign we are aiming to tackle these issues in both a sensitive and impactful way - pushing awareness of sexual safety to the fore, while ensuring all those working onsite are properly trained, and that UK festivals continue to provide the safest, securest and most enjoyable environment for their customers."

Rebecca Hitchen, Operations Coordinator at Rape Crisis South London, Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre said:

"We at Rape Crisis welcome this important new campaign from the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF). It's vital that as much as possible is done to ensure festivals can be safe spaces, free from sexual violence. It's really positive to see event organisers commit to training and strategies aimed at preventing sexual assault and rape at festivals, as well as making sure those who do experience these crimes get access to appropriate support. Zero tolerance to sexual violence and encouraging festival-goers not to be bystanders when they witness assaults are strong and crucial messages."

Rob da Bank, co-founder, Bestival and AIF said:

"I'm fully behind this campaign, both as a festival promoter and as the co-founder of AIF which represents over 60 of the UK's best independent festivals. All share our concerns and aims for our events to be as safe as possible."

Secret Garden Party Founder Freddie Fellowes said:

"It is gratifying to know that a formal policy is being put in place across so many festivals highlighting the availability of support to both the victims and witnesses. It is essential that events come together, with the public, to try and eradicate this totally unacceptable behaviour."

According to Rape Crisis England & Wales, more than half a million adults are sexually assaulted in England and Wales each year. Approximately 85,000 women

and 12,000 men are raped. Only 15% of those who experience sexual violence choose to report it to the police.

The Association of Independent Festivals represents more than 60 UK events, attended by over 500,000 people each year. Founded in 2008 by Rob Da Bank (Bestival) and his manager Ben Turner (Graphite Media) the organisation has a long campaigning history, leading on issues ranging from awareness of legal highs to greater accessibility for Deaf and disabled audiences.

ENDS

FAQs

Why is this campaign taking place?

Sexual violence can happen to anyone. No-one ever deserves or asks for it to happen. There have been past criticisms that music festivals have not done enough to either raise awareness around sexual assault - in all its forms - or to make provisions for victims and survivors. By not talking about these issues or acting upon them, they remain hidden.

For statistics about rape and sexual violence in the UK, and for common myths/realities around these crimes, we recommend you read the information page at Rape Crisis England & Wales:

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/typesofsexualviolence.php>
<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/mythsvsrealities.php>

All festival organisers take very seriously their responsibilities to run a safe and secure event - and some AIF members have already started their own initiatives to promote sexual safety and to offer bespoke facilities to care for any victims of sexual assault. You can read about these in the case studies attached.

AIF wanted to highlight and build upon these initiatives, and bring the issue of sexual assault to the fore - with our audiences, with staff, volunteers and everyone else on site. We want to reiterate a zero tolerance stance to sexual violence. Working with experts at Rape Crisis England & Wales, Girls Against, Safer Gigs For Women and the White Ribbon Project this has resulted in our Safer Spaces campaign.

The campaign combines awareness raising online and over social media with some demonstrable actions by festivals. As a result, we believe music events will be even safer and enjoyable for everyone. AIF aims to build on the campaign in coming years.

What will happen on May 8th?

At 9am, more than 25 festival websites will undergo a 24 hour blackout in a bid to increase awareness about sexual assault. Visitors to these sites will be able to

click through to information about the 'Safer Spaces' campaign, and encouraged to find out more through an infographic and on partner sites such as Rape Crisis England & Wales, Girls Against, Safe Gigs for Women and the White Ribbon Campaign.

All participating festivals will share a short online animation, using gender-neutral stick figures to promote the 3 key campaign messages:

1. Zero Tolerance to Sexual Assault
2. Hands Off Unless Consent
3. Don't be a Bystander

Charter of Best Practice

As part of the campaign, more than 60 members of the Association of Independent Festivals have also agreed to a series of practical actions outlined in a new Charter of Best Practice. This includes a zero tolerance of any form of sexual assault, a commitment to train all staff and volunteers in issues concerning sexual violence, to promote the the principle of consent and to respond to any incidents with a victim-led approach.

Which festivals are involved?

28 festivals will blackout their websites - they are 2000trees, Always the Sun, ArcTanGent, Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival, Bestival, Bluedot, Boomtown Fair, End of the Road, Eisteddfod, Festival No. 6, The Fling, Hanwell Hootie, Heb Celt Fest, Kendal Calling, Nozstock The Hidden Valley, Parklife, Secret Garden Party, Standon Calling, Tramlines, Truck, The Vicars Picnic, Rewind, Field Day, Ampthill Festival, Electric Fields, Pangaea, Strawberries & Creem and Y-Not Festival.

More than 60 AIF members have signed the Declaration. For a full list of members, please go to www.aiforg.com/directory-category/members/

Who has advised AIF on this campaign?

Rape Crisis England & Wales

Rape Crisis England & Wales is a feminist organisation that exists to promote the needs and rights of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, to improve services to them and to work towards the elimination of sexual violence. www.rapecrisis.org.uk/

Girls Against

Girls Against is a campaign working to raise awareness of, and ultimately end, sexual harassment at gigs and concerts. <http://girlsagainst.tumblr.com>

Safe Gigs For Women

Safe gigs for women is an initiative established by regular gig goers with the aim of creating a safer environment for women at gigs.

<http://sgfw.org.uk>

White Ribbon Campaign

The White Ribbon Campaign offers real, practical support to help festivals and music venues stop violence against women and girls. The goal is for all women to know they can attend music events with confidence. And to encourage men (customers, staff, performers) to take a stand. Because everyone, male and female, should be able to enjoy music events free from fear.

www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

Penny Mellor

Penny has over 45 years experience in the events sector, mainly concerned with the wellbeing of attendees and others at outdoor music events. From 1977 to 1996 Penny ran a charity called Festival Welfare Services, providing a range of services at festivals. She has gone on to work on the "Event Safety Guide" alongside the UK Health & Safety Executive. Penny also produced a Welfare Handbook section for the 'Purple Guide' (to health, safety and welfare at music and other events).

About The Association of Independent Festivals:

National trade organisation The Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) is the UK's leading festival representative body. Founded in 2008 by Rob Da Bank (Bestival) and his Manager Ben Turner (Graphite Media), the AIF has grown to be a vital support network for independent festivals promoters, creating a national network of promoters, offering a range of member services, lobbying on behalf of the sector and producing conferences and training events. The combined attendance of AIF's member events exceeds 600,000 and our members generate over £200m in audience spend for the UK economy each year. AIF has over 60 member events, ranging from the 800-capacity Starry Skies to the 40,000-capacity Bestival. www.aiforg.com

Case studies for AIF sexual safety campaign:

1. Bestival / Love Doesn't Hurt:

Over the past four years, Bestival on the Isle of Wight has welcomed a stall from the Isle of Wight Council's 'Violence Against Women and Girl's Strategic Partnership'. The Adult Safeguarding event hub, working under the banner of "Love Doesn't Hurt" provides a space where festival goers can create beautiful jewellery using plectrums branded with positive affirmations and helpline numbers. Specialist staff are available in the team's Bell Tent to provide a safe space to talk about concerns with

festival goers - and the team also roam around the crowd throughout the Festival period to ensure they engage with as many people as possible.

"When people find out what we're doing they're very interested," says Fleur Gardiner, the Safeguarding Adults Board Manager of the local council. "feedback from festival goers has been incredibly positive about the messages we are giving – that being drunk or scantily clad is not being responsible for rape or sexual assault, and that it is everyone's responsibility to challenge attitudes that promote a rape culture"

The council started off solely raising awareness about consent at the festival, but changed its strategy as people came forward to talk to them about their experiences of sexual assault. Its' festival staff now includes an independent sexual violence adviser, domestic abuse experts, and sexual health nurses.

"In an ideal world, all festivals would support approaches such as ours" says Gardiner. "It's a fact that when you raise awareness and offer support, victims will seek it out - by embracing approaches such as ours, organisers can actually be making their festivals safer spaces."

2. Secret Garden Party- Planning, response and issuing an 'ethical code' for the event.

Planning: The festival constantly works to improve its event policies and safety protocols. This includes table-top exercises with the relevant bodies (police, fire, ambulance, security, welfare) in which the festival actively simulates disaster scenarios including sexual assault. This includes agreeing on a clearly defined response to ensure the right care for the victim and access to appropriate authorities.

They assess the demographic of the festival and prioritise attracting people with a similar ethos and values.

This is encapsulated in an ethical code issued to all attendees including the following points:

Decide your own life, don't let another person run or rule you.

Behave honourably at all times and respect the local law and officials.

Do not take advantage of someone who is in a vulnerable situation.

Do not allow yourself to become a stupid drunk and set a bad example for the treatment of other Gardeners.

Always respect nature; do not leave rubbish where you are playing.

You are in a community, pitch in and help.

Try to stay clean.

If you haven't come to learn, come to teach.

When traveling, take your trip respectfully, take no personal chances & cause no problems.

Do not allow other Gardeners to harm anyone, expose all abusers to authorities. People who intentionally cause harm to others are the worst people to infest any society.

Help all who are lost, and try to induce them to return home.

Look after your fellow Gardeners whenever and wherever needed, you may need their help someday.

During the event: To raise awareness of sexual assault during the event, the festival takes the following steps:

Dedicates slots at the Forum, which houses discussion groups and debates, to the issue. Any festival goer can attend these, hear what has to be said by our guest speakers, and contribute themselves.

Actively addressing the issue head on should it arise in Gardeners' Question Time, a slot in the forum hosted by the festival directors, where anyone can ask anything they like.

Dedicating space in the programme to safety advice specifically focused on sexual assault with support information if required.

Using pre-event messaging to help reinforce welfare objectives.

3. Boomtown Fair / The White Ribbon Campaign.

In 2016, BoomTown Fair partnered with the White Ribbon Campaign to support the launch of its 'Safe Music guide' -

The launch event at the speaker's corner of the festival was supported by performers and organisers.

With support from Safe Gigs 4 Women, White Ribbon ran a stall featuring activities, pledges to sign, free gifts, and opportunities for people to share their stories alongside offering advice and support to festival attendees and handing out information leaflets.