

THREE CHEERS TRAINING

SPECIALIST ALCOHOL MANAGEMENT SERVICES | BETTER FOR PATRONS. BETTER FOR BUSINESS. BETTER FOR THE COMMUNITY.

LICENSED VENUE TRIAL OF; THREE CHEERS SASH (SPECIAL ALCOHOL SERVICE HOSPITALITY) PROGRAM AT THE OXFORD ART FACTORY (OAF)

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Background: Three Cheers Training's "Special Alcohol Service Hospitality" (SASH) has been deployed in various alcohol licensed venues since December 2009. The training aims to decrease incidents of patron intoxication, violence and aggression, as well as improving: the hospitality patrons experience, enjoyment of staff in their roles, relationships between staff and patrons, local amenity, venue culture and revenue. This trial seeks to test in a single venue whether the training meets its goals.

Method: Oxford Art Factory (OAF) is the study's licensed venue; a 500 person capacity, live music venue in Darlinghurst, Sydney. All their staff (management, bar staff, security etc.) were trained in SASH and the venue committed to properly implement SASH techniques to the standard they saw as a best fit for them. The study compares OAF's incident register data prior to implementation (2017) of SASH to post implementation (2018). Data catalogues incidents for approaching intoxication, intoxication, violence and aggression. Bar sales revenue between the two periods (2017 & 2018) was also compared. Data was collected and analysis was conducted in consultation with Deakin University. Interviews were conducted with OAF's General Manager / Licensee, their Bar Managers and Security Manager for their assessment of SASH in the OAF.

Data Results: Incident register data from (20 Jan '17 – 20 Jan '18) compared with incident register data from (20 Jan '18 – 20 Jan '19) show total incidents are down 56% in 2018 from 2017 figures; Approaching Intoxication down 55%, Intoxication down 75%, Violence down 500%, Aggression down 80%. There was a 5% increase in bar revenue in 2018 showing that the improved data statistics were not the result of a downturn in trade and indicate that the SASH program is of overall benefit to venue revenue. OAF management interviews reveal improvement in; hospitality patrons experience, enjoyment of staff in their roles, local amenity, relationships between staff and patrons.

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SASH COURSE INTRODUCTION

SASH consists of proactive patron management techniques for licensed venues to integrate into their everyday operations. It is hospitality and safety outcome focused.

SASH is informed by world-leading research evidence from the fields of psychology, physiology and alcohol and other drug (AOD) research. It has its own unique theory which translates practically to standardised best approaches to 12 common scenarios that arise in licensed venues e.g. general service, saving a patron from intoxication, hosting party groups etc.

SASH theory has 3 foundations; Mood, Assist and Water (MAW). SASH demonstrates how to positively manage and influence patron mood, how to assist patrons in a hospitable manner so that they make the right choices, and how to hospitably keep patrons hydrated with water due to the dehydrating effects of alcohol.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF SASH INTO OAF

SASH is implemented into a venue by firstly training its staff (management, bar staff, security etc.) online through the SASH course theory and the step-by-

step guide as how to deal with the 12 common scenarios that arise in licensed venues. This is then followed by conducting demonstrations and role-plays face-to-face with trainees so they can observe and practise the SASH techniques as well as refresh the content of the course.

OAF staff undertook the course via Three Cheers Training's online Learning Management System (LMS) platform. This was then followed by a Three Cheers trainer speaking at two of OAF's staff meetings to refresh the course, demonstrate some of the techniques and conduct some basic role-plays with the OAF staff.

Four site visits were then made by the Three Cheers trainer / assessor to OAF whilst the venue was in service so as to evaluate if SASH was being put in place in the venue's operations properly, and to encourage staff to put it into action where it was not. These visits were conducted before the trial period began so as not to interfere with the trial's results.

The site visits were followed the following week by a meeting between Three Cheers Training and OAF management where feedback was provided to OAF both verbally and in

written reports to assist OAF to improve in relevant areas so that SASH was being properly activated. It was found to be imperative to the project that the highest management insisted to their management and staff

that they wanted to see SASH implemented. This essentially was the key to pushing the management and therefore the staff initially into action.

STATISTICAL DATA BREAKDOWN

DATA was taken from Oxford Art Factory's 2017 and 2018 incident registers and compared. SASH was implemented on 20 January 2018, therefore this analysis is a comparison pre and post intervention.

RESULTS: 2018 **incidents were down 56%** on 2017 figures. The below table shows how the raw incident data breaks down into categories. Each number represents a count of Ask To Leave (ATL) incidents.

Bar sale comparisons between 2017 and 2018, provided confidentially by OAF's accountant, show a **revenue increase of 5%** for the 2018 year.

	Refuse Service i.e. approaching intoxication	Intoxication	Violence	Aggression
20 Jan 2017 – 20 Jan 2018	443	4	5	5
20 Jan 2018 – 20 Jan 2019	199	1	0	1
Number Difference	244	3	5	4
% Difference	55% ↓	75% ↓	No violent incidents recorded	80% ↓

INTERVIEWS WITH OAF MANAGEMENT

The following qualitative data was obtained via separate interviews with the General Manager / Licensee, Bar Manager, Assistant Bar Manager and Head of Security.

OAF EXPERIENCE OF SASH

In the beginning staff and management were skeptical that patrons would respond positively to the SASH techniques, particularly the method where water is offered out to patrons both proactively and preemptively to help delay or prevent intoxication. That skepticism changed as they began trialing SASH properly, and could see the good results plus the positive way the patrons respond to it.

“It took a while for staff to get over the fear of providing the water, helping patrons to stay hydrated. I too, in the beginning, was of that same mindset. I was afraid that it was an unnatural thing to do, that it would upset patrons and be seen as uncool. I was surprised at how well it went over. Now water has become a natural part of the service. Everyone (staff) is on board, they realise it’s the next level of customer service and care.” –
Bar Manager

“At first staff were hesitant, but everyone was pleasantly surprised as to how well it (SASH) was taken.” –
Assistant Bar Manager

Management also identified that staff enjoyed their roles more because of the increased, positive interaction with patrons.

“You talk and get to meet more people. It

totally makes you like your job better, people are so thankful. It definitely pushes job satisfaction up.” –
Bar Manager

Security personnel also report benefits from the implementation of SASH:

“The program is so positive. The relationship between patrons and guards has become so positive. Incidents are down and before where we would have to ATL (Ask To Leave) a patron, they’d get aggressive, cause an argument; now we intercept them earlier, speak to them, get some water into them and they don’t get aggressive anymore, cause they can see we’re on their side and we don’t have to ATL them.”–
Head of Security

Management also report improvements in the way security interacts with the patrons.

“Security in venues quite often just stand there with their arms crossed and are just there to ask people to leave, they’re not hospitable. But as the Three Cheers (SASH) course says, it’s all about hospitality. I’ve noticed our security have become a lot more hospitality based, it’s made the guards think about the patron experience and realise that they’re part of the team that helps us achieve that. It puts it in their hands, it means they can approach patrons, interact with them and give water when needed, which is kind of like a peace offering at times.” –
Bar Manager

Support and encouragement from senior management, particularly initially from the licensee, was found to be a key motivator for staff to implement SASH.

“Mark (General Manager / Licensee) told me to just give out the water, as much as we needed to fulfill the (SASH) program. So it was great to have that support from him, it meant we could just go for it without any reservations.” – Head of Security

Over the course of the year the OAF team have become better at implementing SASH:

“Staff keep getting better at working with Three Cheers (SASH). Staff get better at interacting with patrons, they become more expert at implementing it (SASH), at getting people on-board with the program.” – General Manager / Licensee

“It’s (SASH) become a seamless thing. It’s become second nature.” – Assistant Bar Manager

As the incident record data shows there was an apparent decrease in incidents at OAF in 2018 as compared to 2017. This was achieved with similar numbers of patrons in attendance over the 2 years as shown by the revenue data that actually shows a small increase of 5% in 2018 as compared to 2017. This demonstrates that SASH is potentially a positive influence on revenue, or at least, is revenue neutral. Importantly, beyond the cost neutrality, having positive trends in social outcomes such as these means that any sort of regulatory action is unlikely and may even be reversed; both of which would have substantial economic benefit. The below quotes suggests some potential mechanisms:

“If no one reaches intoxication it means they can stay longer and enjoy what the venue has to offer more. Getting to them early keeps people together, keeps groups together, keeps couples together and thereby maintains revenue. It’s a cost effective preventative measure.” – General Manager / Licensee

“It doesn’t surprise me that revenue increased a bit. It’s clear that by saving patrons from intoxication they stay on for longer than they otherwise would with their friends. They’ll have another drink or two.” – Bar Manager

PATRON EXPERIENCE OF SASH

There’s broad consensus amongst OAF staff, management and security that patrons respond very positively to SASH.

“Patrons give a lot of positive feedback, they say “thanks” when we interact with them, give them some water, help them manage their night.” – Bar Manager

“In staff meetings, staff will bring up that patrons are receiving it well.” – Assistant Bar Manager

“Patrons have been gracious and thankful to receive it (SASH).” – General Manager / Licensee

“You can see the difference. They (patrons) are now very positive towards the guards. The patrons are very happy, they even say thanks for the water and that it (SASH) should be done everywhere. They thank us when they leave, they’ll pat us on the shoulder and say “thanks for the night”, say they’ll be back another time.” – Head of Security

The hospitality outcome focused techniques of SASH are credited with how well patrons receive it.

“It’s under the radar, it’s an offering rather than trying to get them (patrons) to do something they don’t want to do.” – Bar Manager

“The water is a great tool but it’s mainly about the interaction. The training shows how to best deal with each situation, how to approach and speak to the patrons. It works.” – Head of Security

HYDRATION

As keeping patrons hydrated is such a key part of the course, SASH aims to offer water out to patrons from early on and to make it a commonplace thing around the venue to see patrons staying hydrated as they go.

“Multiple people drinking (water) in a room makes it not a big deal if someone is given one by staff or security. The old association with water is that you’re at risk of intoxication or sober, now it’s not about that it’s just about people staying hydrated.” – Assistant Bar Manager

“A lot of bars start offering water when it’s a warning, but at OAF now it’s just about staying hydrated.” – Bar Manager

The key point of difference is the way that SASH is implemented and engages patrons early, in a context where others receive water as well, may create an environment where, over time, patrons may naturally begin to self-manage better e.g. to ask for the water themselves.

“I’ll walk through the crowd with a bottle

or 2 of water and people (patrons) will stop me and ask for it. They’re grateful.” – Assistant Bar Manager

“Patrons are taking the initiative to ask for the water themselves. That’s a massive difference from the beginning (of the trial). They understand now that it (water) works and is a good thing. Patrons will come to the water station, we’ll take cases of water through the crowd and they’ll take them.” – Assistant Bar Manager

COMMENTARY FROM DEAKIN UNIVERSITY – Prof. Peter Miller and Dr Nic Droste

Traditional Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) training courses have long been inadequate for preparing venue staff to work in a hospitality environment where patrons may be intoxicated, let alone unhappy or antagonistic. RSA legislation in Australia is woefully underpowered in terms of the ability to prevent alcohol harm from occurring. Further, the premise of RSA legislation and training acts far too late; once people are becoming a problem and showing signs of intoxication. The evidence is clear that the BAC of people who are showing signs of intoxication will continue to rise for around an hour after their last drink. The key is taking a preventative or engaging approach.

The SASH program stands out as a positive reframing of this approach, by shifting the focus onto *hospitality*.

Engaging with patrons early is the best form of harm prevention, and it’s great hospitality. Prevention becomes active. Crucially, the program also takes a

whole-of-venue approach. But even more importantly, it equips all staff the skill to prevent undue intoxication and related harms and provides a coordinated approach, when communicating about intoxication becomes the norm for staff.

The results presented in this case study conducted at Oxford Art Factory are a promising first step in reviewing the effectiveness of the SASH program. The introduction of the SASH method here is associated with a sizable reduction in recorded incidents related to service refusal, intoxication and aggression, and a complete cessation of recorded violent incidents. These results are accompanied by a small increase in reported revenue. But this increase is much more noticeable because it occurs in the context of a purported downturn in the surrounding night-time economy. In this context, it may well be that the economic value of the program is substantially greater than it first appears, although this requires more robust and expansive trialling.

It must be emphasised that this is an early stage evaluation of the program, and a number of limitations to the evaluation design prevent it from being generalised to all other venues at this early stage.

Firstly, and most importantly, OAF represents a single venue case study. Their entertainment offerings and business model cannot be generalised to other venues. Further, OAF staff – despite initial hesitations – were participants in the trial under a management who were enthusiastic

and committed to the implementation of the SASH model. It is likely that this commitment from the venue played a part in the success of the SASH trial at OAF (and OAF staff should be commended for their willingness to engage with the program).

An additional limitation stems from the self-reported nature of the data, however OAF have no known vested interest in demonstrating a positive outcome for the SASH program in this trial.

All told, this case study is a promising and positive first demonstration of the SASH program. Further evaluation of the program in a broader range of venues and nightlife contexts is warranted. Supporting alternative ways to reduce alcohol-related harm in nightlife precincts should always be considered a core concern of government and these promising results to encourage State governments to consider interventions which both reduce alcohol-related harm and enhance business. But this must be done from an evidence informed perspective, using pilot evidence like this to inform trials that can then give definitive data on effectiveness. All policy interventions should be evaluated independently. Using any other approach is poor practice and reduces community and business benefit alike.

Three Cheers Training Comments

Thank you to Mark Gerber (General Manager / Licensee) and his OAF team for taking the trial on.