

## Volunteer group helps keep Newmarket weekend revellers safe

by Helen Patchett

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FROM handing out plasters to treating a victim of a serious assault, crew members on the West Suffolk SOS bus have to be ready to handle anything.

And on Saturday night, Newmarket's Safer Neighbourhood Team joined forces with the SOS bus crew as part of a safety campaign to encourage revellers to enjoy the bank holiday weekend responsibly.

Eight police officers and police community support officers from Suffolk Police were on hand in Newmarket's High Street from 7pm until the early hours to distribute safety advice.

Sgt Mark Shipton, of the Safer Neighbourhood Team, said he hoped the campaign would send out a positive message.

"It's all about promoting a safe night out on the town," he said.

"We are not saying people shouldn't drink, we want people to enjoy themselves, but to do it safely and sensibly.

"I think the public like to see the police on the streets. It sends a message out that they can come out and feel safe but, at the same time, if people drink to excess and commit offences they will be dealt with."

The team were joined by members of the Newmarket Town Pastors and St John Ambulance medics, and also received a visit from Newmarket's mayor Keith Bovill and Cllr Shirley Crickmere, of Newmarket Town Council.

"It is nice to see what the police

# Out on the town with SOS crew

do and hopefully see people enjoying themselves responsibly," said Cllr Bovill.

"This campaign is an opportunity to go out with police and encourage people to act safely."

On the SOS bus, which is situated in the town's High Street every Saturday between 9pm and 4am, crew members John Walton and Colin Middleton handed out an array of free goodies to encourage party-goers to stay safe.

They provided bottle tops to prevent bottled drinks being spiked, a unit calculator to work out how much alcohol has been consumed, bottled water, leaflets with safety advice, and lip balms with a safety message printed on the lid, which were paid for by Forest Heath District Council.

"We help vulnerable people that may have lost their phones, been injured,

are intoxicated, lost or can't get home," said Mr Walton.

"It saves anybody calling an ambulance and we can deal with people here and then send them on their way, or if it is serious we always have the back-up of an ambulance."

The bus was set up by Newmarket Community Partnership in October 2009 and is run entirely by volunteers.

St John Ambulance medic Paul Wood said in the last two years the SOS bus has become more popular with locals.

"It's a brilliant idea and now that people are getting used to us we get a lot more people coming to us," he said.

"We even get people that we have treated coming back and giving us donations. The team does a really good job and we work as a good crew."

Visit [www.westsuffolksosbus.org](http://www.westsuffolksosbus.org) for more information or to volunteer.



Ready for anything ... Paul Wood and Rex Ingram, from St John Ambulance, in the West Suffolk SOS bus. MNJP-27-08-11RMP029.