



THE SHOW MUSTN'T GO ON

ATTENDEES RAISE THEIR HANDS during the third annual Astroworld Festival at NRG Park on November 5, 2021 in Houston, Texas, which caused the deadly crowd surge that killed 10. One of the victims was 23-year old Madison Dubiski, whose family is determined to make sure, preventable tragedies like this one don't occur again.

Photo by Omar Vega / FilmMagic

How do you prepare for the unthinkable? The short answer: you don't. You cannot plan for something that wouldn't occur to you in a million years: like your baby girl not returning home from a concert; from what should have been a wonderful night out with friends, and one of the most benign activities imaginable.

Yet, for 10 children, teenagers, and young adults Astroworld Festival 2021 turned from a joyful gathering into an unimaginable nightmare, when they got swallowed up in a crowd surge that claimed their lives. All victims died from compression asphyxia – the term to describe an external force limiting the ability to expand one's chest, making it impossible to breathe.

The most devastating finding in the aftermath of the Astroworld stampede, however, came from the investigation of the Houston police department, which found that all ten deaths, as well as injuries, sustained at the 2021 Astroworld Festival could have been prevented.

It's inconceivable what receiving such a message does to the parents and families already devastated by the loss of their loved ones. "You're reeling from a really dark, emotional place probably a little bit for the rest of your life," says Brian Dubiski, father of Madison Dubiski, who lost her life at Astroworld at the age of 23. "But," he continues, "one of the pieces of light we could find was, we knew we wanted to start a foundation to honor her, and create a legacy to ensure that her life didn't end in vain."

The name of the foundation, which Brian launched with Madison's mother, Michelle, and Madison's brother, Ty, is Pink Bows Foundation. It is named after a temporary

memorial that had been erected outside of the concert venue, Houston's NRG Park, where someone had put up a picture of Madison along with a single pink bow. "More pink bows began to be put up, and it spread across Houston, and then regionally across Texas," Dubiski recalls. Soon, pink bows could be seen sporadically from coast to coast, and even across the pond, put up by people appalled at what had happened. The Dubiski family was determined to reduce the risk of another festival or concert tragedy happening again.

"We have no background or expertise in any of this. We just knew we wanted to improve safety protocols that would essentially help mitigate injury and death at live events, sporting events, concerts, indoors and outdoors," says Dubiski.

Crowd safety at events became the first pillar of the Pink Bows Foundation, and the Dubiskis went about finding "the very best crowd safety management experts in the world," as Brian puts it. They succeeded by enrolling Steve Allen and Dr. Mark Hamilton of Crowd Safety in the UK, who boast a combined 80-plus years of experience in event security and crowd safety management. Hamilton, among his many career milestones, is the security advisor for Paul McCartney, acting as security director on all of the Beatle's tours. Allen developed the so-called Showstop Procedure in 1998. As the trademarked name suggests, it's a procedure to swiftly, seamlessly, and decisively stop a show.

Allen first used the Showstop Procedure in 1998 and later during Oasis infamous 2005 concert at Manchester Stadium. Archival footage shows 50,000 people uncontrollably being washed against the barriers like a

wave, Liam Gallagher telling his band to cut the music, Noel Gallagher receiving the relevant infos from one of the Showstop team, and communicating calmly with the crowd, asking them to take a few steps back. The concert could eventually continue.

In emergency situations requiring evacuation, the Showstop Procedure accelerates the process by reducing the pre-movement time of the audience, i.e. the time it takes for an individual to perceive there's danger, assess the situation, decide to evacuate, and initiate movement. It is influenced by several factors, including the type of warning/alarm, for example if an artist is communicating swiftly with the audience, as envisaged by the Showstop Procedure, the individual's familiarity with the venue, and the complexity of the evacuation plan. "Understanding and minimizing pre-movement time is crucial for ensuring safe and efficient evacuation, as it can significantly impact overall evacuation success," Allen explains.

Allen has implemented the procedure 32 times around the world, with zero deaths, zero injuries, and zero public disorder in all cases. "The reason the outcome is so accurate," he explains, "is because it's swift, it's robust, it's seamless. Everyone knows what they're doing because of the advanced communication that's happened in preparation – not on the day of the show in the security meeting, but well in advance."

It's obvious how the procedure aligns perfectly with the Pink Bows Foundation's first pillar. Their support has boosted Allen and Hamilton's ability to develop an accredited, approved Showstop Procedure training course, which anyone working in live events can now book. The course was announced

at the Event Production Show and ILMC in London, England in February, followed by the official launch of the first training course in the U.S. in Houston a few weeks ago. Since then festivals like Roskilde, which experienced its own deadly crowd crush in 2000, venues, and promoters have started block booking the course, which has been endorsed by all the relevant crowd safety alliances, like the Event Safety Alliance (ESA) in North America and Canada, and the global as well as UK branches of the Crowd Management Alliance. The Purple Guide, the UK bible for all things concerning health, safety, and wellbeing at outdoor events, has stated they want to update their guidance on stopping a

HOW PINK BOWS FOUNDATION IS FOCUSED ON REDUCING THE RISK OF ANOTHER TRAGEDY

BY GIDEON GOTTFRIED

show accordingly. It's this kind of endorsement that will lead to the Showstop Procedure becoming a worldwide standard, which is the goal. Hamilton explains, "What usually happens when I get to my security meeting is this: I'll get to the point about Showstop, and more often than not, they'll only then start having a discussion about who the person making the decision to stop the show is going to be. That's an indication of two things: one, people are avoiding it, which is a human trait. They don't want to think about the unthinkable. And two, because they're not thinking of the unthinkable, they've not decided who would be the most suitable person with the most appropriate skill set to be able to make that decision."

The training course is delivered by professionals, and supported by the Pink Bows Foundation. It will give individuals the competency to plan for and implement, if the need arises, such a far-reaching a critical decision without hesitation, for the benefit of all involved. The safety and security plan of 2021's Astroworld Event Operation Plan named persons with authority to stop the show, but there was no procedure in place, no individual that had been assigned the role, as the investigation into the fatal event showed. "Roles and responsibilities are really important in this," Hamilton sums it up.

And Allen adds, "you need to have a qualified competency range, and that includes knowledge, experience, skills and training. The bit that's been missing is the training. This course is developed and designed to address that point. It has an exam at the end of it, it requires a minimum of at least three years of management or supervisory experience in live events, and a reference that supports the range of your experience

in the industry. It's not something that can be done by an inexperienced individual, because they're operating in a high-stress moment where they're probably on sensory overload. It needs to be somebody who can be focused, listen to what they're being told by the control room, and then turn that into a very concise message that they're going to hand on to the artist rep, who's going to tell the artist, who's then going to tell the crowd."

The Pink Bows Foundation has received huge support from Sir Paul McCartney, Jim Kerr, of Simple Minds and Barrie Marshall MBE, who's been inducted into the Pollstar Live! Music Hall Of Fame this year. They would love to see as many promoters and venues start throwing their weight behind this as possible and create that internationally standardised procedure. "You look across the board, from a forklift driver to an EMS person

to other people that require some type of certificate or training just to do their position. But the person in charge of possibly making the single biggest decision during an event has very little or no formalized training. That was just a void that we felt needed to be addressed, and so we're providing that through the foundation," Brian Dubiski explains.

And he emphasizes, "we're not trying to force this on someone. We're not trying to take a combative position. We're looking to collaborate and make it a safer, better place. Is it reasonable for us, as The Pink Bows Foundation, to ask the events industry to collaborate to create an international standardised procedure to make all events safer? We think so."

Allen agrees, "it's not about pointing fingers. It's not about looking backwards. The event industry, and everyone involved with it, in my experience, do not want anyone to be hurt. The proclamation that safety is the number one priority is real, so let's collaborate. Let's up-skill. Why? Because this Showstop Procedure is proven, this isn't just an



idea that Mark and I have come up with out of the blue."

Crowd safety is one of three pillars of the Pink Bows Foundation. A second pillar is dedicated to the mental health of concert and festival goers. "We realized," Dubiski explains, "that a lot of events were tending to visitors with mental health issues in their first aid tents. The first-aid workers are trained to deal with band-aids, cuts or bruises. But visitors were coming in because they were dealing with anxiety and depression or felt uneasy about crowds. So, we created the Pink Bows Safe Space. We've done about nine or 10 events, where we put up a large, custom pink 20-by-30 tent with really comfortable furnishings, an AC unit for hot days, and mental health professionals on site."

The foundation's third pillar is about carrying on Madison Dubiski's legacy. "She found her fulfillment by giving back," her father remembers, "by the time she had graduated high school, she had already volunteered more than 500 hours with more than 25 different non-profit organizations. Two she loved in particular were dealing with pediatric cancer, and special needs. So, one of our pillars is to continue to honor the things she volunteered her own time for."

It's obvious that the Showstop Procedure is but one cog in a larger wheel. "Our goal," says Dubiski, "is to improve the safety processes and protocols across the board," driven by the core belief, that "every crowd deserves to return home safely." **S**



To learn more about the Pink Bows Foundation and Showstop Procedure scan here.



THE CORE TEAM OF THE PINK BOWS FOUNDATION, pictured at the foundation's launch event in March in Houston, TX (from left): Steve Allen, Michelle Dubiski, Ty Dubiski, Brian Dubiski, Stephanie Stegall, and Dr Mark Hamilton. *Courtesy Pink Bows Foundation*