

**Greg Liang's presentation for the National Working Meeting on Crack Cocaine and Hepatitis C, being held March 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> 2005 in Ottawa, Ontario.**

Hello, my name is Gregory Liang, I've been using cocaine and heroin for twenty years now, I'm 37 years old, so I've been using for more than half my life already. It's a fact I'm definitely not proud of. I've been through it all, crack houses, shooting galleries, grow houses, detoxes, recovery houses, treatment centres, crime, prison, remand centres, probation, all kinds of counseling, and I've overdosed three times.

I'm here representing VANDU - the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, located in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, also known as "skid-row".

I remember ten years ago when crack cocaine first made an appearance on the streets of Vancouver, it was the greatest thing back then, you didn't have to cook your powder to get a rock, you could buy a rock ready made and smoke it on the spot. We called it "base" or "freebase" back then, we never called it crack for some reason. Back then our rocks were made with real cocaine, not the garbage we see now-days, the highs were a lot smoother back then.

Today the rocks we see on the streets of Vancouver are cut with so much garbage it's become a major problem for everybody, people's health are a major concern because some dealers will cut any white powder they have into their rocks to increase profits. We see this especially with speed or crystal meth, being cut more and more into the rocks sold on the street down here. This is because speed is so much cheaper to produce than cocaine and the highs are much more dramatic with speed. Psychosis is a real problem, we're seeing a constant increase in violence on the street each year. Deaths are increasing. It's really disturbing that the users we see starting each year are getting younger and younger. I want to stress this point that we need to do a lot more work with youth to help prevent them from even using that first rock, or drug, if possible, we definitely don't want to see them ending up on

the streets. Living on the streets and being addicted to drugs is a miserable existence, every dollar you have needs to be spent on getting more drugs. Crime becomes an option for many. It brings a tear to my eye to see so many people addicted and living the lifestyle of misery & violence. I'm shocked at how many people are smoking this stuff.

Even though we've been blessed with a Supervised Injection Site in Vancouver, we definitely need to have an Inhalation Room to help the users who don't inject their drugs but smoke it instead. The SIS is a huge success in Vancouver, it's proven that there's a definite need for facilities like this, it's far safer than using outside in an alleyway, the transmission of disease is greatly reduced and there's an opportunity for us to reach out to people and hopefully get them into the services they desperately need.

We've identified that we need drug testing to determine what's in the rocks we're smoking, we can weed out bad dealers this way. We need to consider a stimulant replacement for cocaine, like methadone maintenance for heroin. Glass pipes and related supplies need to be provided at low cost or free of charge to reduce disease transmission. I see a lot of glass pipes with jagged edges or are really short and people get their lips burnt, or cut, this way. Most users will try to only use their own pipe, but when it comes down to it and you need a hoot, you'll share your pipe. Peer involvement needs to be increased, let's take advantage of the wealth of knowledge peers can provide to their brothers and sisters on the street. It's important to include the people that are most affected because they are the "experts", they know what they need.

So to wrap this up, crack cocaine is a complex problem that no one scheme or idea is gonna solve, this problem needs a multitude of initiatives that can tackle this problem from several different angles to even make a difference. We need to include everybody in this process, working together for the benefit of everyone. I really hope that we can make some progress during this conference, the use of crack cocaine is a growing problem that is nothing but bad news. Thank-you.