

PREVENTING HEROIN OVERDOSE: PRAGMATIC APPROACHES
Friday, January 14, 2000 3:45 pm -5:00 pm Community Organizing:

Ann Livingston, contact for the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users or VANDU
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VANDU is a user-run user group funded by the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board since January of 1998. As a registered non-profit society, we empower people who use drugs using a rigorous democratic process. VANDU members vote for their board of directors and pass motions at rather well attended weekly general meetings. VANDU has been successful in keeping a public discussion going in Vancouver about overdoses, the spread of AIDS and Hep C as well as interventions that effectively reduce crime, disease and death. With a membership of over 450, VANDU creates a voice for the thousands of users living and dying in extremely difficult circumstances mostly in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Biographical Information:

Ann Livingston has 3 children and lives in a housing co-op in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and has worked with her neighbours who use drugs for 5 years. With organizing skills gained working for changes in childbirth policies and services for families with disabled children, she has pushed an empowerment model to change the lives and community of people who use drugs. When people who use drugs, previously viewed by themselves and others as incapable, immoral and undeserving, begin see themselves as citizens involved in their community, lives are saved and public opinion is changed. Ann is currently the project coordinator for VANDU and the only paid employee. Ann is involved in the Mayor's Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment, Prostitution Alternatives Counseling & Education, Neighbour to Neighbour and other community groups. She attends Vancouver Police Board meetings and ran for Vancouver City Council.

Bryan Alleyne was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Addicted to drugs and alcohol at a very early age, he now lives in Vancouver where he is heavily involved in VANDU and his community of the Downtown Eastside. He has attended conferences and has organized and lead demonstrations for safe sites and other harm reduction initiatives that save lives of drug users. He lobbies for jobs for user and user centered outreach as the most effective way to stop disease and death. He is on the board of VANDU, the Committee to set up a Resource Center for Users, Community Directions and works closely with the street nurses, the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board staff, the "street users", the needle exchange, the Carnegie Community Center and the Mayors Coalition on Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment.

Melissa Error is the president of the board of VANDU. Melissa has used drugs for many years and is an authority on the drug scene in Vancouver. Her many years of involvement in the methadone program and her expertise on safe injection, herbal remedies, community organizing and hepatitis C are key to VANDU's success in organizing drug users. Currently enrolled in

anthropology courses at the University of British Columbia, Melissa has had to drop the production of the Hype a newsletter by and for users. She continues her involvement with the committee to set up a Resource Center for Users and the Consumers' Board. Melissa has two teenage children.

Title of Presentation:

Ann Livingston: *What's A Nonuser Like You Working For A User-Run User Group Anyway? Neighbourly Behaviour As Harm Reduction And Community Organizing.* Overcoming barriers to form user-run user groups.

Bryan Alleyne: *So Ya Won't Hire Me Cause You Know I'm A Junkie;* The dilemma of users "coming out" in community organizing and then applying for housing and jobs in the neighbourhood.

Melissa Eror: *Denial Is A River In Africa; Is Pretending You Don't Use Or Not Admitting That You Have Relapsed A Typical Profile Of A Heroin Overdose?* How user groups can change the culture of shame and denial about relapses thereby reducing overdose deaths.

VANDU will make their constitution, annual report, newspaper clippings about VANDU and photographs of meetings and actions available. We will need a slide projector to show a few slides.