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inevitably hijacks people and takes them over, turns them into monsters and so on, that's just not true. It didn't happen to all the people that bought it over the counter.

What's causing the compulsive use that you see in some people, which is very disturbing and tragic, is that terrible inner need. There's this very interesting experiment in Australia, where they've been prescribing drugs that are like the methadone equivalent to meth. There is a parallel to the Swiss heroin prescription; you don't see people developing psychosis or the things that appear after people are illegally using meth in some cases.

There are what are called drug consumption rooms in some parts of the world. For example, in Vancouver, there's a place where addicts can go in and take their drugs and be monitored by doctors. And obviously if things go wrong, they can be looked after, and also while they're in the regulated space, they're always told, "When you're ready to stop, we're here to help you; we're here to support you."

I would experiment with that option. That option might not work. We need to find out.

E.G.: *Are we really in the last days of the war on drugs, as the title of your book suggests, or do we still have a long way to go?*

J.H.: Some places are in the last days of the war on drugs, and other places aren't.

What we have to do is organize together as citizens, demand it and persuade our fellow citizens, because they have perfectly legitimate fears and totally understandable anxieties.

There was a homeless street addict named Bud Osborn, who was watching his friends die all around him. He lives in a part of Vancouver called the Downtown Eastside. It has the highest concentration of drug addicts in North America. Addicts would hide from the police and use their drugs behind dumpsters or in hidden corners, and if you're shooting up and you're hidden and you overdose, no one will see and your body will be found dead hours later. Bud thought, I can't just watch my friends die, but also, I'm a homeless junkie, what am I going to do?



PHOTO BY SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS

Maricopa County, Ariz., inmates march for chain gang duty in 2003. Johann Hari spent time with one of the county's female chain gangs. The inmates, who are mostly drug addicts, picked up roadside trash and dug graves while the public jeered at them. Hari says Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's tactic of humiliation only deepens his inmates' propensity for addiction.

He got together a lot of the addicts (and asked), "Why don't we arrange a patrol? We'll draw up a timetable, and we'll patrol the alleyways, and we'll look in the places that people hide, and if someone's overdosing, we'll call an ambulance."

People were a bit skeptical, but they started doing it, and the death toll from Downtown Eastside overdose began to significantly fall over the next two months, which was great in itself, but also the addicts started to think about themselves differently. They started to think, "You know what? Maybe we're not the pieces of crap everyone says we are. Maybe we're people who can do something."

They had learned about safe injection rooms in Frankfurt, Germany, and lots of other places, and it had virtually ended death from overdose in those places. They thought, "Well, we've got to have that here."

The mayor of Vancouver at the time was this quite right-wing politician called Philip Owen. They decided to start stalking him and demanding an injection room.

One day, Philip said, "Who the hell are

these people?" And he went in, sat with addicts, incognito, in the Downtown Eastside and just listened.

He was blown away. He'd never met addicts. He didn't know their lives were like this. And he held a press conference, and he said he's never going to speak about addiction again without having the addicts there, and he was going to open a safe injection room in North America and have the most compassionate drug policies in North America.

When I went to the Downtown Eastside, it had been 10 years since they started this experiment, and (drug-related fatality) rates were down by 80 percent, and average life expectancy had increased by 10 years, which is virtually unheard of in medicine.

I would say to anyone reading this, who thinks the drug war is a catastrophe but thinks, "What can I do?" You can't think of a more powerless person in our culture than a homeless street addict, and because of what Bud started, thousands of people who would have died lived. The Canadian Supreme Court has now ruled that addicts have an

inalienable right to life, and that includes the right to safe injecting rooms.

I think the people of Oregon are compassionate and caring people, and I think if there was a comparable movement there, it would be just as successful.

E.G.: *If you had 30 seconds to try to make the argument for drug legalization, what argument would you use?*

J.H.: If you speak to people about why they are in favor of drug prohibition, almost always, it is because they don't want people to become addicted, and they don't want kids to use drugs, to which I always say the truth, which is, I completely agree with you. Those are things that massively motivate me. The only disagreement is the policy you're supporting doesn't achieve those goals and, in fact, takes us farther away from them.

And there's a different policy, which if you look at these results in different parts of the world, they achieve those goals.

Fred Martens was a very right-wing, undercover drug cop in the '70s, and he had a kind of epiphany one day. He was staking out a drug dealer in plainclothes in Wayne, N.J., and a kid came up to him and said, "Hey mister, I'm too young, they won't let me buy alcohol in this store. Will you go in and buy me something for me?" And Fred said, "No, get out of here," and so the kid went up to the drug dealer and bought drugs from him instead, because drug dealers don't ask for ID.

Fred had this realization that legalization puts a barrier between kids and drugs that doesn't currently exist. Lots of evidence exists that kids find it considerably easier to get marijuana than alcohol because the people who control the alcohol trade in our culture pay a big price if they sell to kids.

It's very interesting how they won that argument in Switzerland. What they did is they explained some people think legalization means anarchy and chaos. Actually, what we have now with the drug war is anarchy and chaos. We have unknown criminals selling unknown chemicals to unknown users all in the dark, filled with violence and disease. Legalization is a way of restoring order to that chaos.

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