

INJECTION, from page 4

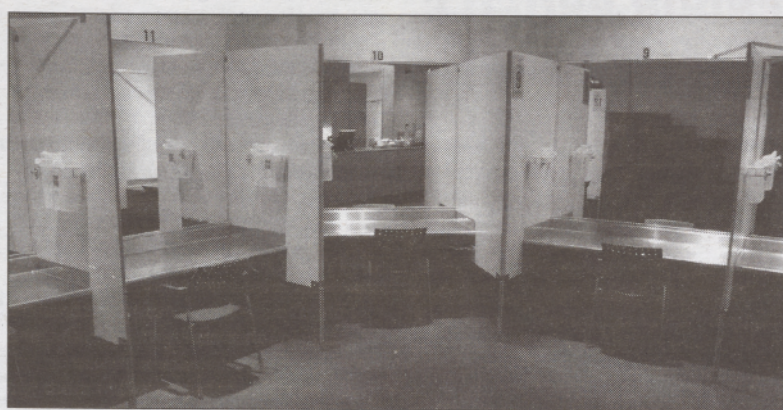
in an Insite-like model. (Insite is a safe injection facility operating in Vancouver, B.C., since 2003. It's located in an area with a concentrated population of heroin users.)

This is why: Insite was responding to a specific problem in Vancouver, and Vancouver had, for lack of a better term, a European-style red light district. And yes, there are users that live all across Vancouver, but the strategy they use at Insite is a very expensive model and can work for that concentrated area.

You're in Portland, for example. What if we put a safe injection facility in downtown Portland? Well, drug users in downtown Portland will probably use it – maybe 85 percent of drug users may use it – who are homeless and using outside. But if you live in Southeast Portland, are you really going to use it? Probably not. You're probably not going to get on a bus and go the far distance just to do it. That's why it needs to be multiple places. So it needs to have a mobile part of it, or a place that can easily move, like a trailer, or have 10 sites simultaneously open. Because that's the problem with the American drug war; we don't really have a centralized drug area. People can talk about outdoor drug markets, but those are in multiple places. It's a complicated problem, and this is definitely a solution to this complicated problem, but it needs to be maneuverable.

E.G.: Do you see these sites also serving as a pathway to treatment services for people who express an interest in quitting?

S.M.: Yes. The way we divide up drug use is: There is stable drug use and chaotic drug use. A stable drug user has much more control over their own lives and much more ability to moderate their own drug use. Stable drug users kind of stop using drugs or lower their drug use or increase their drug use all the time. And then there is chaotic drug use, and chaotic drug use is like drug use that has become unmanageable, like your life is focused on consuming this drug, and there are usually, not always, but usually a combination of problems: homelessness, mental illness,



Insite is a supervised injection site in Vancouver, B.C.

PHOTO BY JAY BLACK

Safe injection sites: A controversial solution

As public drug injection draws criticism in Portland, other U.S. cities are fighting for supervised injection facilities. Read more in our online archives at streetroots.org

abuse, trauma, all mixed into this chaotic use. So for chaotic drug users, it's really important to give them really clear access to treatment facilities and detox facilities and also therapy facilities and mental health facilities. Our hope is that we will be an access point for lots of people for lots of different reasons, and treatment is going to be one of those options and always be offered and be there. But to be perfectly honest, too, Portland – Oregon is in a similar place as Washington. Funding is not necessarily going too well for detox facilities and treatment facilities. There's been a big shakeup since the Affordable Care Act. It made it so a lot of folks have insurance, which means a lot of the more private places are now a lot more accessible to low-income folks, and the low-income folks are engaged in those services, making those services a longer waiting list. And so along with being a big referral to those services, it would also be an advocate for more of them.

E.G.: Are the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and Seattle Police Department supportive of opening a safe drug use facility?

S.M.: That's a question you should

probably ask them. We've been in some talks with them, but we're at the beginning of those conversations.

Street Roots did ask, and both were reluctant to comment. A spokesperson from the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office said it's too early in the process to say where it will stand, and the Police Department didn't respond with an answer before press time.

E.G.: Are you at all concerned the police might target people using the site, to try to bust them for possession or anything like that?

S.M.: No, because we have 25 years of history in Seattle, working with the Police Department and prosecuting attorneys, and they understand that people have to use; have the ability and need the ability to use a direct service. The Police Department, and I don't want to speak on their behalf, but they want people to get services just as much as everyone else, and to be perfectly honest, the police have been the most supportive of this idea – of ending public intoxication and ending public drug use. They don't want it because that's where a lot of the complaints come from.

E.G.: Is there anything standing in the way of getting this site open, or do you think it will happen pretty seamlessly?

S.M.: I don't think there's anything standing in the way, really. Fighting has always been "not in my back yard" folks, but a lot of communities have contacted us and said, "We want it in our area," and other communities have contacted us and said, "We don't know about in our area," and there's lots of different people in the same community that said, "I want it" (or) "I don't want it." And so we'll figure out the best site for it.

What I think we've missed in this conversation about drug use is all the stigma that goes along with it, and all the lack of love. We get a lot of folks that keep hearing from people that they're bad and they're horrible and they should stop, but they don't stop to tell them, "We love you just the way you are."

People make better choices when they're loved, and people make better choices when compassion has been given to them. We want people to be loved and cared for, and there are lots of folks that come into our program who burst into tears because we're the first person in years that told them they were loved. For me, it's like, fuck politics, this is what people need, and this is what people deserve, and our mantra is: If not us, who? And if not now, when?

E.G.: Why now?

S.M.: Because I'm tired of my friends and the people I love dying of overdose. I'm tired of my friends being so panicked in a dumpster, getting hepatitis C, getting bacterial infections, doing damage to their body, unnecessary – and tired of people telling people they should stop, but then closing down detox facilities. I'm tired of the shame and brutality we give to some of the most wonderful, caring human beings that I've ever had the opportunity to know. And so I think people need to understand that people are dying, and people are suffering, and we spend trillions of dollars on a war designed to make them suffer. I think it's

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