INJECTION, from page 5

time for people to stand up and say, "No, not now, not here."

Emily Green: *Have you already secured funding?*

Shilo Murphy: We are an organization that never secures funding until something is open. We do first and ask questions later.

E.G.: *It seems a lot of progress toward safe injection sites is made when there are actual, active drug users lobbying for them, many times in the form of a drug users union. How has the union played a role in your current efforts?*

S.M.: The Urban Survivors Union (a national drug users union founded in Seattle by Murphy) is what actually brought it to the People's Harm Reduction Alliance to work on. And they have been in constant communication, and we have worked on it together. There's lots of our membership saying, "The dumpster is not a safe place." We've been working on this a long time. Portland and Seattle – Vancouver is right next to us; it's had a safe injection facility for 10 years that's been incredibly successful.

E.G.: *Can you explain how distributing meth pipes is a form of harm reduction?*

S.M.: Our participants kept coming up and saying, "Hey, I want you to know, I'm just picking up needles because I don't have access to a pipe." And we thought about that and we said, "That seems really dumb." I mean dumb in the sense that if you want to use something that is safer to use but are using something more dangerous because you don't have access to it, then why don't we just give you the access to it. And so we started talking to folks, and we did a little survey. The majority of folks said if that service was offered, they would engage in it and inject less. So then we offered it. We are doing a survey right now, actually, to see how successful it is, but I can tell you our program is wildly successful – so the longer answer to that is: We want to keep people smoking for as long as possible. If you're going to smoke, stay smoking, and less chance to inject. We (also) offer it to folks who want to transition back (from injecting to smoking). Because with smoking, there is a minuscule possibility of hepatitis C, and there's no HIV and no abscess risk.

E.G.: *No syringe exchanges here in Portland offer meth pipes. I did see that you have a branch of your nonprofit here. Do you plan to bring your meth pipe distribution to Portland through that project?*

S.M.: The way we operate our programs is drug users in each area decide the services. So Portland drug users have been talking about it, whether or not they want that service, and they just haven't come to an exact decision, so it's possible.

E.G.: *I noticed your syringe exchanges don't require a one-to-one trade. (Portland area exchanges run by Multnomah County and Outside In practice the one-to-one-trade model, where users must trade dirty needles for clean ones. However, they do provide kits with syringes to those who don't have needles to exchange.) Can you explain why you don't use this model?*

S.M.: Essentially it's best practices. It's a standard of syringe exchanges nationally, and all of the data has shown that unlimited access is the best means to stop hepatitis C and HIV, and so we just go with the best practices. I understand that the public health department has to follow the politics more than science, but we just follow the science on it.

E.G.: *Do you accept dirty needles?*

S.M.: All of our sites collect dirty needles, and to be perfectly honest, we kind of gauge by volume, and we've always gotten back vastly more than we've ever given out.

The Portland People's Outreach Project is a People's Harm Reduction Alliance site. We helped start it, but it's really the amazing folks on the ground in Portland that made this project become successful with a physical site and an under-the-bridge (bike) delivery service. It's kind of like we've always met this new school of thought with the old school of thought – that uses science-based philosophies and data along with old-style outreach so we can get services to the people that need them, because the person living under the bridge isn't necessarily going to go to the syringe exchange.

We're looking into the idea of People's Harm Reduction Alliance opening up a science-based treatment facility in Portland.

We bring data and science. We also bring love and compassion, because we don't focus on numbers and statistics when it comes to our people; we focus on individuals and how to improve individual health. And the other is we are run by the people who use our service. So if there's, for example, heroin mixed in with fentanyl that hits the streets and people are dying of overdose, we can move faster to respond to that than other organizations that aren't peer run. I can tell you of many times that we will see something happen that we will respond to, and then three months later a government official will send us information or an email about the thing that we've already responded to.

In Portland

The Portland People's Outreach Project, established in the fall of 2014, offers clean syringes by bike delivery to heavy-drug-use areas in downtown Portland on Friday evenings and out of the Anarres Infoshop in North Portland on Saturdays. Call 503-765-PPOP (7767) for delivery locations.

E.G.: *You are an active drug user yourself. I saw you were quoted as once saying, "Heroin saved my life." Can you explain that statement?*

S.M.: I was one of those typical lost teenagers and living on the streets and had thoughts of chaos, and drugs really opened my mind and expanded the way I think. I got to meet and engage people because of it, and had to deal with lots of different cultures, ideas. Me and my parents were very liberal minded, and I got to engage with some much more conservative folks, for example. I include LSD and hallucinogenics in that; it really has made my life better. That doesn't necessarily mean it makes everyone's life better.

E.G.: *You've been criticized by other harm reduction advocates for taking this stance on drugs. Do you think you're setting the right example for your clients?*

S.M.: Yes, I think we give people hope, and I've always said, you must reach for the stars. Your dreams are never big enough; you must go for all – otherwise, you will always fall short. Do you think we could have gotten to the moon if we didn't reach for it? Do you think we could have done the five-minute mile if we hadn't strived for that? Everyone will tell you it cannot be done, and your heart will tell you that it must be done. And so people say we can't, we'll never get to a time where drug users are respected, but I was told as a child that gay marriage would never happen – and it happened. They said marijuana would never be legalized; it's, in both of our states, legal. So if you don't reach for the stars and you don't dream, we've already lost.

E.G.: *Are you still an active heroin user?*

S.M.: Yeah. I use drugs whenever I want to use drugs. To be perfectly honest, I've been so overworked lately, I've used much less drugs. The biggest barrier I have to my drug use is the fact that I do so much work for drug users.

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