

A photograph of two men at a conference holding a white banner. The man on the left is wearing a purple and white striped shirt and a lanyard with a badge that says "LEE HENTEL". The man on the right is wearing a dark hoodie and a lanyard with a badge that says "NICOLAS QUIH". They are both looking towards the camera. In the background, there are blue curtains and other people, including a woman on the left holding a black banner and a person on the right holding a black banner with orange letters. A large white banner with the hashtag "#TheyTalkWeDie" is held up by the two men in the foreground. The text "Users First: From Harm Reduction & Rehabilitation to Care & Good life" is overlaid in white on the image.

#TheyTalkWeDie

Users First: From Harm
Reduction & Rehabilitation to
Care & Good life

Why do we need to reform our drug policies?

- Current policies have failed to produce a positive position for drug users in a society.
- This has led to a significant lack of care and empathy among drug users and especially among those who suffer from the most serious problems.



© Charles Mackay/HRI

Background

- Research on harm reduction policies in Finland (needle and syringe exchange, opioid substitution treatment and housing first policies) from 2003 onwards
- Current research on threshold of services among the most vulnerable clients, who live and spend their time on the streets
- Advocacy work at substance ombudsman office about users' rights to receive services, good care and treatment



A WAR ON PEOPLE

DRUG USER POLITICS AND
A NEW ETHICS OF COMMUNITY

JARRETT ZIGON

Jarret Zigon (2019):

- War on drugs is a war against people
- Besides actual deaths the war has produced “social deaths”
- People who use drugs are seen as barely human, lacking qualities, which define a “normal person”
- “less than human”, “evil addict”, “de-humanization”

Finnish Drug Policy

- Two tracks drug policy – public health and criminal control - which do not communicate with each other
- Tensions in the treatment field between rehabilitation and harm reduction orientations
- Moralistic attitudes among public authorities and social and health care professionals

Finnish Drug Policy (street level view)

- Many a user do not receive enough support and proper help –even in the treatment service system
- Distrust toward social and health care professionals and public authorities
- Feelings of constant control on the other hand and neglect on the other.
- Feelings of shame, loneliness and "emptiness"

Zeke, 25 years old

- "I'm actually more a monkey than a human being."

Users' First: Caring and Emancipating Drug Policy

- Takes as its starting point drug users' basic and human rights
- Cultivates users' potentials and gives them possibilities for participation and looking their own position in a society
- Gives possibilities for users to look after themselves –even when they are using
- Actions diminish feelings of shame, loneliness and emptiness

Users First: Caring and Emancipating Drug Policy

- Central concepts

- Care:

- A person is taken as "who s/he is" and activities are sensitive to an individual need. Activities are based on interaction and flexibility and support individuals in their everyday life.

- Community

- A place/places, where people are able to realize their goals, needs and dreams

- Care of the self

- Activities that provide people with information and tools to look after themselves and their health; interaction and action that is focused on peoples' well-being and quality of life

How to move forward?

- Experimenting with profoundly new ways of thinking treatment and help
- Creating institutional structures that support new ways of helping and treating
- Support for drug users' own initiatives and communities