

JOSHUA

Joshua initially got involved with harm reduction through a service learning requirement for one of his classes in college; he picked the syringe exchange because a lot of “punk rock chicks hung out there,” but he fell in love with the work that would eventually save his life. Joshua says, “Harm reduction principles kept me alive; Naloxone [the overdose reversal drug] brought me back to life. Dead people don’t ever get better. There was a time in my life where I had given up on my life and myself and if it wasn’t for people doing the work I do now, who cared enough about me to put clean rigs in my hand and Naloxone in my kit and put a sandwich in my hand from time to time and just care about me when I didn’t care about myself and when I didn’t feel worthy of care, I wouldn’t be here talking to you today.” Joshua is many things, but he describes himself as a harm reduction volunteer, member of both the Northern Nevada Outreach Team (NNOT) and Public Health Alliance for Safety Access (PHASA), a drug user, former homeless person, a client, a volunteer, an employee, and someone who has had first hand experience with Naloxone.

Joshua shares the mantra “one hit, one kit, don’t share shit” with the clients at Change Point and it seems to be catching on. He wants people to know and remember that it’s not just needles and syringes that can transmit disease. “People think that as long as they’re not sharing syringes they’re good, but they’re sharing cottons, they’re sharing cookers, they’re sharing every other thing...a tourniquet...anything that you use for the process of preparing an injection can transmit hepatitis C.” Hepatitis C virus can live outside the body at room temperature on environmental surfaces for up to three

weeks (<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C/cFAQ.htm#cFAQ31>). Change Point provides all of the necessary supplies so their clients can inject safely.

When discussing harm reduction, he says, “Knowing first-hand how it worked in my life, and seeing it work in the lives of others [really gave me a passion for harm reduction].” When asked what he sees as one of the most important aspects of his work at Change Point, with no hesitation he said, “Removing the stigma around injection drug use is the most important thing we can do as harm reduction workers. Stigma conditions people to think they are subhuman because they are dependent on a substance. There’s such an intense stigma associated with drug use that we start to believe that we don’t deserve the same kind of happiness, or the same kind of quality of life that anybody else has. It’s so satisfying to see people walk into this place and, life’s been kicking them around a little, but none of our volunteers -- none of our employees come at them with any sort of judgment about what they’re doing. Stigma causes death. People feel ‘less than’ and they’re not as apt to go get what they need. I proudly self-identify as a drug addict, I’m an opiate dependent adult, and I’m also a badass human being. It’s not the definition of who I am. I am an injection drug user, a father, a friend, an artist, an activist, so many other things. That stigma is a poison.”