

Transcript – Raz, July 24th, 2025

00:00:02 Speaker 1

This is Aden.

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Today is July 24th, 2025.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

I'm talking to Raz.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

So let's get started.

00:00:11 Speaker 1

Please introduce yourself.

00:00:12 Speaker 1

Who are you, and where are you from, and where are you now?

00:00:18 Speaker 2

Hi, Aden.

00:00:19 Speaker 2

I am Raz.

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I live in London.

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Yeah, I have lived in London for the last 14 years.

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Was there something else to that?

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Oh yeah, maybe like in terms of what I do.

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Yeah, I organize with a group called Radical Acts to Survive, RATS, based in London.

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It's a drug users and sex workers union—co-founded by queer and trans people, and sex workers—that is also, of course, a harm reductionist grouping and an abolitionist grouping.

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Okay.

00:01:06 Speaker 1

Could you start by telling us the story of how you got involved in harm reduction and the work that you do?

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Yeah, I think a few things come to mind.

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I guess me being a harm reductionist before I even understood what harm reduction was.

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And then sort of, yeah, how that changes as I sort of engage with harm reduction named as such.

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I guess like in terms of the first one, I, when I was about like 20 or 21, I started organizing a little group with some friends.

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We're all studying away from our homes, and we're all Latin American, but living in Europe.

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And yeah, we have different experiences in relation to drugs, some more sort of in terms of being drug users, and that informed our experiences, of course, but some of us were not necessarily drug users, but like people from Latin America, from countries that are deeply affected by the war on drugs.

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And we got together to put together this very informal group of students who would sort of seek to raise awareness among other students of, yeah, just at the time, like if I look back, like quite basic, ideas around drugs, like what was the war on drugs?

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What were the drugs that Europeans use, produce?

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And I think that was, it's a heartening moment because it's the first time that I started thinking about drugs politically.

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Whereas until then, like I grew up actually in a very religious family who

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and quite sort of conservative environment.

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We'll probably go back to that when we talk about queerness.

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But yeah, drugs weren't just like a negative thing until then, even if like many of us had experience of drug use.

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So I guess like trying to

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bringing that subject out of obscurity was already a form of sort of seeking to reduce harm.

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100%.

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Because you cannot tackle, you cannot tackle any system of oppression that you don't even sort of acknowledge as even existed.

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So like denaturalizing, the fact that there is this war on drugs, I think was already sort of like an attempt by us to move in that direction.

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And then when I moved to London, I started understanding, like engaging more in, particularly in sort of policy reform, because like, the link with my studies. And I think there was a turning point in the late 2000s, early 2010s, which is when I was doing my studies, in Latin America when it comes to drug policy, there was this commission, it was called the Latin American Commission on Drug Policy Reform, and it was probably the first time that I can remember that really visible former heads of state and authors of renown would speak against the war on drugs.

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That was 2011, they produced their first report, and so when I moved to London,

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and I continued sort of with my academic interest in drug policy reform, I also encountered those sort of texts and pronouncements.

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And then I also realized, oh, I'm also a drug user.

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And maybe there's something like to explore here in terms of what that means for like practice, like how I sort of tried to change the world as it is towards like whatever vision I was coming up with of how the world should be at the time.

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And yeah, I think like ever since I got to London, which was 2011, it's been a constant process of reconsidering like what is harm reduction?

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Like for me as an individual, for like the people that surround me, for the country I'm from, and like what is all our states in all this. And so I think the concept has become ever more expansive. And perhaps like from what was originally a quite an intellectual exercise. It became a deeply personal exercise and one of sort of care for myself, for others, and for those who will come after us. And yeah, I think that that already, I don't know, I cannot think of any point where I was not a drug user and not practicing some form of harm reduction because already, you know, with friends who were exchanging information about like our suppliers and the kind of stuff that we were finding in our drugs and how to sort of make a trip better and or experience less challenges.

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I remember at the time when I moved to London, MCAT, so mephedrone was really on the rise and many of us

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Yeah, found ourselves like very young and using loads of mephedrone and sometimes, I mean, in my case, definitely experiencing challenges with that.

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So that sort of exchange of tactics on how to protect each other and ourselves and transform the world.

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I think, yeah, that is sort of how I understand harm reduction.

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And so it's been a constant ever since.

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Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

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I'd love to hear like you talk more about like first engaging with harm reduction through this more like academic like institutional space and then that kind of transitioning.

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I mean, more so I don't know how recent, but like coming to understand harm reduction through this more like this more personal sense of like community and care.

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Like I'd love to hear you just, I mean, you talked a lot about that, but I'd love to hear more about like the discrepancies that you might see in kind of how you engage with harm reduction, like as a politic in your like personal life versus like the work, like the more like institutionalized work that you do or like the more institutionalized work that you see that claims as harm reduction.

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Hmm.

00:08:53 Speaker 2

Yeah, where to start?

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I think, I think we're, so there's a few transitional moments that I think maybe I would, if I had to sort of give it timings, I would identify like, I think on the personal side and with

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friends and sort of like immediate community, the sense of harm reductionist care and community care was always there.

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Yeah.

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I think what I found really, I don't know, because I also have no regrets, but like what is unfortunate is like at the time, you know, I was already practicing this, but when I did any research, I'm talking about early 2020s, sorry, 2010s, my bad.

00:09:52 Speaker 2

So when I had recently moved to London, like, that practice was there, but when I sort of went into my day job, which was on drug policy reform, and it has been for a very long time, like, I didn't see

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that narrative or that understanding replicated.

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Yes, yes, yes, yes.

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And so if I, I think I just hadn't yet found sort of, for lack of a better word, like mentors or people who would sort of identify that political vision, like quite clearly.

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So something that I was practicing, you know, at the time,

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I thought I was just like taking care of my friends and then harm reduction was like service provision.

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Yeah.

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Which is hilarious because like nowadays I would be like, no, what I was doing was harm reduction and service provision very often isn't harm reduction.

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So it's sort of.

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Almost the opposite of where I was before.

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But yeah, like,

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moments where it sort of made sense to me.

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I guess what was really fortunate.

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At a certain point, I changed jobs.

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I changed jobs within sort of the drug policy reform space a few times.

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And I guess the lucky thing has been that with each change, I've been sort of

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Each one of those institutions has been a little bit more politically sort of, for lack of a better word, if we think of it as a spectrum, like each one has been more politically progressive than the previous one.

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It's not to suggest that any of them are or have been or, yeah, radical, but like each one has contributed to move me in that direction.

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So yeah, I think my biggest sort of moment of realizing, oh, what I was doing was harm reduction and actually like this is the ethos of harm reduction as I understand it.

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So one of radical care was, yeah, I started my current job.

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And in noticing what many people were doing in harm reduction around the world, I sort of saw the connections, which with that politics that I was already sort of putting in practice with

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my immediate community and being like, oh like that is harm reduction.

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And then like that reinforced or made me then want to engage in a more sort of deliberate political organizing with also like comrades, friends and people

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usually in my media community, but not only, through RATS, the drug user union that I mentioned, which is actually relatively recent.

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So that's all scattered because I've never tried to temporalize it, but yeah, I think if I had stayed in my first job, it would have taken me much longer to find

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to find those connections between what I was already doing from the personal to what harm reduction was.

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Although at the same time, like the conditions, like things like drug death catastrophe in North America, I think have sort of launched the conversation so prominently, the harm reduction conversation so prominently around the world that maybe even if I had stayed, like it would have been unavoidable, but.

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Yeah.

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That's a very discussive.

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I'm trying to look back into, what is it, like almost 15 years of like experience with the word.

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So it's hard to- Yeah, I feel like you summarized it pretty well though.

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Like I feel like I can get a picture of.

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Okay, cool.

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Yeah, like how things have changed for you and such.

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Thinking about that timeline, you introduced yourself,

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mentioning your involvement with an organization called RATS.

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If you want to talk more about that, I think I would love to hear that, like about your involvement with that group.

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Kind of what are the aims of it?

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What is it working towards?

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Like what, yeah, like in the context of London, I guess, as it's, correct me if I'm wrong, like a London-based group.

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if you kind of just want to talk, more about that.

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Yeah, it is, it is London-based.

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So I was like, for the last sort of five years, if I'm not wrong, I've been organizing with an abolitionist group focused on political education.

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Cool.

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Futures.

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and,

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Yeah, prison abolition has become such a useful prism for me, and whereas I think I've always been sort of anti-humanitarian and thought myself as socialist, I think abolition has provided a framework to sort of consider what this ultimate political vision that I'm rowing towards may look like.

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more fully.

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And so for the longest time, I felt a little bit like, what's a word?

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Maybe isolated in the UK because for many reasons, the drug user movement has been decimated in the UK.

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Like primarily it was a conscious decision of a unsurprisingly social, supposedly, I mean, self-understood

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a Labour government, but actually a Social Democratic one.

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So actually, you know, Liberal government.

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Yeah, government that deliberately defunded drug user organising in the UK and so pro-user groups that have become quite dependent on state funding to function from like in the space of five years folded like massively, like there was a huge implosion.

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Yeah, really, really dramatic.

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And with that came also move from sort of state policies that were gesturing towards harm reduction as in like provision of opioid therapy.

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Yeah, things got conservative real fast from my understanding.

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Yeah.

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Very abstentionist, like pro abstinence and actually intolerant of drugs.

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And so I guess I was sitting with this politics, like, socialists, prison abolitionists, and not finding an outlet to organize politically with other drug users around this.

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And then at the end of 2023, a group of us started talking about like, yeah, the slack.

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And also very inspired by a producer activist who recently passed away and who was a good friend, Peter Krykabt, who in 2020 set up a safer use site, like a mobile safer consumption site in Glasgow.

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And

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Yeah, just like noticing, like being very involved in by that and this group of us being sort of socialist and prison abolitionists and noticing like how drug user organizing was

lacking, we decided to just create a group to, well, one, create space for sort of drug user organizing and sex worker organizing because like some of us were,

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sex workers, so like that.

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And most of us in trans, so like those intersections were sort of like natural to us because that's sort of like our communities and very overlapping.

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Like having those politics, being inspired by that and realizing that there's a growing drug deaths crisis in the UK and knowing that these are challenges that our very communities experience, we founded that group.

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And yeah, we have organizing, been organizing ever since, like perhaps like more practically to get safer consumption sites running in London.

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And not only like the idea is

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like build, like rebuild the drug user movement in London alongside, like along those, um, along, along that political perspective.

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Um, um, yeah, that is right.

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Yeah, I, yeah, thank you for explaining that more and more about like the context of kind of like drug user organizing in London and the UK more broadly.

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Um,

00:20:51 Speaker 1

I wanted to ask you, or I personally have heard that y'all have had an action last month kind of related to obviously the vision and goals and things that you like your group is working towards.

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If you can talk more about that action, I'd love to hear more about what it looked like, what came of it, like what's

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I mean, still currently unfolding.

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Like after that, I would just love to hear more about the action that y'all had last month.

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Yeah, definitely.

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So it was on 26th of June, we ran a demo safer consumption site in a central location in London, Allen Gardens, near Brick Lane.

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Partly because that is a site where, I mean, for many reasons, because that neighbourhood or that borough is a borough that has one of the highest rates of use of both heroin and crack cocaine in the city, which of course exposes people to the violence and neglect of the state. Because the whole of the city lacks, as is the case with all of the countries of the UK, except for Scotland, lacks a safer consumption site.

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And because, of course, it's just such a basic need of any person who doesn't have a place to use drugs privately and is forced to use in public, often in really undignified conditions, anyone should have access to a safe place to use drugs.

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So we run that demo, which ran as a demo.

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So there is currently no way to run that without exposing the people who would use it.

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Yeah.

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Precisely like it brings violence, so we had to run it as a demo, but the whole setup was sort of very much ready to welcome anyone who wouldn't need to use it.

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Like it's the idea was showing the community like how.

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for lack of a better word, easy it would be for our communities to organize for each other in this way.

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And, you know, Peter always told us like how, like what he ran in Glasgow became unsustainable because like, yeah, you sort of need to be able to coordinate loads of people to make that happen and that coordination takes a toll and when it's one person sort of orchestrating it all,

00:24:03 Speaker 2

That is incredibly hard and credit to him for running it for months.

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But like, we can definitely do this.

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Like we don't have to wait for the state to do this.

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And indeed, the state won't do it like anytime soon.

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And if it does, and if it does with the collaboration of charities who tend to be sort of basically neoliberal structures that are subcontracted by the UK state to provide “drug services”, it will run in a way that is punitive, exclusionary and not sort of, not lit up to our expectations, which are like those of harm reduction services that are responses primarily and accountable primarily to the community and that seek directly into liberation rather than sort of like appeasement or the mere provision of services like just almost for the sake of keeping the contracts running.

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In fact, like we're all volunteers and

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It was incredibly successful.

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Like we had many apprehensions.

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Like one, we thought like there was a possibility that the police would crack down on it.

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Like, even if it was just a demo.

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Yeah.

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And that didn't happen.

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So that was a win.

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That is a win.

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Yeah.

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Because we had all the equipment and stuff.

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So like,

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Yeah, you never know how the police are going to react.

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And in the UK, there's such a strong anti-drug use sentiment in the UK.

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And in fact, like near, we were going to do it in a different site.

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And that part that we originally wanted is now plastered and was already at the time plastered with

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like these ads by the police that say basically something about like making our community safer by cracking down on like drug use and drug supply.

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So that's the sort of state of the conversation from the state in the city.

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And we thought we were going to find that among the public.

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We thought people were going to have that animosity.

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And actually, 160 people came over through the five hours that we were in the park.

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And by and large, I think apart from three people who weren't negative, but just hesitant, apart from that handful, like everyone was sort of like, why is this not already running?

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Because, people are not stupid.

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People know that their neighbors are struggling.

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Like, especially street-based neighbors are struggling with finding safe places and they don't want necessarily, like, there's actually a concern that

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comes up very often, they don't want their neighbors to be using our public space in this way, which is also a complicated conversation to have, because of course we don't want this to be sort of like misconstrued into some sort of like social cleansing.

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But yeah, I think there's something in there about like being concerned about the people that they see and noting how useful it would be for

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these community-run spaces, and very often people would be like, oh, so do you have doctors here?

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And it's like, well, I mean, some of the volunteers are doctors, but you don't need a doctor to make this happen.

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So we saw it not only as a sort of political exercise in the sense of putting pressure on public authorities, but also political education as in showing, we can do this, we can do this.

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And hopefully, like our idea is that we will continue repeating this until we can make them happen safely for everyone involved and that people will progressively join us.

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A lot of people were asking us actually, like, Well, I mean, not a petition, but if you want to stay in touch, like we will continue running this and we do trainings so that like, yeah, more and more people can join.

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And some of that having said, Aden is like, while I think it's fair to say that RATS has instigated this, like it has done so in collaboration with another 14 organizations.

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Yeah.

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Both like more institutional NGOs and more radical grassroots organizations as part of the London Harm Reduction Collective.

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So like, we're all we're all part of this and we all are trying to make this happen.

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Yeah, Well, thank you for like giving a rundown on this recent action that kind of like, I don't know, I feel like you touched on a lot of good points, like especially thinking about how like, despite like a particular government in a particular locale having like a super conservative take on drug users and like what is to be done about them, that like the public eye

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and public vision and opinions, perceptions of drug users and harm reduction, often does not look anything like what their said government says.

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So I think like you specifically mentioned that is super important.

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Yeah, so thinking this is a bit of a shift, but another

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like big thing that I think is really important to think about in relation to drug user organizing and harm reduction.

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I'm just curious, like however you define this and what you see as most relevant, like how have your identities like shaped your relationship to harm reduction and drug user organizing just overall?

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I think maybe two big ones come to mind, like one I've already sort of chatted a little bit about, which is like, I think it's like, because I'm from a region that has been subjected to US imperialism for so long, it is impossible for me to consider harm reduction outside of sort of questions that are relevant to people who produce and supply drugs.

00:31:11 Speaker 2

And yeah, very often I see my friends and colleagues from Latin America pushing back against this idea that harm reduction, one, I don't know if this was copied from a text, but I loved it. Harm reduction didn't spring from the veins of white European men drug users like production like there's I could talk for so long about

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How, like, there are so many practices included, including among indigenous communities that we could sort of understand as a precursor or as actually like harm reduction 'in the wild'

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Like harm reduction that exists already before somebody in Europe named it as such.

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Yes.

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And so, yeah, like considering always harm reduction is like a practice of radical care and that radical bit simply, for me at least, means looking at what are the root causes of oppression, like what are the root causes of that harm?

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And yeah, I think that has definitely shaped my understanding of harm reduction.

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And it's something that very often like I have, and many others have to push back against, like think of structural conditions and not just sort of immediate needs, which is, which is very important to satisfy immediate needs, but

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we need to satisfy or respond to immediate needs as we also transform the structural conditions that are causing those needs to meet.

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Yes, yes, yes, yes.

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And the other like huge one of course relates to like my queerness.

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Like I think like from so many angles, like one, from a matter of like precariousness and fabricated vulnerability because like queer people are more likely to be homeless, queer people are more likely to use drugs and those be exposed to state violence and neglect. People who are queer are very often like live with needs are unmet because like the state is unwilling to make space for us.

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There's so many reasons that expose queer people to drug-related harm and push us towards drug-related harm.

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So yeah, I had a few times to sort of, particularly in Europe, it doesn't happen so much in the Americas, but in Europe, there's this almost like pushback against the idea that like,

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Yeah, you need some, you cannot sort of imagine harm reduction as something that is solely, like, this is how it has been sort of given to me, but even the construction seems stupid to me, like, solely about drugs, as if drugs existed sort of like in a distinct realm.

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In a silo, yeah.

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Completely, and your relationship with drugs weren't, yeah, that, a relationship that is, sort of constrained by so many different circumstances and this idea that you can sort of ignore those circumstances while still fairly or effectively responding to those, like the challenges of that relationship with drug, it's absurd. You cannot do that siloing. And I think for queer people, that is more of an inevitable sort of understanding.

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Like you, you cannot, you don't have the luxury of that siloing when the world will not afford you that luxury.

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Like, whereas, you know, yeah, I understand how a middle class white person can do that siloing in his head because yeah, he won't be faced in the same way, especially like a cis head and won't be faced with, won't be pushed to those conditions.

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So like, yeah, those two have definitely hugely

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shaped my experience and also like the experience of being a migrant don't have sort of ... a lot of wealth in the UK is inherited and you know like most people that I know who are English and own a place either inherited it or have wealth that they have inherited and have or connections or networks like when you when you're a migrant and you don't have that like

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and most of your sort of circles are on the same boat and you don't come from middle and upper class backgrounds.

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Like you're sort of, you're sort of more, you're on devices and economic precariousness becomes something that you cannot ignore.

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And yeah, I think that's also why my vision of harm reduction is quite radical.

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I don't know how it would have turned out if I were cis-het white men from, I don't know, Devon shot.

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Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

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That's, I feel like you brought up a lot of really good points, like thinking, and I think like what you mentioned about this like siloing that often happens within like particular bubbles of the harm reduction movement where like, you know what I mean?

00:37:52 Speaker 1

Like a lot of spaces, especially like in the global north, like in the UK, in the US, throughout like Western Europe and such, like so much of what is decided around, like, you know what I mean, within harm reductionist spaces, quote unquote, is from like the lens of typically like cis white men, right?

00:38:19 Speaker 1

And often so many of these services, or spaces or groups or whatever are for the needs and safety of those types of folks. like I'm sure like you probably know a bunch of people as do I that like who are femme, trans, people of color or, you know what I mean? Just don't exist within those dominant identities here that like feel so unsafe, like accessing like what is defined as harm reduction.

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You know, it's like, oh, like there's so many people I know who are like, I would never go to XYZ like service, you know, because I'm, you know what I mean?

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I don't feel comfortable there.

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It's clearly not built and tailored to my needs.

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Um, so yeah, like, I think that's, yeah, a really great point that you brought up.

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Um, and yeah.

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There's so much in there, Aden and of course, it could be a whole conversation in and of itself, but like, um, it's one of the reasons why sort of, so RATS.

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Yeah.

00:39:33 Speaker 2

Co parents to find a name for that relationship with an organization called Release, this like London Harm Reduction Club, and it's a place, like we very often describe it as a community living room.

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Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:39:49 Speaker 2

Because we want it to be just welcoming to anyone, but in everything that we do in relation to

00:39:58 Speaker 2

Sorry, in relation to what we're doing with the hub, we're thinking, like, how do we lower those thresholds of access to this space, particularly for, yeah, people who are not part of identities that are in a dominant position because, yeah, what you were saying, like drug services are not usually designed like that, but also because we believe that if we make a space that is welcoming for queer and trans people, for sex workers, for neurodivergent people, that place will be also welcoming for everyone else.

00:40:39 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:40:40 Speaker 2

So like, it is, 'cause also, like, I have people be like, oh, but, literally one time I had somebody be like, oh, but you know, when I go to my drug service, most people who I see there are sort of white men.

00:40:57 Speaker 2

So what about that?

00:40:57 Speaker 2

And I'm like, but I'm not, I'm not saying they cannot come like.

00:41:01 Speaker 1

Yeah, it's not about that.

00:41:02 Speaker 1

Exactly.

00:41:04 Speaker 2

The only one who's thinking of this is some sort of weird cake that can only be divided and eaten like you took your piece and you run away or something that like like

00:41:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, like a community building exercise.

00:41:19 Speaker 2

So like, yeah.

00:41:22 Speaker 2

And also we know that in the UK at least, most people, I don't know where the percentage is at the moment, but like most people, for example, who die in relation to drugs, do so without having had contact with drug services, which is of course an indictment on the quality of those services.

00:41:44 Speaker 2

in my personal experience, like whenever a friend and you know, very often because people start thinking like, you're the drugs person or you're the home abduction person, like your community goes like, oh, I have a friend who's training, like what should I do?

00:42:00 Speaker 2

And my response is, unfortunately, like in the absolute majority of cases, like, I cannot in good faith recommend most of

00:42:09 Speaker 2

these services because I know people would be mistreated and wouldn't find what they're like looking for.

00:42:16 Speaker 2

There's exceptions in London police, like there's some like services that are a little bit sort of more clued up.

00:42:24 Speaker 2

But it's a shame because like sometimes you have like services that are more clued up on how to respond to the needs of queer and trans people, but then you find a lot of anti-drug user sentiment in those spaces.

00:42:36 Speaker 2

So like- Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:42:39 Speaker 2

We need to do way more work at like, how do we make things like truly welcoming for everyone?

00:42:46 Speaker 2

And I think that passes by, yeah, prioritizing who are usually the most marginalized and excluded from these spaces.

00:42:55 Speaker 2

And in fixing that, we'll end up creating spaces that are quite welcoming for most.

00:43:02 Speaker 1

Yeah, no, you, yeah, I...

00:43:06 Speaker 1

There's a lot with this.

00:43:07 Speaker 1

I do want to say first that I actually, like when I was visiting London I actually got the chance to like go to release and like see the space and stuff.

00:43:22 Speaker 1

And I can definitely rep the fact that it did feel very different to a lot of places I've seen out like in the US and elsewhere that are very like

00:43:33 Speaker 1

sterile and scary.

00:43:35 Speaker 1

And it's like, okay, I'm just grabbing my supplies and I'm running the fuck away.

00:43:42 Speaker 1

Yeah, and I also appreciated like how like you have like, there's so many like materials, like, political education materials, like so many little pamphlets and things like thinking about, you know what I mean?

00:43:55 Speaker 1

These more like structural conversations and stuff.

00:43:58 Speaker 1

Like I actually have a whole pile of stuff that I took.

00:44:02 Speaker 1

when I was there, that I was like, wow, I, what I mean?

00:44:05 Speaker 1

Like, it's sad that something as simple as this, like, isn't as present in a lot of places, just like information about thinking about the movement in like a more radical way, right?

00:44:21 Speaker 1

And I think, yeah, something else that you mentioned about like,

00:44:25 Speaker 1

these like yet again, quote unquote, harm reduction spaces that are more tailored towards queer and trans people, like often having these like anti-drug sentiments.

00:44:35 Speaker 1

I can definitely resonate with that.

00:44:36 Speaker 1

Like I've seen, you know, like I was living in Berlin for a while and like I've been in the Bay Area, in California, in New York.

00:44:45 Speaker 1

And there's so many organizations that kind of claim is like safer nightlife, right?

00:44:51 Speaker 1

And have so much stigma around particular drugs that aren't seen as, you know what I mean?

00:44:58 Speaker 1

Quote unquote cleaner or more safe or whatever.

00:45:01 Speaker 1

Like if you're, you know what I mean?

00:45:03 Speaker 1

Someone who's talking about using G, G even, or like meth or crack or, you know what I mean?

00:45:10 Speaker 1

It's like, okay, wait, like this, you know what I mean?

00:45:12 Speaker 1

Like this space clearly isn't for users of more stigmatized drugs, clearly.

00:45:19 Speaker 1

So I think that's something, important that you mentioned.

00:45:26 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:45:27 Speaker 2

Hierarchies are a bane of anyone who's really committed to harm reduction. If we do not use our experiences of vulnerability in relation to these systems to actually connect with each other in our pain, in our precariousness, in our marginalization, but rather use them to think that we need to carve out exceptions for ourselves.

00:45:59 Speaker 2

That is a selfish reflex that we need to extricate from our communities. The war cry should always be solidarity and not just between drug users but between anyone who's experiencing oppression. That can really strengthen our movements so like whenever I hear sort of producing groups like self-defined as like single-issue networks I cringe like I think...

00:46:30 Speaker 1

Me too, me too.

00:46:31 Speaker 1

Because yet again, like as you talked about before, and also as I know, like it's just so evidently clear that like the oppression that someone faces as like a user of stigmatized or criminalized drugs is not like this siloed struggle, right?

00:46:48 Speaker 1

Like there are so many intersections that come with it.

00:46:52 Speaker 1

And you see that like it's so visually and like obviously and materially like

00:46:59 Speaker 1

apparent that like, it's not like, this isn't just a matter of like drug user and non-drug user.

00:47:05 Speaker 1

Like this has, you know what I mean?

00:47:07 Speaker 1

There's so much precedence on like racial, class, gender lines and other identities.

00:47:15 Speaker 1

Like we can't just think that we can fight for one thing and then ignore everything else.

00:47:20 Speaker 1

So I really appreciate you making that sentiment known with this.

00:47:27 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:47:30 Speaker 1

I, so another question that I'm thinking about in relation to all of this.

00:47:35 Speaker 1

I mean, you spoke a lot about, like in the beginning about your, like how your personal relationship to what you've come to understand harm reduction has changed over time.

00:47:46 Speaker 1

But I'm really curious just like in the context and locales that you've resided in, like through your involvement with this work, like how have you seen

00:47:56 Speaker 1

like the drug user, quote unquote, harm reduction movement change over time since you first started getting involved.

00:48:10 Speaker 2

In terms of cruiser movement, I think what has been really beautiful is to see it re-emerge in the UK.

00:48:20 Speaker 2

I think when I started,

00:48:25 Speaker 2

drug user organizing was reduced to advisory groups attached to drug services.

00:48:32 Speaker 2

So drug services would create some space for people who use drugs who were using the service to have a say on what the service was doing.

00:48:41 Speaker 2

So very, very much like, I don't know, like, yeah, I don't know.

00:48:50 Speaker 2

I don't want to say extractive, but I will say extractive.

00:48:54 Speaker 2

Because like the purpose there was not sort of having drug user leadership, but just like, it's almost like consulting the people as an afterthought.

00:49:05 Speaker 2

There were very few drug user led groups that understood themselves as drug user groups that were there to sort of build community.

00:49:21 Speaker 2

It's not that they didn't exist, like they didn't completely disappear, but there were very few and I think I see them more and more.

00:49:31 Speaker 2

And yeah, that makes me really happy that that means like something, something is changing and there's a realization that there will be no harm reduction without drug user leadership.

00:49:47 Speaker 2

And

00:49:49 Speaker 2

Yeah, there's challenges in that, I think, especially sort of more institutional, I'm talking about NGOs and charities and the like, do not realize that we're not in, again, for lack of a better term, in the same position, when we speak of, in terms of power, clearly,

00:50:18 Speaker 2

volunteer run drug user groups like will struggle more in so many different ways than sort of like an organization that is like very well funded and or even funded like and has sort of like workers.

00:50:36 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:50:36 Speaker 2

So I think there's still a way to go in terms of like clarifying that relationship, which I think could be positive, like in terms of, for example, like NGOs and charities providing more deliberate

00:50:48 Speaker 2

like more deliberately and intentionally providing resources for drug user groups to sort of grow and thrive.

00:50:55 Speaker 2

Whereas, yeah, sometimes I feel we're treated as, as if we should already function, or as we, if we were NGOs in the making and it's like, well, no, like, some of us do not want that.

00:51:12 Speaker 2

And like, you have resources that we don't, so like,

00:51:17 Speaker 2

appreciate what we're doing and support us in doing it instead of trying to shape us in the direction that you want us to go.

00:51:26 Speaker 2

But even that conversation, I don't think would have happened before, or at least I didn't see it happening as much because, yeah, there wasn't much drug user organizing.

00:51:41 Speaker 2

Like the politicization of drug user organizing is something that I find really positive at the moment in the UK.

00:51:49 Speaker 2

And not just like, perhaps its just an example, but there's a lot of harm reduction organizing happening among trans communities, for example, in relation to access to hormones, access to equipment for the use of that. And I think there's something really interesting there of like almost like a new generation of harm reduction that embraces radical community care as like an ethos.

00:52:26 Speaker 2

And so the question of sort of becoming an NGO that gets a contract from the state to provide services is not at all in the horizon of those organizations and or at least it's not a goal.

00:52:44 Speaker 2

but rather how do we strategically engage with the state to and with NGOs to get resources to do what we need to do for each other.

00:52:52 Speaker 2

So like it's a it's maybe it's it seems like a slight difference, but I think it's not.

00:52:58 Speaker 2

I think like it speaks to the goal being liberation, not sort of accommodation.

00:53:07 Speaker 1

Yes, 100%.

00:53:07 Speaker 2

And yeah, I think

00:53:14 Speaker 2

there's also even an institutional, so-called institutional harm reduction, like a progressive sort of move towards understanding that difference and why it matters and why it's important that they support us.

00:53:28 Speaker 2

So yeah, that gives me hope.

00:53:30 Speaker 2

That gives me a lot of hope.

00:53:31 Speaker 1

Yeah, no, that's really good to hear because I feel like it's

00:53:37 Speaker 1

Yeah, considering everything that is going on, especially in my context in the States, it is so hard to hold on to that hope.

00:53:45 Speaker 1

But I mean, it is important to remember that like, despite so much loss that all of us are experiencing in relation to this work,

00:53:56 Speaker 1

and in relation to the supply right now and everything going on, like that there are these, there's so many pockets of wins that are happening and I think...

00:54:07 Speaker 1

You know what I mean?

00:54:08 Speaker 1

Like hearing you talk about the action that you had with the group that you're a part of and like hearing more about like how there is kind of this shift towards the reemergence of drug user groups like coming back in the UK.

00:54:23 Speaker 1

Like, I don't know, it's good to hold on to that hope and stuff.

00:54:28 Speaker 1

So I really appreciate you bringing up those good moments and kind of like thinking about that.

00:54:36 Speaker 1

kind of closing towards the end of our conversation, I kind of just wanted to ask you more about, I guess, like there's two aspects to this, which you kind of already talked about already, but I'd love to hear more about kind of like the challenges that you see that the movement is facing right now, what you think could be done to overcome said challenges that feel most relevant.

00:55:04 Speaker 1

And then

00:55:06 Speaker 1

from there, like, I'd love to hear, like, what you hope for the movement.

00:55:10 Speaker 1

Like, what do you wish to see, like, the movement achieve?

00:55:16 Speaker 1

Like, what are, you know what I mean?

00:55:18 Speaker 1

What are the challenges we're facing right now?

00:55:20 Speaker 1

How could we work towards addressing those?

00:55:22 Speaker 1

And what, what's the end goal, you know?

00:55:25 Speaker 2

Yeah, huge questions.

00:55:29 Speaker 1

Yes.

00:55:30 Speaker 2

In terms of, in terms of challenges, I think,

00:55:35 Speaker 2

Uh, yeah, for me, the biggest one, and it's sort of the one that keeps me up at night, so to speak, is like, I see, like, I am really worried about like, it's gonna sound silly, but like the state of the state, like I think, um, whereas

00:56:00 Speaker 2

Like what I see, at least in the UK, is a progression towards an ever more punitive state that is dismantling its social provision function and ramping up the, or strengthening its repressive apparatus.

00:56:20 Speaker 2

And we see that in sort of laws, we see that in the multiplication of

00:56:27 Speaker 2

police bureaucracies, we see it in increased expenditure for both the military and security apparatus.

00:56:35 Speaker 2

So it's a state that's becoming ever more carceral.

00:56:38 Speaker 2

And when I raise that worry with elders in this movement, very often they tell me, oh, it ebbs and flows.

00:56:46 Speaker 2

I worry that it's not.

00:56:48 Speaker 2

I worry that this is not sort of like a pendulum swing, but like

00:56:54 Speaker 2

like the last throws of the neoliberal state and the sort of, as the tensions of capitalism intensify, the state sort of is moving in the direction of ramping up its suppressive apparatus in order to defend itself from what will be a reaction, I hope, from

00:57:23 Speaker 2

the people who will find themselves increasingly precarious.

00:57:26 Speaker 2

So I am very worried about sort of, yeah, this sort of, I don't know if optimistic is the word, but like roast-tinted idea that like, yeah, this is just a phase, basically, of the pain, and it will go back to a state that provides social welfare, and we just have to wait kind of thing.

00:57:53 Speaker 2

And that has consequences for harm reduction then, because then what do we do to respond to that increasingly punitive, cruel, sort of neglectful state?

00:58:09 Speaker 2

I think what gives me hope in relation to overcoming those challenges is precisely, yeah, what I was saying earlier about the emergence of sort of drug user and harm reduction organizing that understands itself as a vehicle for radical care, like to not let our people perish under the weight of those systems.

00:58:31 Speaker 2

And so you will have seen, for example, at the hub, we have information on what to do if you're stopped by the police and what to do if you see.

00:58:41 Speaker 2

Yeah, like we need to get more clued up, like resourcing our people to respond to that ramping up of police and state violence.

00:58:52 Speaker 2

I, and those connections between sort of like harm reduction in relation to drug use, sex work and queer and trans identities and like their needs, like the connections that are being built between those spaces and sort of anti-carceral abolitionist, homelessness solidarity groups, for example, like people who are, they're actually doing excellent work responding to the needs of street-based people.

00:59:32 Speaker 2

I think those connections that I see, at least in the UK setting, for me and the overlaps between these groups gives me hope that we are mounting some sort of resistance against this evolution of the state, which is really threatening.

00:59:54 Speaker 2

And then I am sometimes quite worried that there's people sort of actively torpedoing that process.

01:00:05 Speaker 2

How many times I hear people say, Harm reduction is not political.

01:00:12 Speaker 2

Harm reduction is about finding compromise and crossing across the aisle or whatever stupidity like I hear very often, like even elders in this. And it's like, no, no, you are asking us to compromise the sort of very forces that are in our lives that will kill us.

01:00:31 Speaker 1

Yeah.

01:00:33 Speaker 2

And yeah, I think, yeah, I think in terms of those are both my challenges and hopes.

01:00:40 Speaker 2

Like I see that movement.

01:00:44 Speaker 2

or that direction.

01:00:45 Speaker 2

I also see ourselves organizing better against it.

01:00:49 Speaker 2

I'm worried about those who sort of ask us to continue compromising and sort of moderate our tone.

01:00:57 Speaker 2

And I think we're at the same time, like, if I look back at my 15 years in this space, I think we're winning, like, in terms of at least, you know, at least,

01:01:13 Speaker 2

at least the most radical among us like very often are wheeled in by the more institutional organizations to like pretend that they care about this but I think I'm hoping that in that sort of artificial like narrative shift like like

01:01:32 Speaker 2

that will then start transforming into actual practical solidarity, even if currently we don't see it as much.

01:01:38 Speaker 2

But yeah, I think before they didn't even pretend to care about these ideas.

01:01:42 Speaker 2

So like, really pretend, I'm hoping that it will start materializing in actual support.

01:01:49 Speaker 1

Yeah, yeah, no, for sure.

01:01:50 Speaker 1

I think, yeah, as things have been getting like the response of

01:01:58 Speaker 1

You know what I mean?

01:01:58 Speaker 1

Folks who are at the very margins of these issues are, you know what I mean, fighting back a lot harder by virtue of having to, But, no, I definitely feel...

01:02:14 Speaker 1

very similarly about the same fears, but also the same hopes in how a lot of, I mean, at least in the world that I'm in, like a lot of younger drug users who have like a lot of a more radical position compared to, folks in more institutionalized spaces and, harm reduction elders that have, you know what I mean, been sucked in by those spaces.

01:02:38 Speaker 1

Like,

01:02:39 Speaker 1

I definitely feel like I'm exposed to so many folks who have such a radical vision, who are pushing for that as hard as they can, that it definitely gives me hope that like this, like it doesn't have to stay like this.

01:02:53 Speaker 1

You know, I think that's the best way that I kind of conceptualize it.

01:02:57 Speaker 1

It's like, it's fucked right now, but this is not how it has to be.

01:03:02 Speaker 1

Like we can work towards something so much different.

01:03:07 Speaker 1

Yeah, I really appreciate you kind of sharing your thoughts on that.

01:03:13 Speaker 1

And if there's anything else that you feel is like important for you to bring up or mention before we work towards the close of our conversation, like, please take up the space that you wish to.

01:03:26 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think, like, just really shows how much you said, like, I think a reminder that so many of us are

01:03:36 Speaker 2

planting the seeds of like, what can be a different state for harm reduction.

01:03:42 Speaker 2

And yeah, I have to believe that it will come to fruition.

01:03:49 Speaker 2

Because otherwise, I will just like, get even more depressed.

01:03:53 Speaker 1

Yeah, no, I know.

01:03:54 Speaker 2

I believe that we can win.

01:03:56 Speaker 1

Yeah, no, I do too.

01:03:59 Speaker 1

Well, thank you so much for taking the time to share your story and your thoughts and

01:04:06 Speaker 1

You know what I mean, your experiences within this work.

01:04:08 Speaker 1

Of course.

01:04:09 Speaker 1

Yeah, so I'm going to stop the recording now.

01:04:11 Speaker 1

Thanks.