

Drug policy: Reconciling recovery and harm reduction approaches

Stephen Bamber

stephenbamber@gmail.com

www.theartoflifeitself.org



Defining terms:

Harm Reduction

IHRA position statement:

Harm reduction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of psychoactive drugs in people unable or unwilling to stop.

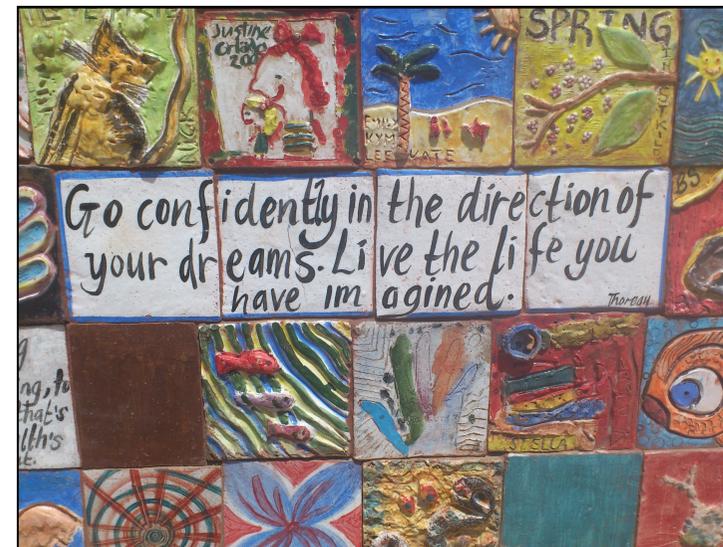
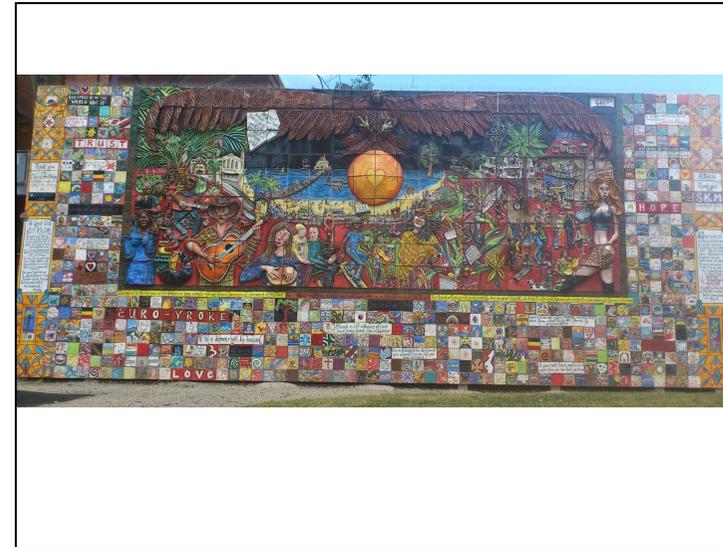
The defining features are the focus on the prevention of harm, rather than on the prevention of drug use itself, and the focus on people who continue to use drugs.

Recovery and abstinence: setting the record straight^(ish)

- It is a basic category error to consider recovery and abstinence as equivalent
- Recovery is a process (or series of processes...)
- Abstinence is a state: a condition of being
- They are two different 'things'
- Association comes from US influence
- The recovery concept is at its most potent when it's meaning is co-produced locally

Recovery and harm reduction: Some shared characteristics

- Both terms engender hope and hysteria
- Some conceptual confusion
- Working principles: *“Meeting the client where they are”* – client focused
- Both recovery and harm reduction can be described as “a journey undertaken by those who are determined to change the way we view drug users” – de-stigmatisation
- Both recognise substance-free living as a gold standard

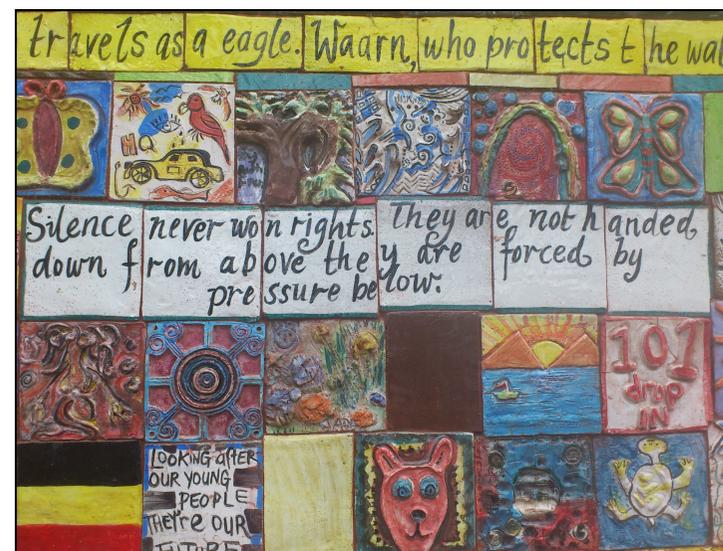


Recovery

Key theme no. 1

Privileging self-empowerment and autonomy

- Taking responsibility and control (systemically and individually)
- Raising aspiration throughout local systems
- Authentic partnership
- Eliminating dysfunctional service-level co-dependence
- Positive risk taking

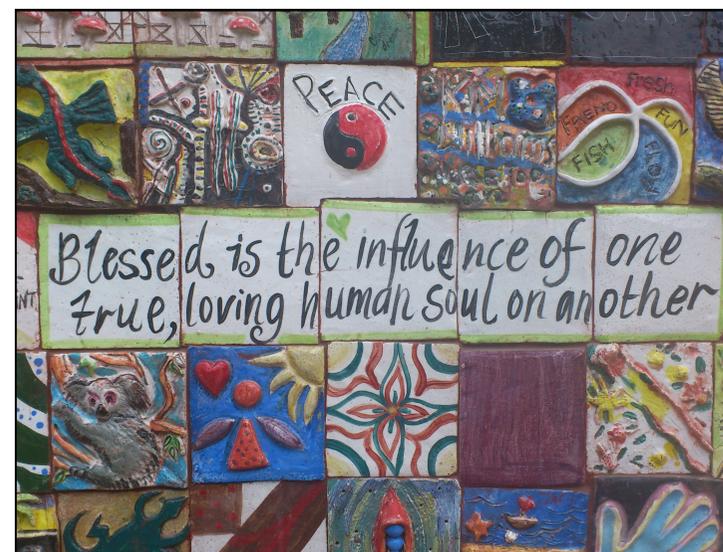


Recovery

Key theme no. 2

Nurturing a service-user driven culture

- Multiplicity of identities
- 'Service user' / 'client' / 'survivor' / 'consumer'
- Nurturing and mobilising grass-roots activity
- Singularity of the experience – recovery as a unique, personal journey
- Co-production



Recovery

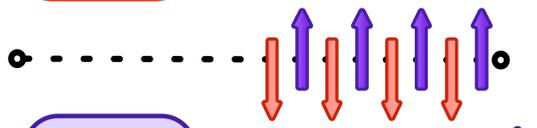
Key theme no. 3

Reciprocal peer-support/ mutual aid

- “Experts by experience”
- Non-professional support
- Rebalancing of net therapeutic power
- Independent, self-governing, institutionally autonomous



Traditionally, there has been an ideological barrier between drug and alcohol treatment services and mutual-aid groups. They have followed separate and independent paths of development.



In a recovery-orientated treatment system the barrier becomes permeable. Knowledge, ideas and experience cross over between the two groups enriching the local recovery community.

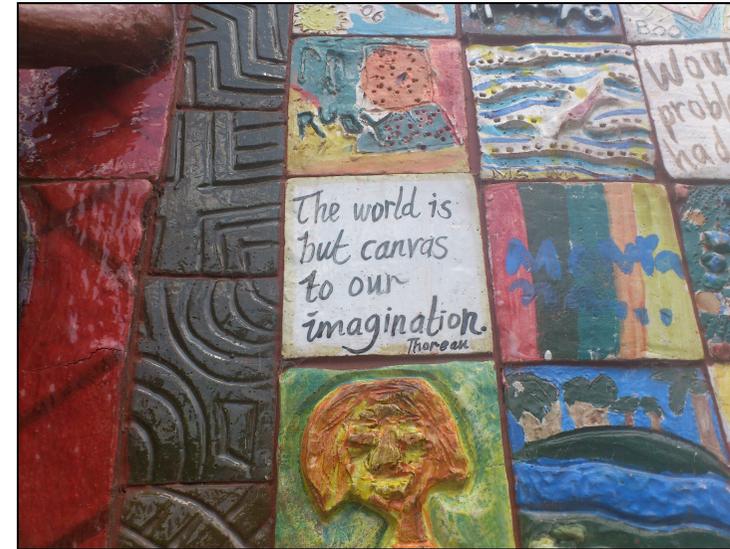


Recovery

Key theme no. 4

Social contagion

- *"Recovery is contagious!"*
- Social Learning Theory (Bandura *inter alia*)
- *"I'll have what she's having!"*
- Affirming recovery as a learning experience
- Challenge of creating (or leveraging) environments conducive to the horizontal and vertical transmission of recovery
- Simple form: making recovery success visible
- Complex form: modeling recovery and wellness



Recovery

Key theme no. 5

Formation of a new identity or sense of self

- Recovery as a journey of self-transformation

Conversely:

- Recovery as retrieval/ reclamation/ integration of the self



Recovery

Key theme no. 6

Social (re)integration

- Building a meaningful life
- Gaining a mainstream social identity
- “A place of equality in society” (Bonney and Stickley 2008)
- Recovery from “social exclusion, stigma, labeling, restrictions, civil rights, discrimination, guilt and shame” (Anthony 1993)



Recovery

Key theme no. 7

Hope and optimism

- Challenging “learned hopelessness”
- Recognising diverse but positively perceived outcomes
- Focus on personal strengths rather than pathologies
- Appreciation of long-term incremental growth rather than *instantaneous* transformation (conversion)

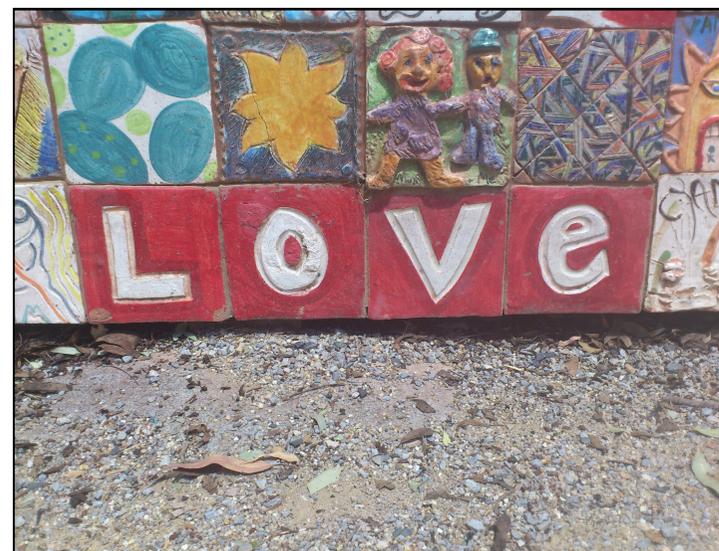
Conclusion

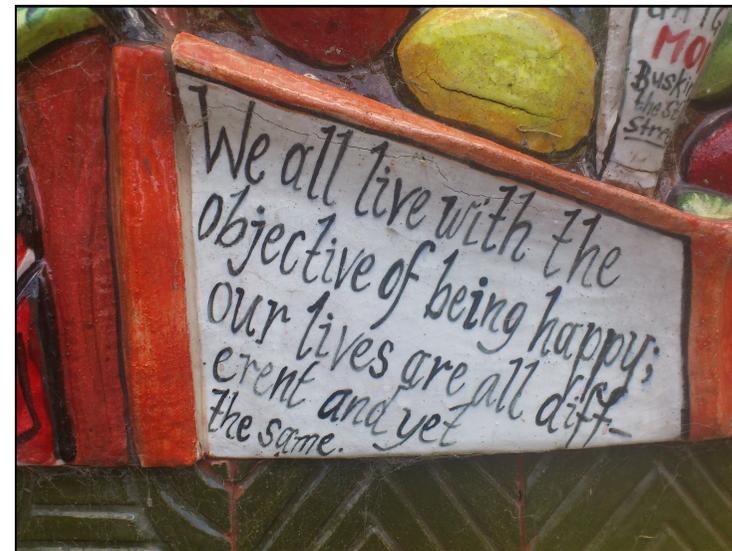
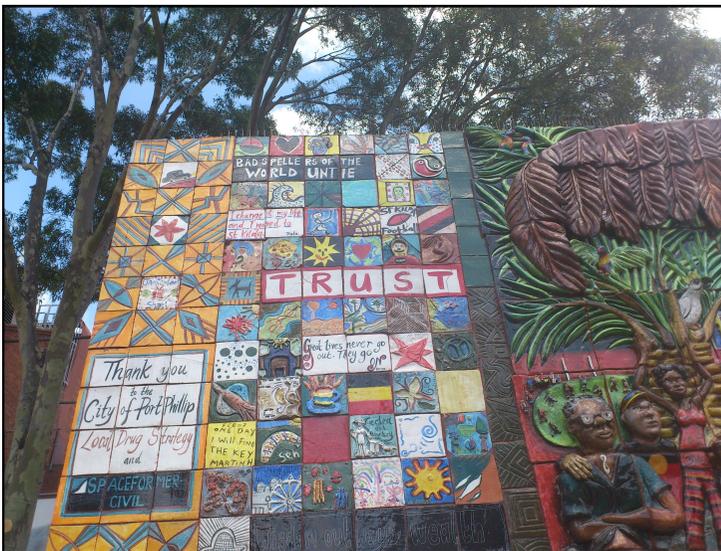


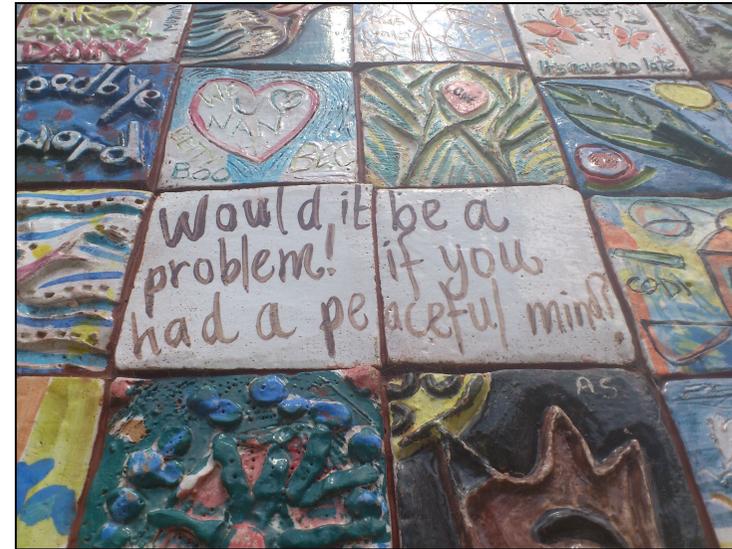
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Concluding remarks

- We're all on the same team!
- Recovery is an organising principle that maximises the positive outcomes of harm reduction
- Develop/ employ staged models
- Integration, shared language, local vision (ROIS)
- Nurture multi-disciplinary activity
- Re-cast frontline HR initiatives as vanguards of recovery
- Recovery management
- Integrating recovery experience at all levels within the system
- Affirming the sovereignty of the community







Stephen Bamber
Recovery Writing: Volume one, 2009-2010

Available free from The Art of Life Itself website

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<http://bit.ly/recoverywriting>

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Foreword by William L. White