I am the Policy Manager of the Asia Action on Harm Reduction (Asia Action) project in China. This project is funded by the European Union. Where people who use drugs (PUDs) are discriminated against and marginalized, and governments are still unwilling to change their minds, this project is an act of bravery for harm reduction. Project partners are undertaking a challenging journey to bring about change and protect the human rights of PUDs.

**About me and ‘life on the road’**

I started to work in harm reduction when I joined AIDS Care China in November 2012. It has been an intensive learning for me which I call ‘life on the road’. I am continuing this journey and want to take the Chinese public and government with me.

*On the Road* is by Jack Kerouac and this book helps us to understand how different everyone’s life is. It also teaches us to respect other people’s choices. We can accept drug use as a way of life and people who use drugs could have a family, a job and lots of friends like many of us do. Through Asia Action we encourage governments and local communities to give people who use drugs a chance for a better life and help them to live their ‘life on the road’.
People who use drugs in China

Recently I visited Ruili City, which is a major border crossing between China and Myanmar. I visited the local methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) clinic, met people who use drugs on MMT; and followed my colleagues on their journey to all corners of the city to provide clean syringes to PUDs, many of whom live on the streets or under the bridge. MMT clients told me that they are at the very bottom of the society and through our conversations I feel their desires to be accepted by the public. Many of them earn a living by working as a porter or collecting coke bottles. They are struggling between drug use and an ordinary life. All they need is support in a friendly and respecting way.

People who use drugs in China lack access to clean needles and syringes; they don’t have enough money to pay for MMT fees; and they face the risk of being imprisoned in compulsory detox centres which obviously do them no good. However, the biggest challenge from my perspective is that they are not accepted by the general public.

Both the public and the Chinese government regard drug use as a criminal act. So once a person has been labeled as a PUD or injecting drug user, his or her driving license will be revoked and be recorded within the controlling system managed by the Ministry of Public Security. And sometimes a person who looks and acts like an PUD will be subjected to an impromptu urine test and then imprisoned in a compulsory detox centre if the result is positive, even if there is strong evidence showing that he or she is an MMT client.

The situation in China is that the public discriminates against people who use drugs and expects all of them to be imprisoned or even wishes them death. The reason? Well, I think it is because ordinary Chinese have little tolerance for others, nor are they necessarily able to understand a different life style.
Support Don’t Punish

During the recent project partners’ meeting, we saw the fantastic Someone’s Mother, Someone’s Brother film. Any person may be attracted or forced to start using drugs and may end up dying on the street without help or support. It is the addiction that makes people suffer. Nobody is born evil and any one of us could be in this situation. Shouldn’t we ask ourselves why we didn’t provide interventions much earlier, at the time they needed them most?

Fortunately, it is not too late! Please take the Support Don’t Punish action today. Click here to find out how.

Recently, an MMT client came to the AIDS Care China clinic asking for help. He has been sick for a while and didn’t have the strength to earn a living. In addition, he is living with HCV. We promised to try our best to help him. When he heard the promise, a light flickered in his eyes.

AIDS Care China is one of the key partners in the Dutch funded, Alliance led Community Action on Harm Reduction project (CAHR). CAHR is an ambitious €10 m project spanning five countries (Kenya, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia) that will expand coverage to 180,000 injecting drug users, their partners and children with a wide range of services (HIV prevention, treatment and care, sexual and reproductive health and other services) by 2014.