

Why I Am
Anti-Drugs In Prisons

By
David Smart

I'm not anti-drugs. I am anti-drugs in prisons! By "drugs" I am, of course, meaning illegal drugs. I am certainly all for the psych drugs and other medications prescribed to the inmates who surely needs them.

When I came into prison in 2001, I was an ardent pot-head. So, I was very glad to learn that marijuana was readily available inside the prison gates. I was, however, completely surprised to discover that any kind of drug(s) one wanted was also readily available. And most often drugs are easier to get in prison than they are on the street.

One of my first roommates (cellies) was a needle dope junkie. I had always avoided needle dope and needle dope junkies. It just wasn't my thing. I don't want a doctor who has years of schooling and medical experience injecting me with a needle. I'm definitely not going to allow a drug induced junkie to inject me with one.

It was absolutely horrible living with this guy. He had other junkies coming in the cell shooting up dope, from morning til night. This was one of the ways he supported his habit. He supplied the needle and the cell to other junkies; they supplied the drugs. No! They didn't mind sharing a needle at all.

He required the cell stay completely dark. The only light allowed was the flickering light of his T.V. He kept the window to the outside blocked, so no light came through. I could not use the light in the cell to read, write, draw or do anything. It often amazed me that they could shoot-up by the light of the TV only. I bet there are some doctors who couldn't do that.

So, here I am, fairly new to the prison system, living in a tiny

dungeon with a needle dope junkie the likes of which I had never seen. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I was surprised this could go on in prison. It never felt right to me.

On more than one occasion, he told me he could not wait until he gets out of prison, so he could rob again. "It will be one of the first things I do," he said. I warned him he would come back to prison. It seemed he had gotten comfortable in prison. For a newbie, such as myself, this was surprising he didn't seem to mind being in prison. I didn't want to be here at all.

It is my understanding, he did exactly what he said he was going to do. Several years later, I heard not long after his release, he shot someone during a robbery and was back in prison.

I have seen many recidivism statistics. However, I have never seen what I would consider the most important one - the recidivism statistic on junkies' who are released. I imagine there are no such statistics. No one, especially prison administrators, wants to acknowledge the fact that junkies are being released into the communities. I can assure you that they most certainly are! And in larger numbers than most would believe. By some estimates, three quarters of the inmate population have addiction issues. When the prisons are kept full of drugs that is a whole lot of junkies being released into the communities.

I have lived with and around junkies for twenty (20) years now. I don't

¹By junkie(s), I am referring to inmate(s) who use any kind of drug(s) while in prison, not just needle dope. I do not use the term junkie to be insulting. For this writing and for simplicity's sake the term junkie(s) will often include inmate drug dealers/smugglers regardless of whether or not they use drugs.

NEED STATISTICS TO KNOW THAT THE NUMBER ONE FACTOR IN DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT ONE WILL RETURN TO PRISON IS HIS/HER DRUG USE WHILE IN PRISON. I AM AN INSIDE WITNESS TO THE PROVERBIAL PRISON REVOLVING DOOR. I HAVE SEEN WAY TOO MANY - I MEAN A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT - EXIT ONLY TO RETURN SOME TIME LATER. THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY - BY A LOT - WERE USING DRUGS REGULARLY WHEN THEY WERE IN THE FIRST... SECOND... THIRD... OR MORE TIME. AS I'VE INDICATED, I DO NOT BELIEVE ANYONE KNOWS THE EXACT STAT, BUT FROM MY EXPERIENCE I WOULD ESTIMATE AT LEAST 85% OF THOSE RETURNING TO PRISON USED DRUGS WHEN THEY WERE PREVIOUSLY IN PRISON.

SHOCKINGLY, SOME FRIENDS AND/OR FAMILY MEMBERS OF JUNKIES KNOWINGLY AND WILLINGLY SUPPORT THE JUNKIE'S DRUG HABIT WHILE HE/SHE IS IN PRISON. I WOULD BE VERY CURIOUS TO SEE THE RECIDIVISM STATISTIC ON THIS GROUP AS WELL. BUT AGAIN, I'M SURE THERE ARE NONE. I WOULD EXPECT THE PERCENTAGE OF THESE JUNKIES RETURNING IS HIGHER THAN 85%. WHY WOULD THEY NOT RETURN? EVERYTHING IS PROVIDED FOR THEM: FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER AND DRUGS! LIFE IS A FREE RIDE FOR THESE JUNKIES. THIS IS NOT LIKELY TO BE THE CASE ONCE THEY ARE RELEASED. I'M SURE THESE FRIENDS AND/OR FAMILY MEMBERS BELIEVE THEY ARE DOING GOOD BUT THEY MOST CERTAINLY ARE NOT! THEY ARE ACTUALLY DESTROYING THE LIFE OF THEIR LOVED ONE. ALMOST INSURING HIM/HER OF A LIFE OF CRIME AND PRISON.

ALTHOUGH, MOST JUNKIES CON, LIE AND SCHEME TO GET MONEY AND/OR PROPERTY FROM THEIR FRIENDS AND/OR FAMILY MEMBERS TO BUY DRUGS WITH. I ONCE OVER-HEARD A JUNKIE ON THE PHONE CONNING HIS GRANDMOTHER OUT OF HER SOCIAL SECURITY MONEY. HE TOLD HER, IF SHE DIDN'T SEND MONEY TO PAY GANG MEMBERS "FOR PROTECTION" THEY WERE "GOING TO KILL" HIM. HE EVEN HAD ONE OF HIS BUDDIES GET ON THE PHONE WITH HER AND "PLAY THE PART" OF A GANG MEMBER. LATER THAT NIGHT, WHEN HE WAS IN THE UNIT, OBVIOUSLY HIGH, BRAGGING ABOUT HAVING CONNED HIS GRANDMOTHER, HE SAID THE MONEY WAS USED TO PAY OFF A DRUG DEBT AND BUY MORE DRUGS. I FELT SO SORRY FOR THIS GUY... AND HIS GRANDMOTHER. I WOULD HATE TO WAKE UP ONE DAY AND REALIZE DRUGS CAUSED ME TO LIE TO AND CON MY GRANDMOTHER

out of her social security money.

The junkies with little or no support from the outside must "hustle" or steal to support his/her addiction. A hustle is a service performed for other inmates. There are a lot of prison hustles. It can be something legal like: doing laundry, drawing, cleaning, waxing floors, etc. It can also be something illegal like: stealing and selling kitchen food, school supplies, maintenance supplies, etc.; carrying contraband across the compound; holding contraband for someone; and, of course, prostitution among many other illegal hustles.

For a short time, I celled with this newbie. He was young with blonde hair and blue eyes; a pedophile and sexual predator's dream. And all of them were absolutely relentless in their sexual harassment of this young man. I have never been so happy to be unattractive and older. I could not have tolerated the constant harassment he endured. He claimed not to be homosexual coming into prison. However, due to the lack of support from the outside and the availability of drugs on the inside, he eventually acquiesced to having sex with men to support his drug habit. Despite this, he continued to claim he was not homosexual. (Not that there is anything wrong with being homosexual). He claimed to be doing what is necessary to survive in this world.

I recently received a letter from him. After being out for several years, he is currently in the county jail on charges of possession/sell of drugs - Heroin, Meth and (!) Fentanyl. Its likely he will be returning to prison soon. Of course, this is no big surprise to me considering his drug use when he was in. Although, I had hoped what he had to do to support his drug habit while in would somehow keep him out. He managed to stay out of prison for fifteen (15) years or so. Although, he has been in and out of the county jails a few times.

Drugs in prisons creates an uncivil and intoxicated environment in which the non-using inmates are forced to live. Collectively inmates have a choice as to what environment they live in. But it is a collective. When drugs are readily available intoxicated junkies determine the environment in which all inmates must live. This is extremely unfair to the non-using inmate who are forced to live with and around junkies who are under the influence of drugs. Most sober people do not enjoy being around those who are drunk. The same is true of those under the influence of drugs. In the prison setting, there is no choice. Non-using sober inmates must associate with and tolerate under the influence junkies.

When a non-user goes to the chow hall to eat a meal, it is likely he/she will become an unwilling party to a drug deal. I have been an unwilling party to as many as four drug deals in one meal. If not a drug deal some jonesing junkie will be at the table worried and stressed out about where their drug dealer is, when or if he is going to show up or if he has already come and left. He will have everyone at the table, some of who just want to eat, stressed out about his drug dealer! When non-users go to the yard they are unwillingly subjected to groups of junkies shooting up and/or smoking dope. It doesn't really matter where non-users go - even to church - they will most likely be subjected to under the influence junkies.

Non-users are compelled to cell with junkies and must live with all his/her junkie ways. This includes but is not limited to: being unwillingly subjected to his/her drug use, being locked in a tiny space with one who is under the influence of drugs, being inconvenienced so he/she can get high and, of course, dealing with the theft of one's commissary and/or property which is almost certain to happen because junkies steal.

There is often no proof of theft because thieving junkies also lie. So, prison officers can not do much anything about the theft. Should one take

matters into their own hands, he/she stands to lose everything he/she has... left! And could end up paying a junkie's medical bills while sitting on close or max custody or worse.

The last junkie I celled with stole an irreplaceable beard trimmer I had. Of course, he traded it for dope. He took my radio and attempted to trade it too. Thankfully, at that time, the drug dealers were not in the market for a nice radio. He admitted the theft and attempted theft to me but denied it to the unit manager. He was moved to another unit. Nonetheless, I was still out a beard trimmer that I can not replace because beard trimmers are no longer sold to us. Of course, banning beard trimmers just makes them more valuable to the junkies.

A few months later, this thieving junkie was released into a community. Hopefully, not your community! However, if it was your community, maybe he won't commit too many crimes before he is caught, put back through the justice system and returned to prison. Odds are extremely high, this is exactly what will happen (unless he is killed first). And the cycle continues.

For non-using inmates, the most grievous thing about drugs in prisons is not being forced to live with and around junkies or having to tolerate them while they are under the influence - although it is awful. The most grievous thing is being unjustly punished and having lost all that prison administrators have taken or disallowed using drugs as a pretext. Non-users are innocent bystanders caught in the middle of a battle between administrators and junkies.

Administrators promulgate policies that punish all inmates for the wrongdoing(s) of one or a few inmates. When administrators take or disallow something - as they often do - they take or disallow it from all

inmates. The policies - especially, mail and visitation policies - promulgated to keep junkies from getting drugs in affects all inmates; not just the junkies who have gotten or attempted to get drugs in. When administrators take or disallow something because it has been or could be used or misused by junkies, they take or disallow it from all inmates; not just those who misused or likely would misuse it.

As a result, non-using inmates are unjustly subjected to punishments and losses created in response to the wrongdoing(s) of the junkies; even though the non-using inmates have done nothing wrong or deserving of the punishment or loss. Non-using inmates have unfairly and unjustly lost or been denied a tremendous amount because of this. Having to live with and around junkies pales in comparison to being unjustly punished and having lost all that administrators have taken or disallowed, using drugs as a pretext.

Promulgating drug policies that punish the non-users for the wrongdoing(s) of the junkies is not just completely unfair it is also antiquated. Promulgating policies in this manner can only be effective if the non-users could "correct" the junkies for having been unnecessarily punished. Back in the day, inmates could get away with correcting another or other inmate(s). In fact, administrators expected it. This is not the case today though. Today inmates will get into a lot of trouble for correcting another or other inmate(s). They would likely face disciplinary charges. Depending on the severity of the correction one could be placed on close or max custody, have to pay medical bills and/or much worse. So, promulgating policies, in this manner, is very out-dated and often ineffective.

Plus, the policies promulgated in this manner are, in effect, futile. Clearly, wrongdoers are not concerned with following policy or doing the right thing. Junkies are, by their nature, wrongdoers. As such, they will certainly find another way to do wrong despite any policies. For this

reason, policies promulgated in this manner most often fails to accomplish their stated purpose or any legitimate purpose. Ultimately, the non-users - those who have played no part in the reason the policy was promulgated - will be the only ones punished. The junkies will still be getting high.

Here at this prison, administrators quit selling us microwave popcorn; supposedly because the junkies were intentionally burning it to conceal the odor of their drugs. Of course, not one single junkie stopped using drugs because of this policy. Nor were any drugs removed from the compound because of it. The junkies simply found another way to conceal the odor. So, except for banning microwave popcorn, nothing was accomplished by this policy. It completely fails to accomplish its stated purpose or any legitimate purpose whatsoever. Meanwhile, the non-users who had done nothing to deserve losing the popcorn can no longer have it.

Furthermore, whenever punishment and/or loss is imposed broadly among the group like a sledge hammer instead of being directly focused on the wrongdoers like a pick ax, the impact of the punishment and/or loss is not as poignant. The wrongdoers are provided a degree of solace and surely feel less culpable. It is much worse to be punished alone than it is to be punished with others. When everyone is punished the wrongdoers do not feel as bad or guilty about themselves or what they have done.

Consider all the drug policies administrators have promulgated throughout the years and all that they have taken or disallowed using drugs as a pretext. Yet somehow the prisons remain packed full of drugs. And let me tell you, it takes a whole lot of drugs to keep a prison full. How is it possible that nothing administrators have done has been effective or at least reduced the amount of drugs in prisons? And how do the drugs get in?

Historically administrators have claimed the inmates get the majority

of drugs in through visitation and/or the mail system. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and stringent mail policies show these claims to be incredulous.

The COVID-19 pandemic shut down all visitation and religious services for fourteen (14) months. During this time, there was no noticeable reduction in the amount of drugs on this compound. I am told the same is true at several other compounds. Had the majority of drugs truly been coming in through visitation there would have been a noticeable reduction; especially when visitation was first shut down. However, this was not the case at all! The shutting down of visitation seemed to have no effect whatsoever on the amount of in the prison. The prison was full of drugs before visitation was shut down and it seemingly stayed full through out the entire fourteen (14) months.

The COVID-19 pandemic removed all credibility from administrators' claims that inmates get the majority of drugs in through visitation.

Over time, the mail policies have become so stringent that it is absolutely impossible to get enough drugs in through the mail to fill up a prison; let alone keep it full. No further discussion is needed. It's impossible.

The stringent mail policies has removed all credibility from administrators' claims that inmates get the majority of drugs in through the mail system.

The COVID-19 pandemic and stringent mail policies substantiate claims that prison staff and/or officers² bring the majority of drugs into the prison system. This is something I believe we have all known but administrators

² Herein after "staff and/or officers" will be referred to simply as staff.

have refused to acknowledge, in any meaningful way. To acknowledge this would then require they do something beyond the bare minimum to stop it. I assert, administrators are reluctant to stop their staff from bringing drugs into the prisons because they and the staff who are bringing drugs in benefit greatly by drugs being in prisons.

There is certainly no benefit to any of the inmates by drugs being in prisons; none of them! Despite what the junkies might say. As I've explained, drugs in prisons are most unfair and unjust to the non-using inmates, for the junkies, drugs in prisons are truly life destroying; all but condemning these inmates to a life of crime and prison, if not death.

Furthermore, chasing the next high takes an enormous amount of time and effort. It can be all consuming for some junkies. It is a never ending cycle of hunting, acquiring, gathering funds and using. If there were no drugs in prisons junkies would have to find other ways to occupy all this time. Certainly some would use this time on more positive productive endeavors. Some may just rehabilitate his/herself. And self rehabilitation is, what is, required.

This is what happened to me. Once I gave up marijuana and tobacco in 2009, I had all this extra time. I began reading and writing more than I had ever done before - which was very little. Now, here I am writing about being anti-drugs in prisons. I'm sure this surprises me just as much as it will anyone who knew me back then.

Unfortunately, the large majority of junkies will never take it upon themselves to do better, as long as drugs remain readily available.

There is no benefit to the communities by drugs being in prisons. They unknowingly have junkies who are being released from prisons forced on them. These junkies are not likely to hold steady employment. They will

likely be a burden to all those around them and will certainly bring more drugs and crime to the communities.

There is no benefit to the justice system by drugs being in prisons. It must continue processing and returning the same junkies back to prison - over and over again - at a great expense to it and the communities.

The only ones who truly benefit by drugs being in prisons are the prison administrators and those who bring drugs in - which I argue is prison staff. I see no other reasonable explanation as to how so much drugs get in. Obviously, there is a significant financial benefit to those who do bring drugs in.

However, it is prison administrators who benefit most by drugs being in prisons. When the prisons are full of drugs the junkies are calmer, easier to control and less likely to cause the staff and administrators trouble. Also, it is well known that administrators have an extremely difficult task in keeping prisons staffed. A task they often struggle in achieving. By tolerating their staff bringing drugs into the prisons, this extremely difficult task is made easier. A staff member who is being paid hundreds of dollars to bring drugs in will certainly show up for work. And will definitely want to keep their job. Plus, tolerating their staff bringing drugs into prisons provides their notoriously underpaid staff with a supplement to their income; at no additional cost to administrators.

Should administrators take serious measures to stop their staff from bringing drugs into the prisons - thus taking away their second income - which likely pays more than administrators are paying them - their extremely difficult task of keeping prisons staffed would become nearly impossible.

Administrators have promulgated no shortage of policies with the

pretext of keeping drugs out of prisons. However, many are completely ineffectual; incapable of achieving its stated purpose or any legitimate purpose whatsoever. It seems these policies are promulgated just so administrators can claim they are doing something to address the drug problem. Even though the policies waste more time, effort and money than they accomplish anything.

Here in Tennessee, tax payers pay a hefty price for one such policy. At least one mailroom employee at each institution is paid a salary with benefits and can make a career out of removing postage stamps from all incoming mail. The stated purpose of this policy is to keep drugs from coming into the prisons.

First of all, let me assure tax payers, who are footing the bill for this expensive policy, that drugs being smuggled into prisons underneath postage stamps is not how prisons get full and stay full of drugs; just like it is not how cell phones get in.

Secondly, the majority of inmates, including the majority of junkies, are not going to have drugs smuggled into prisons underneath postage stamps. Most inmates do not have the means and/or courage to smuggle or attempt to smuggle drugs into prison. Those who would dare attempt it will certainly use a better more effective way than underneath postage stamps. Believe it or not, some inmates, junkies included, simply care too much about his/her loved ones to put them in this kind of jeopardy; even if their loved one(s) would smuggle or attempt to smuggle drugs in.

I, for example, am anti-drugs in prisons. It makes no sense whatsoever to utilize staff's valuable time and effort and tax payer's funds to pay staff members to remove postage stamps from my mail. This is true for the large majority of inmates. So nearly all of the time and effort this group of

staff members use to remove stamps is a complete waste of their time and effort. Yet, they are being paid a salary with decent benefits and the prisons remain full of drugs.

As if this policy was not senseless enough, they leave the return address labels which are usually larger than stamps and would conceal more drugs.

When I think of this policy, I envision a mailroom staff member sitting at a desk with a huge pile of envelopes. He/she is hard at work removing the postage stamps from each envelope. Meanwhile, another staff member pushes a wheelbarrow overflowing with drugs right past him/her.

This policy, like nearly all the drug policies promulgated, is directed at keeping inmates from getting drugs into prisons. Some of the mail and visitation policies are very stringent in this regard and adversely affect the inmates' loved ones and those who would do a kind deed for an inmate. Comparatively, very few policies are promulgated to keep prison staff from bringing drugs in.

Whenever an inmate enters a prison he/she is stripped searched and everything with him/her is meticulously searched. This is true even when the inmate never leaves sight of staff and was guarded the entire time, when the inmates hands and feet were shackled, whether he/she was gone for a short time and returned or was permanently transferred to another prison. Staff, on the other hand, can come and go, unsearched, at will most of the time. Staff enters unsearched, can be carrying a plastic container or bag full of items that are not searched, later return to his/her vehicle for a "smoke break" or whatever, then re-enter the prison unsearched.

So, most of the policies are not directed at keeping drugs from being brought into the prisons. They are directed at keeping inmates from getting drugs in.

When all these things are considered, there is a reasonable and strong argument to be made that administrators are promulgating policies that eliminate their staff's drug dealing/smuggling competition. The following leads to this conclusion:

Administrators are reluctant to acknowledge their staff brings the majority of drugs into prisons - even though the prisons are full of drugs and there is simply no other reasonable explanation as to how so much drugs get in.

Administrators do the bare minimum - promulgate few policies - to keep their staff from bringing drugs in while promulgating many - some senseless, some stringent - policies to keep inmates from getting drugs in.

Administrators benefit greatly by tolerating their staff bringing drugs into prisons.

Regardless of administrators' motives, there is an undeniable conflict of interest when those who benefit most by drugs in prisons are the only ones with the authority and means to keep drugs out of prisons. Administrators have a crucial responsibility to the inmates, communities and justice system to keep drugs out of prisons. They also have a responsibility to keep the prisons adequately staffed.

Obviously, by prisons being full of drugs, administrators have neglected their responsibility to keep drugs out, choosing instead to tolerate their staff bringing drugs into the prisons so their other

responsibility of keeping the prisons adequately staffed can be achieved. It is a detrimental choice for inmates, communities and justice system who pay a dire, expensive cost each in their own way.

Several inmates, including junkies, have stated, "they will never get drugs out of prisons" this may be true. It will most definitely be true, as long as the status quo remains the same. My response to those inmates is always, "Yeah but they could certainly reduce the amount, so the place isn't full of drugs."

Obviously, most inmates are troubled individuals coming into prison. Many come in because of some drug issue(s) they have. Tolerating drugs being in prisons should be more criminal than most of the crimes the inmates are in prison for committing. Unfortunately, I have had a front row seat to watching far too many human lives destroyed by the availability of drugs in prisons. It is truly tragic to have watched for all these years.

Whether in prison or in the free world drugs are without a doubt a scourge on society. In the free world, though, one does not have to live with or around junkies or associate with them in any way, if one chooses not to. One is not forced to deal with under the influence junkies or tolerate their ways. The drug laws promulgated, in the free world, are not severely unjust to the non-users. There is just so much that is extra worse about drugs in prisons than drugs in the free world.

For all the reasons stated herein and more, I have decided, I'm not anti-drugs. I am anti-drugs in prisons! And you should be too!