

UPHNS HUB Video Call Minutes May 18, 2021

Attendance: 30

Presenters:

Albie Park and Jessica Tilley from Harm Reduction Works (HRW) in Massachusetts

Welcome and context:

- Welcome and Land Acknowledgement by Clement Fong
- Simultaneous translation description by Sophie Wertheimer
- Clement Fong offered everyone to introduce themselves in the chat box
- Albie and Jessica developed a fully scripted replicable harm reduction, mutual aid / self-help group alternative to abstinence only programs (e.g., 12 Step Program)
- Albie has a background as a treatment provider and counsellor for a harm reduction program in San Francisco
- Jessica is Executive Director of the New England User Union. She identifies as an injection drug user, has been in harm reduction for almost 28 years, and has held various positions in leadership and program management
- Albie and Jessica partnered about four years ago to develop HRW

Presentation: Harm Reduction Works (HRW) – Host Script

- Albie read through the HRW [Host Script](#)
- There are two versions of the script:
 - Focused groups are for people who have used drugs or alcohol in the past or currently use drugs or alcohol
 - Open groups are open for anyone, and especially for people who aren't sure what harm reduction is and how it can help them
- The script includes a welcome, harm reduction announcements, introductions, an exercise, followed by a meeting close. Examples of exercises include reading poetry, an excerpt from a book, watching videos or listening to a podcast together
- The origin of the script was based in a project that Albie had led for his Masters of Social Work degree, specifically tailored to gay men who use speed
- After Albie and Jessica started working together, the HRW script was edited. The intention was to create a script that could be replicated
- The HRW was relaunched in March 2019. After 6 weeks of hosting these meetings, Albie and Jessica were interviewed on [Narcotica](#), which led to more interest and new meetings
- HRW became a tool for community organizing. For example, someone who might not know a lot about harm reduction can start a meeting. HRW is an excuse to create and find your community that is based in compassion, kindness, respect, and community.
- The script is a unifying principle of HRW and for these reasons, should not be changed. HRW welcomes folks to adapt the script to meet individual and community needs. If the script is changed, they just ask that it is not branded as HRW
- HRW meetings provide an opportunity to connect and build trusting relationships, as well as can act as a platform for distribute harm reduction supplies.
- The HRW logo also emerged through the meetings and is an example of how the space can create a sense of

community and belonging. Each group might choose to create their own logo.

- HRW recognizes the fact that there is never going to be enough treatment, and there will always be people who need help of some sort but may not want to go to treatment.
- It is also remarkable to have people who have been in abstinence-based modalities come to these meetings and disclose that they are thinking about drinking or using, where before many couldn't come forward in their 12-step program due to fear or judgment.
- You can find the schedule of HRW meetings on the webpage. There are new meetings that have emerged on their own that may not be included on the site
- Specialized groups have been established over time. Some examples include:
 - Women's non-binary group
 - BIPOC group
 - A group for folks who identify as queer
 - A new meeting in Kentucky that is very conservative
 - There are satellite programs in rural communities. HRW is allowing harm reduction to go in places where there hasn't been a lot of exposure, but there has been great need.
 - Service providers are now starting meetings. HRW is a way to engage in conversation for service providers who are not comfortable sitting down and connecting
 - There is a discord room – this acts as a source of community for young folks
 - One person holds meetings both inside and outside the jail so that people feel like they still have a community after they get released
 - There is a group that has been established by a group of moms. Mothers have used HRW as a forum to challenge outdated or harmful narratives (e.g., tough love / enabling / disabling perspective), and disclose personal drug use as a parent
- Part of the mission of HRW is to dispel stigma. Stigma reduction is embedded in the host script
- Participants can also use the group as a place to rehearse telling their stories, especially if they have a presentation coming up (e.g., origin stories / lived experience).

Discussion:

- **Q: What is the best way to get in touch with HRW?**
 - A: Jessica and Albie will put their contact information into the chat box.
 - Jessie Tilley: jtilley@hrh413.org; 413-313-8143
 - Albie Park: apark@hrh413.org; 413-320-0011
- **Q: what is the best way to start down the HRW pathway? Is it best to check the website and take a look at the script?**
 - A: I think it is good when people have a call with us, helps people feel connected. It depends on who the person is. Our link tree (<https://linktr.ee/hrw>) definitely has the foundations of HRW, includes information about who we are, how to contact us, the meeting schedule. The webpage doesn't include international meetings yet – but anybody is welcome to attend the meetings on the schedule list. The best strategy depends on how or who is starting the group. What way feels more comfortable.
- Comment: The way that I have been looking at my own work is trying to prioritize trust and collaboration. Whenever someone starts a meeting, it means we are starting a collaboration. I am going to be as supportive as I can. I believe that it is probably best if 4-6 people decide they are going to do this together – in case nobody shows up – you can still have the meeting. You can also alternate who is hosting the meeting so there isn't so much pressure.
- **Q: How do you decide what exercise will be brought to the meeting?**
 - A: That is determined by the host. When we were doing the live groups in North Hampton, I would

choose the exercise because that was easier. It's good for at least the host to know what the exercise is going to be prior, but what the exercises are is really up to the individual groups and what they figure they want to listen to or watch.

- Comment: Moving the meetings online has created limitations in some ways, as well as opened things up in other ways such as screen share, and watching videos together
- Comment: Having the exercise ahead of time also helps so that we can advertise. We often host speakers – so we can advertise for that. There are some groups where it would totally work to have someone just show up with a piece of poetry that they want to read. I love the idea of collectively bringing stuff that members want to present.
- **Q: We have a copy of the host script that we circulated with the invite. Is it okay if we share the host script through this network again?**
 - A: Yes. It is a tool and it is meant to be disseminated.
- Comment: When we first had people looking at the script, they wanted to make small changes. What we realized was that people wanted to feel some ownership over the script. The script is copyrighted, but if people want to make a change, we ask that they talk to us. I understand people wanting to have ownership. There were groups popping up that were taking chunks of our script and changing the meeting structure to meet their needs. That is fine, as long as they don't call it HRW.
- Comment: When I say don't make changes to the script, I just mean to the written stuff. Different groups have definitely added their own flavour. We want to empower folks to make their own choices. That approach is aligned with harm reduction.
- Comment: HRW is more than an alternative to the 12 Step program, it is a movement that is intended to build community – it fills a really massive gap in the harm reduction world in terms of non-abstinence based groups as well as opens up space for providers, parents, and family members. There are not enough options for folks out there.

Closing:

- Upcoming calls: We have two upcoming meetings in June (June 2 and June 24) with the CSSDP on their Cannabis Education Toolkit.
- Announcement: On the HUB community of practice web platform, we have rebranded the blog and are now calling it the HUB. The HUB will include more creative submissions including poetry and audio submissions as well