

LETTERS

Four Pillars strategy is making a difference for communities and their health care

Re: Four pillars drug strategy not supporting business or taxpayer needs in Vancouver (BIV letters to the editor; issue 867; June 6 - 12)

In response to Cheryl Savchenko's letter and this ongoing debate with regards to the Four Pillars Coalition, I feel that I need to defend **Sam Sullivan** and the coalition because it has made a huge difference in the decreased number of overdose-related deaths and in helping to keep our city streets clean.

I work for a large non-profit organization in the Downtown East Side and I couldn't disagree more with Cheryl's argument. I understand her fear and concerns, however, that attitude is simply enabling the growth of this problem to continue.

A recent article from the London press states that London is on the verge of adopting the same safe injection policy as we have here in Canada and that also exists in Germany, Australia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Norway and Luxembourg.

This system has proven to be effective on many levels. The most visible being how these safe injection sites across the world save lives and keep drugs off the streets.

As for the recent trend towards neighbourhood housing for these people, the closing of Riverview hospital has more to do with this decentralization than anything else. As for the people who are being sent to live in these residential units,

most of them suffer from some form of mental illness that requires them to live in an environment that's safe, supported and conducive to their treatment. The idea that they're all drug addicts, thieves and prostitutes is naïve and is promoting a fear-based attitude that will only lead to further despair.

We run several residential and emergency shelters at our organization, three of which are located outside of the Downtown East Side, in Burnaby, the North Shore and East Vancouver.

With the opening of each shelter, we encountered much resistance from concerned families and residents in the neighborhood. Now years later, however, they're thanking us for allowing these people to be treated with dignity and to be given the same respect we all deserve.

There has not been any increase in theft, crime, violence or prostitution in these areas, and I believe that is because once these people are removed from the destructive environments they are able to focus on recovery and not be persuaded to self-medicate with drugs.

This is an essential part of their treatment. How do you expect people to get well in an area that makes them more susceptible to the pressures of drugs and crime?

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