



## **Statement of the VANDU Board of Directors regarding DULF**

**October 26 2023** – The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) affirms its solidarity with the Drug User Liberation Front (DULF) following the October 25th arrest of co-founders Eris Nyx and Jeremy Kalicum.

The repressive actions of the Vancouver Police Department are part and parcel with a coordinated campaign to discredit and dismantle harm reduction in British Columbia and Canada at large.<sup>1</sup> This is a dangerous political strategy that stokes and preys upon stigma against drug users and the poor. 2023 alone has seen overdose prevention sites closed or prevented from opening across the province<sup>2</sup>, the de-prescribing of medical safer supply<sup>3</sup>, and Bill 34: proposed legislation that will criminalize people who use drugs in public spaces.<sup>4</sup>

We condemn this brutal escalation of the war on our community and stand with DULF at this critical juncture in drug policy history. DULF saves lives.

VANDU has long advocated for access to a regulated, safer alternative to the increasingly toxic drug supply that kills more than 2,300 people<sup>5</sup> in British Columbia each year. The demand for safe supply undergirds VANDU's support for DULF. Replacing the poisoned drug supply, the creation of dignified housing for all, and repairing our social safety net are all required to address the crisis at hand. Since 2020, the City of Vancouver<sup>6</sup>, British Columbia Centre for Substance Use<sup>7</sup>, and Doctors of BC<sup>8</sup> have expressed various forms of support for harm reduction-oriented compassion clubs for people who have no recourse but to purchase increasingly toxic, unregulated drugs.

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<sup>1</sup> What's Behind the Right-Wing Backlash Against Harm Reduction? | The Tyee

<sup>2</sup> Nanaimo Area Network of Drug Users closes Nicol Street overdose prevention site | Vancouver Island Free Daily

<sup>3</sup> The number of people accessing safe supply in B.C. has dropped. It's unclear why — but it's prompting concerns | CBC News

<sup>4</sup> Why Did BC Step Back on Decriminalizing Drugs? | The Tyee

<sup>5</sup> Unregulated Drug Deaths by Month, 2013-2023 | BC Coroners Service

<sup>6</sup> Council Motion: Saving Lives with the Community Led Compassion Club Model for Safer Tested Drugs | Vancouver City Council

<sup>7</sup> Heroin Compassion Clubs | British Columbia Centre on Substance Use

<sup>8</sup> Policy submission to the Select Standing Committee on Health | Doctors of BC



In one year of operation, DULF's Compassion Club has proven to have vastly benefitted the health and safety of people who use drugs in our community. A rigorous evaluation of DULF's Compassion Club found that enrolment (n=43) was associated with a 35% reduction in overdoses, while overdoses requiring Naloxone were reduced by 32%. There have been no deaths related to substances procured through DULF. Club members had fewer hospitalizations (-50%), experiences of violence (-39%), and police interactions after joining (-48%). Compassion Club enrollment also improved overall health, reduced reliance on the unregulated drug supply, and supported many to reduce their drug use.<sup>9</sup> DULF's findings are consistent with an extensive body of research and community testimony supporting the scaling of non-medicalized safe supply to reduce drug-related harm and death.<sup>10</sup>

By any reasonable scientific or moral standard, DULF's life-saving work should be praised for its success and recognized as an evidence-based harm reduction intervention along a continuum of care that includes self-directed recovery.

In a time where no other known medical intervention has proven to significantly reduce drug poisoning death as novel benzodiazepines, tranquilizers, and toxins flood the illicit drug supply, DULF bravely confronts the harms of prohibition itself. Political refusal to engage with alternatives to the demonstrable harms of drug prohibition is nothing but shameful complacency with a status quo of mass death now in its seventh year.

This year, VANDU celebrates its twenty-fifth year of taking direct action to save lives. In the 1990s, drug users and allied healthcare professionals risked arrest to illegally distribute harm reduction supplies on the street. When our loved ones were dying in alleyways, VANDU operated unauthorized peer-run safe injection sites in defiance of police suppression. Recognizing the success of our actions and the publication of public health evidence backing them, the government and the general public would overwhelmingly support the opening of Insite, the first sanctioned safe consumption room in North America. At the start of the toxic drug poisoning crisis, VANDU again broke the law to provide unlicensed overdose prevention services when Insite was not enough. In 2016, a ministerial order affirmed the necessity of our action.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Compassion Club and Fulfillment Center | Drug User Liberation Front

<sup>10</sup> Safer Opioid Supply: A Rapid Review of the Evidence | Ontario Drug Policy Research Network

<sup>11</sup> Ministerial order supports urgent overdose response action | BC Gov News



Laws are made and remade through social action. The Downtown Eastside's activist history and the continued struggle of drug user movements worldwide prove that drug laws can and must be challenged to save the lives of those abandoned by society.

Public health professionals have always relied on drug user knowledge to create policy. Across North America, life-saving harm reduction measures originated from the courageous actions of drug users fighting against the routine persecution and abandonment of their peers. DULF continues in this tradition of civil disobedience against a barbaric regime of drug prohibition. Like generations of freedom fighters before them, DULF strives to fulfill humanity's moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws, especially those which cause provable harm. We will continue to defend the survival of our peers and honor those taken too soon by the drug war. With thousands of lives on the line, the drug user liberation movement will not be intimidated into submission.

You can jail a revolutionary, but you cannot jail a revolution. As both sides of the legislature reveal their lethal indifference to the lives of the many, harm reduction must be restored as a movement priority, principle, and practice in the hands of everyday people. As just one voice in a worldwide coalition of drug user organizations, we call on our allies in research, policy, and health services – as well as all organized sectors of working people and tenants – to defend DULF, the Downtown Eastside, and drug users everywhere against the deadly interests of those who profit from prohibition.

DULF saves lives.

Signed,

*The VANDU Board of Directors*