

## Notes from the Alliance

**Time to join forces for a new public health approach to replace the failed drug strategy, says Daren Garratt.**

Everyone who reads DDN has been affected by the current 10-year drug strategy, and will undoubtedly be affected by what replaces it; whether that's as a user or carer who's concerned about quality of treatment, an employee who's concerned about their livelihood and career path, or a tax payer who's concerned about the millions of pounds of public money that has been spent and where/if/how it's made a difference.

And while I think it's fair to say that although there have been undoubted advances in various areas that have improved, and even saved, the lives of many, many users, you'd be hard pushed to find anyone who can mount a credible defence of this strategy's success as a whole; particularly when one considers the considerable amount of money that has been pumped into it.

I am, therefore, honoured to be able to tell you about a newly formed, informal coalition of organisations and individuals called the Drugs and Health Alliance 2008 (DHA). This group, spearheaded and chaired by Transform, wants to ensure that any new post-2008 national drug strategy moves away from the restrictive and often counterproductive focus on crime reduction and treatment targets, and embraces a wider public health approach that acknowledges other fundamental factors such as poverty, social exclusion and mental health issues.

But how do we ensure that the same mistakes aren't made again and we establish a more inclusive, mainstreamed, cross-departmental Government approach that begins to address the real issues that underpin the harm experienced by users, their families and our wider communities?

Well, the DHA believe we should seize the current political opportunity to demand democratic input into the policy making process. In plain English, this means let's exercise our right to call for an independent review of the current drug strategy, let's identify the issues that we need to raise for the new strategy and let's get them on the political table.

This is a debate that needs to start now though, because it's not long until 2008 and once that new strategy's upon us there's very little we can do to effectively change it. To this end, the DHA has agreed to write a letter to ministers calling for a transparent, independent review of the current drug strategy, and the opportunity to be involved in a process that shapes future policy decisions.

But we also need to turn the spotlight on this issue and get this debate into the wider public arena. So, if you're concerned about the way things have gone over the last few years, or perhaps more importantly, the way things will probably continue to go over the course of the next strategy, then these are the questions, issues and demands that you should be raising too.

By working together we hope to effectively influence the government's drug agenda and finally achieve the reductions in drug-related harm that we all seek.

So, for more information about the DHA and how you can get involved please contact [info@tdpf.org.uk](mailto:info@tdpf.org.uk)

*Daren Garratt is development manager at The Alliance. You can also see him in concert with the Nightingales - visit [www.thenightingales.org.uk/gigs.htm](http://www.thenightingales.org.uk/gigs.htm) for a list of gigs. New album 'Out of True' is released on 2 October...*

# Love and Baggage

William Pryor takes an unhooked look at how addiction and relationship go together

**We may sing endless songs about it**, but love is a force we can't explain, even though we know what it is when we experience it. When we don't have it, we tend to be unhappier than when we do have it; we tend to forget we ever knew it. When we're in a state of love, the world is good; it wraps us in confidence and light. When we love, our being has purpose; we know why we're here.

Love is open, tender, giving, generous, peaceful and so many other adjectives. It needs no defending. The Chinese character denoting love is made up of other symbols: one for a heart in the middle, between signs for 'accept' at the top, and 'feel', or 'perceive' at the bottom. Bertrand Russell described love as an absolute value. It cannot be reduced, however hard neurochemists may try.

To be in love with someone is to have a relationship with them. To be in love is to see ourselves in the mirror of the other; to see our baggage in the rosiest tints. But it is also to be ecstatic, which gives the mirror the pink colour. Some of us would like to be in love all the time. We also use the word to pick out those experiences that particularly turn us on, from 'I love Marmite', through 'I love being stoned', to 'I love sex'. Indeed being in love with someone else often leads to an erotic experience we adore.

Neuroscientists don't want to be left out of this discussion. They've found that when people testify to feeling love, there are bucket-loads of testosterone, oestrogen, dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, oxytocin, and vasopressin in their brains. To be in love is to be high. To be in love with someone who is in love with you is a double amplification of the most rhapsodic human experience.

Trouble is we get confused about love, so badly do we want it. All those neurochemicals make it hard to distinguish love from lust, need, want, greed and other malfunctions of the self. When I first fixed heroin it was very like falling vein over needle in love. The morphy high apparently freed me from carrying the baggage of my self. I was ecstatically what I wanted to be. I had a new purpose: to continue this love affair. I wanted more. I couldn't stop. All symptoms of addiction.

Mystical love is the true absolute value; it transcends the self and its baggage, it is beyond space, time and the self. It is therefore the opposite of addiction, which, in the end, is an obsessive clinging to an illusion of one's self being in love. At first heroin freed me from my unhappiness, and in that release I could love what I saw of myself in its mirror. But what I saw was an illusion. Our worldly love is a stepped-down form of mystical love, maybe all we can take



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while absorbed in the world. The more it is stepped-down, the more we confuse it with something we can possess, the closer we get to addiction.

The theme of Unhooked Thinking 2007 is Love and Baggage. It's our baggage – our frustrations, depressions, misaligned expectations and neurochemical misappropriations – that turns love to the dust of need. Addiction and mystical love are the two most powerful relationships we can experience, at opposite ends of the continuum of humanity – addiction is a prison, love liberation. At Unhooked Thinking 2007 we'll examine the connections between love, conflict, relationship and family. We'll be talking about how we can unhook our thinking about addiction from the clichés of medicine and criminal justice; we'll be thinking about the role of love in the treatment of addiction; we'll be rummaging in our baggage to see what we can let go.

*Unhooked Thinking is on 9-11 May 2007 at Bath Guildhall. Visit [www.unhookedthinking.com](http://www.unhookedthinking.com)*