





20 years of Harm Reduction

Mike Linnell

Drawing A Line



Drawing A Line - Mike Linnell - 20 years of Harm Reduction.



This book was designed in secret by Louise Thompson with graphic support from Kerry Hilton, right under the nose of the subject. That's how serious Mike is about his work - at least we think that explains it. Kevin Robinson oiled the cogs, and Maggie Rogan irritated the contributors into submission, including Mike.

Based on an idea inspired by Mike's drunken despair in a hotel bar in Manchester - so thanks also to Marie McGowan and Mark Knight. We would like to thank all those who contributed to the content of this book.

Mike Linnell - Director of Communications, Lifeline Publications.

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Mike on all of it...

The colleagues I have worked with and respected over the years: Les, Rowdy, Steph, Mark, Peter, Russell, Mark, Colin, Ian, and all the people in this book have had a huge influence on my thinking. When you work closely with people and bat about ideas on a daily basis, you often loose track of who had thought what and where it came from. You develop a kind of collective wisdom. What I think is based on this collection of ideas, influences and experiences that come from those who I have worked with over the past twenty years.

CONTRIBUTORS

Colin Wisely



Jon Derricott, Neil Hunt, Andrew Preston



Harry Shapiro



Andrew M Bennett



James Kay



Russell Newcombe



Lyn Matthews



Pat O'Hare



Rowdy Yates



Mark Gilman



Peter Mc Dermott



Ian Wardle



Ian Wardle - Chief Executive, Lifeline.



Mike on Ian

Ian is the Chief Executive of Lifeline and has been my boss since the early 1990's. Since that time Lifeline has gone from having about 30 staff to about 300. That in itself is quite remarkable although not that unusual as the huge expansion in the drugs field has seen a number of treatment services grow as rapidly as we have. What is remarkable is that we have managed to do this whilst still publishing the most radical and innovative publications ever produced by a British charity. I don't think there are any other Chief Executives in the drugs sector (or anywhere else for that matter) that would have supported the work we do.

Nobody gets away with what Mike Linnell gets away with. Nobody. When Lifeline and Mike notoriously "crossed the line" in 2002, there was a certain amount of laughter here. Who of us, after all, had last seen Mike Linnell when he was on this side of the line. Mike has repeatedly redefined where the line is and in so doing reserved his right to continue crossing it.

Mike is part of a strong ethnographic tradition in the British drugs field. His work is shaped out of his contact with drug users. Mike is an ethnographer and his work is satisfyingly rich in milieux detail. This is more than a milieux, however, this is a world: a world described by Mike



The Lifeline Project in Manchester, by contrast, provided a graphic response to the explosion in recreational drug use in 1990s Britain. Founded in 1971 as a 'street'-based drugs charity, Lifeline has over the past decade produced publications aimed at different groups engaged in drug use, their parents or loved ones – or anyone not using drugs, but 'living in a world profoundly affected by drug use'.

on the basis of his researches and investigations with the people for whom his work ultimately is intended.

I am enormously proud of Mike's work as a propagandist. Lifeline tells the truth about drugs. Mike Linnell tells the truth about drugs. He is one of the very finest campaigners against the humourless stupidities of the war against drugs. He is one of the most innovative and best informed public health safety campaigners in Britain and beyond. He is a major propagandist for drug normalization.

Note in Mike's work the many, many large tableaux of mass intoxication. These murals are, each in their own way, manifestos for

drug normalization. Drug use is normal. Excessive drug use is normal. And in public too. It's the British way. Drug use is normal. It isn't necessarily safe, considerate or sensible. Also note in Mike's work the very many images of misery and humiliation. For every celebration there is a cautionary tale – and a hangover.

Whatever our attitudes to drugs and drug users, however, we are charged with putting across the best, most accessible, and most up-to-date safety advice on illegal and legal drug use. Mike Linnell's work is the best as well as being the most provocative, the most engaging and the most humorous.

Peter Mc Dermott - Freelance Writer, Consultant & NTA Board Member.



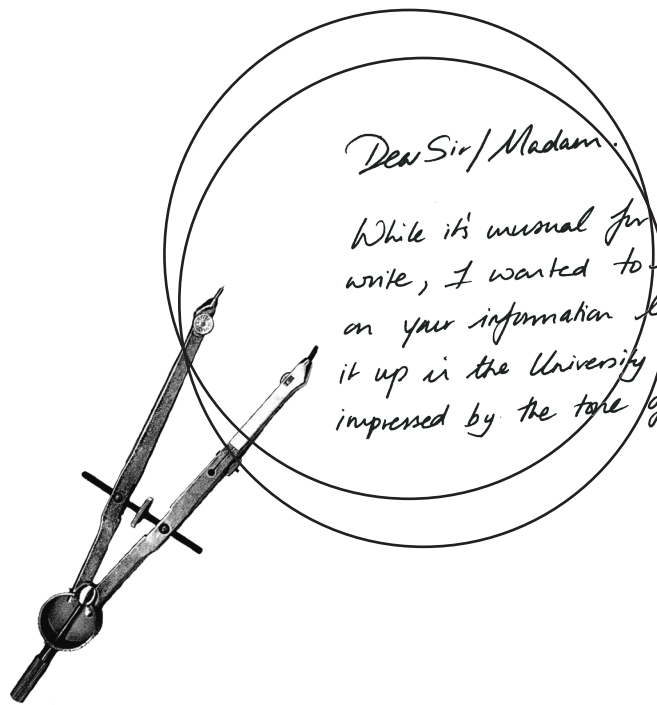
As a writer and theorist, Peter was of crucial importance to the birth of the harm reduction movement in Britain. In the late 1980's, he wrote for and edited the Mersey (later the International) Harm Reduction Journal. Peter has written numerous booklets (McDermott's Guides) for Lifeline, that are wonderfully insightful and funny - he is frankly unique and impossible to replace. Peter is the 'voice of the user' at a national level through his representation at the National Treatment Agency- and although drug user representation can often be tokenistic, nobody who has ever worked with Peter is left in any doubt he earns his place at the table on merit. I remember seeing Peter nod off and loose his teeth, whilst presenting a research paper at the international harm reduction conference in Rotterdam, although he doesn't seem to recall this.



The Alfred Hitchcock of Harm Reduction: a tribute to Michael Linnell.

One of the great strengths of Lifeline's publications is that they have always had a great appeal to the illiterate and semi-literate branches of the drug using population.

A consequence of this popularity has been the huge amounts of undeserved flattery have that come my way, as people congratulate me for the hilarious pictures that I've been drawing over all these years.



16 May 2000

In the mistaken belief that I'm the one that draws the pictures, attractive young female injecting drug users have offered me their bodies, while less-attractive males have offered me free samples of mind-altering substances. These are the perks of being at the cutting edge of harm reduction-based drug education.

But whenever you have an upside, there is invariably a downside too. For me, the major downside of working with Mike Linnell has been a strange inexplicable tendency for some people to associate me with the character of Peanut Pete! I've always resented this travesty.

How anybody could mistake a fifty year old Scouse methadonian for a teenage ecstasy-gobbling Mancunian has always been a mystery to me. Grandpa 'Smackhead' McDermott, I could see, but Peanut Pete?

And the 'professionals' are no more literate than the users are.

Over the years, Linnell has made me a minor celebrity through his rather fine illustrations of the author in the various publications that I've written for him. Now, whenever I go to a conference, someone will



always ask me why I'm not wearing my cigarette holder and smoking jacket?

This is a perfectly ludicrous question. They might as well ask why I'm not wearing my pyjamas and slippers. My cigarette holder and smoking jacket are upstairs in my hotel room, awaiting the post-conference recreational leisure activities - a fact that many hundreds of attractive young drugs workers will be happy to attest to.

Like all great caricaturists, Linnell can't resist the self portrait and has, on very rare occasions, put his own character into his work. If any reader

can successfully identify which of the stories he puts himself into, we'll send you a set of autographed 'McDermott's guides' as a prize. Entry to this competition is barred to all Lifeline Employees, and anyone who attended the Third International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm.

I've known Michael Linnell since 1986 or 1987 – when he came over to Liverpool, a still wet-behind-the-ears art student who was touched by a stroke of genius. In those days, Lifeline was a schizophrenic organization, still dominated by the dead hand of



amateur psychotherapy, and Linnell represented a tiny core of Harm Reductionists who were working in the belly of the beast. Fortunately, the Harm Reduction faction won.

Whether the organization and its staff know it, whether they acknowledge it or not, throughout the nineties and beyond, Michael Linnell and his work was the public face of Lifeline. Any reputation that Lifeline gained for being a cutting edge, innovative, creative enterprise was attributable almost exclusively to Michael Linnell's work during that period.

Twenty years later, the rest of the organization is finally starting to deliver on the sort of quality and attitude that Linnell's work promises.

Of course, there are those who criticize Michael for being cynical, or for criticizing rather than offering solutions. Neither of these are accurate. His critique of the field is born not from cynicism, but from optimism – from a vision of what good services should look like, and how the people that use them should be entitled to the very best that we can offer.

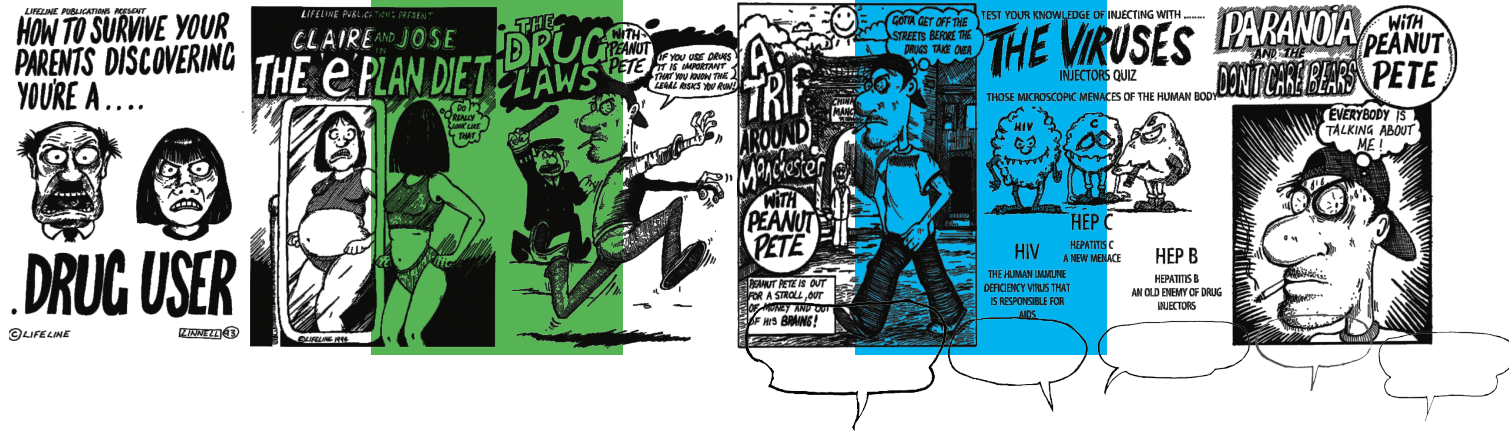


And when the history of British drug policy post AIDS comes to be written, Michael Linnell will be seen as a critically important figure. His work for Lifeline ultimately defined how drugs education should be done – not just in the UK, but across the globe.

And not only does he leave behind a major contribution to the theory, but the work stands on its own as well. I have no doubts whatsoever that in another twenty years time, people will still be reading those of Lifeline's publications that bear the product of Mike's hand and brain, because even if they had no socially redeeming content whatsoever, they

are never anything less than hilariously funny, and reflect the foibles and attitudes of a particular subculture at a particular point in history. How many other drug information leaflets can you say that about? Are there any?

Of course, not everybody likes his work. Every now and again, some new rent-a-quote politician, or some up-and-coming wannabee journalist will stop quaffing the Cabernet or snorting the Charlie for long enough to recognize that there's a potential moral panic in the making here. And so no doubt the media will start monstering him yet again, whining on about the risk to our young people – as though their own



policies actually did anything other than increasing drug related harm.

Mark Gilman - Regional Manager (North West), NTA.



Mike on Mark

Mark and I both started work for Lifeline in the same month and year. Amongst other things we were both responsible for producing Lifeline's first publication 'Smack in the Eye'. As a thinker, writer and public speaker Mark Gilman played an important part in the early harm reduction movement; he was certainly the funniest of the early harm reducers. Mark's research and analysis of the early rave scene was of vital importance to the Safer Dancing campaign and the Peanut Pete range of leaflets. Mark is now a Regional Manager for the NTA.



When I joined Lifeline Mike Linnell was already there. When I moved to Lifeline's Regional Drug Training Unit I started to work closely with Mike. At first I thought what does a Spurs fan from Basildon know about drugs and drug users in the North West? Within a few months I had the answer – a lot! I suppose I have to talk about the first edition of 'Smack in the Eye'. We wanted to produce something that would let British injecting drug users know that they too were at risk of HIV and AIDS. They didn't believe they were. I had extensive ethnographic contact with injecting drug users in Greater Manchester. I started

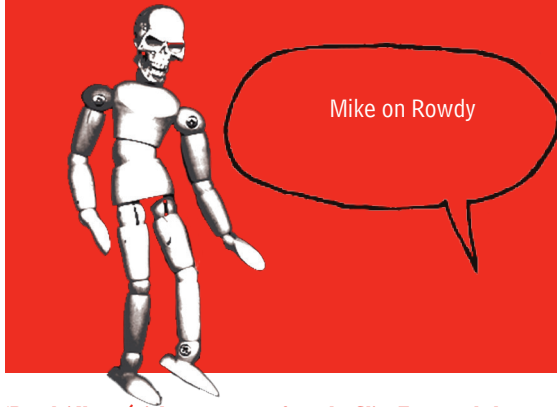


warning people about the threat of HTLV3 (as HIV was then known). My warnings met with characteristic resistance - "Bollocks – its only queers and American Junkies who get that shit!" As I recall, we (Mike Linnell, Rowdy Yates and me) sat down in the Church Inn in Prestwich and talked through a range of ideas to break through this resistance. The comic was Mike's idea. The first edition was brilliant. Since that first edition of 'Smack in the Eye', Mike has gone on to produce hundreds of cutting edge harm reduction cartoons. I can't think of one that hasn't hit the right spot. There are many in the drugs sector who like to think

of themselves as genuine radicals. In over twenty years I have only met one genuine radical in this business. Mike Linnell is the only person I know who has never compromised. He has never given an inch. He is as committed today as he was twenty years ago. As for a favorite? It's got to be 'The Lads Go Mad in Amsterdam'.

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Rowdy Yates - ex Chief Executive, Lifeline.



'Rowdy' Yates (nickname comes from the Clint Eastwood character in Rawhide) started work at Lifeline as a volunteer carpenter and always kept a touch of the 'Woodcraft folk' about him. He became Director of Lifeline and had the courage to change his mind and his working practices and steer Lifeline along the path of Harm Reduction. He left Lifeline to become a croft farmer in Scotland and run the drugs course at the University of Sterling. I remember hearing him sing an unaccompanied Irish ballad in a bar in Galway; it brought tears to the eyes of the whole bar.



In my time at Lifeline, I attended more than 100 funerals so this wasn't some sort of theoretical debate for us. We wanted to produce HR materials for users and training materials for other professions that cut the crap and would actually be read. Mike was very much a central part of that approach. That meant telling the truth, making it digestible and getting to the right readership - which is where Mike came in. It also meant being clear about what we thought was OK and not OK.

I think Mike understood this delicate balancing act better than most – even within the organisation. (I still view Mike's cartoon of the Zoo-keeper



as one of the most telling satires on methadone prescribing ever set in print.) And I think that's why Lifeline has had so much more success with its publications than its many me-too producers. It's not just the fact that Mike has an extraordinarily sharp wit and is a great draughtsman (though he is both of those things) it's because he understood that there were some fundamental truths that underpinned the stuff we wanted to say.

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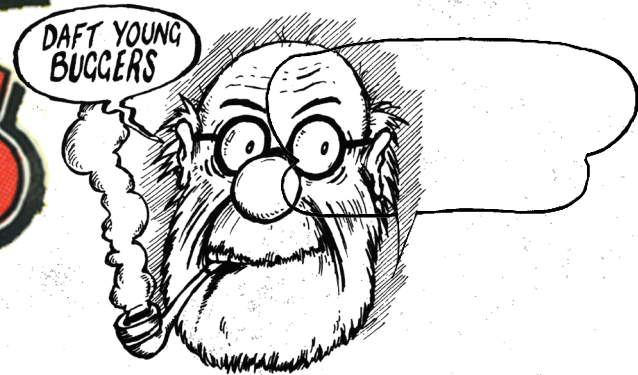
Pat O'Hare - President, International Harm Reduction Association.



Our sister organization in the 1980's (and Scouse v Mancs rivals) the Mersey Regional Drug Training and Information Centre (MDTIC) evolved into HIT while the North West Regional Drug Training Unit (NWRDTU), turned into Lifeline Publications. Both Pat O'Hare who worked at MDTIC and James Kay were both former bus drivers. Pat has spent the last fifteen years jetting around the world and turning harm reduction into the International Harm Reduction Association.



I remember the first time I met Mike. I didn't believe that this elegant, handsome well dressed bloke standing in front of me could possibly have been responsible for that load of - sorry I am getting carried away - brilliance is of course what I was going to write. Unfortunately, as a socio-economically deprived child from Bootle, I didn't read comics as a kid because my mum and dad couldn't buy them for us. I now suffer from a kind of comic illiteracy. I never know which bubble you read first. But everyone tells me they were great and I believe them. I know that they were effective harm reduction and were



pioneering in speaking to people in a way that would attract them and keep their attention and be credible.

They also had an impact outside the UK. Last month I was at the soon to open heroin trial in Vancouver and there on the wall was a 'Granpa Smackhead Jones' poster. I think of Mike Linnell also for other things. I think of him as one of the most genuine, "ego-less" people in the field; for his incredible passion to do something to change society's view of drug users and the way they are treated; for unbelievably clever, witty and incisive presentations at harm reduction conferences. I

remember him at the Chiang Mai conference Gala Dinner badgering the organisers, successfully, to do some kind of collection to help Thai Drug Users who were being killed by their own government and then being one of the leaders in getting Paisan and Chockchai and other colleagues over to the UK to protest about the killings in Thailand.

Well done, Mike, you are a credit to our field. One thing I know for sure...I will never be able to tell a story as funny, scary and unbelievable as the one you told me in Jersey in 2000.

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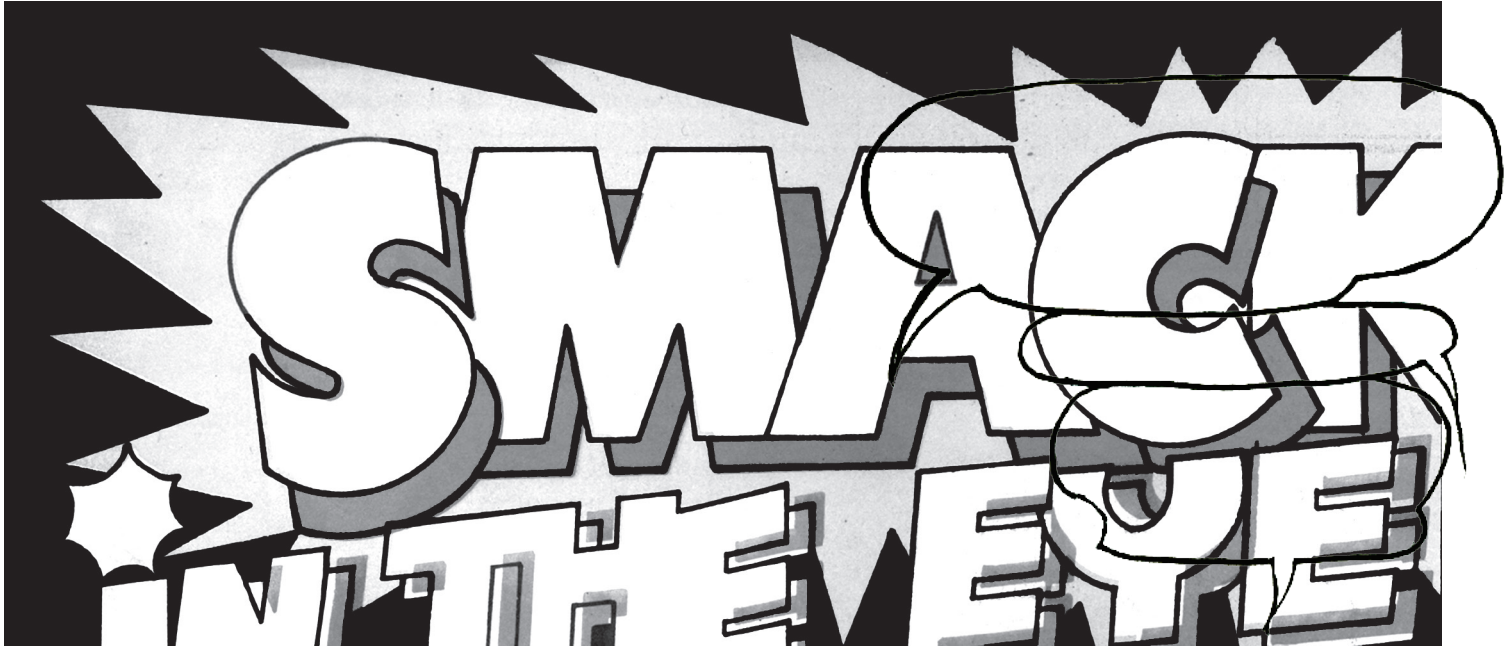
Lyn Matthews - Drug Worker, Freelance Trainer & Consultant.



I remember meeting Lyn and her husband Alan in the mid 1980's when she was an outreach worker in Liverpool. Lyn has continually pushed for harm reduction work and for the better treatment of women users, and for using women working in the sex industry. I remember standing outside a jewellers shop in Liverpool while a bemused public was blissfully unaware that we were protesting about the treatment of Thai drug users to the Thai consulate that had its entrance hidden inside the shop.



During the mid 80's, cheap, brown heroin had started to become readily available on the streets of Liverpool. For many of the youth at that time, unemployed, disaffected and disillusioned by the Thatcher government, heroin became something that at least filled your day. Before long, if you lived in an area where heroin use was high, you were frightened to close your windows for fear of trapping someone's fingers. Houses got burgled, racks of clothes were removed from shops and more and more dealers set up shop. A whole new subculture was born and it seemed a whole generation were becoming philosophically adrift on a sea of smack.



Other areas, including Manchester, had also begun to experience similar problems to what we were seeing in Merseyside, as heroin began to flood the streets of Britain. Drug treatment at this time was draconian and punitive to say the least, and this new breed of drug users certainly found there was nothing to offer them in drug services except humiliation. With no information around drugs, hardly anywhere worthwhile to go for help, being on 'smack' was pretty grim up north. And it was not just drug use that was a risk to peoples lives, injecting drug users were at an even bigger risk of a deadly virus to which there

was no cure – HIV. Thankfully, some people recognised a new, more common sense approach was needed. And fortunately, there were people around who were willing to take the risk of standing up for the rights of users.

As we in Liverpool continued to develop services aimed at attracting those who were injecting brown and selling sex by introducing 'user friendly' services, a few people in Manchester were beginning to take their own pragmatic approach to this new wave of heroin use. Towards the late 80's we were handing out a publication in our needle and

THE ROBINSONS



syringe exchanges, which came from Lifeline, 'Smack in the Eye'. 'Smack in the Eye' was a cheeky little publication which gave sound information in a humorous way on safer sex and drug use. And it was through 'Smack in the Eye' that I first became aware of Mike Linnell's work. Characters like 'Grandpa Smackhead Jones' and 'Tough Shit Thomas', created by Mike, not only made users (and workers) laugh, but also gave them information which was actually useful to them. Even scousers liked it!

But for some people, including the police, the publication was too much and was labelled as being 'pornographic' by some commentators.

Soon the cry for it's withdrawal echoed through the corridors of Lifeline. Mike's and Lifeline's defence of the publication sent a strong and important message out to the people 'Smack in the Eye' was targeted at – some people really were on their side. 20 years on nothing much has changed really. Mike is still in there causing controversy, still managing to upset those with less enlightened minds, with his creativity, insight and wit and has over the last twenty years made an enormous contribution to the harm reduction movement.

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Russell Newcombe - Senior Lecturer/Researcher
in Drug Use & Addiction, Faculty of Science,
Liverpool John Moores University.

Mike on Russell (Dr Nuke)



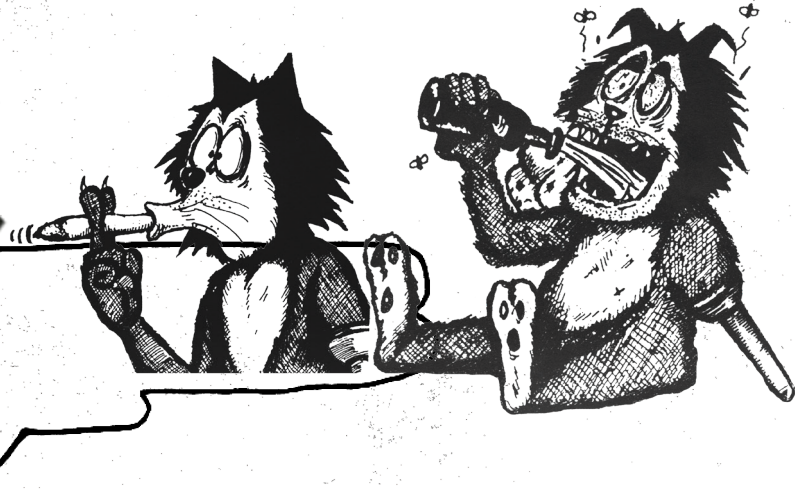
Russell is a researcher, writer and academic. He was the author of 'High Time for Harm Reduction' (published in Druglink), which helped focus sporadic harm reduction practices across the country into an informal movement. His work on drafting the first ever code of practices for nightclubs produced for Manchester City Council and Lifeline kicked the whole safer dancing thing off. I was with Russell when he was thrown out of the Vatican for refusing to take off his baseball cap.



In 1987 I got hired by Mersey Health Authority to set up the Drug Education Research Project in Liverpool, the first task of which was to design and research some harm-reduction cartoons. A character called 'Willy Whizz' was invented (or rather ripped off) to give information about safer use of amphetamine while 'speeding' around his cartoon strip. I needed an artist to produce the final version, and was lucky enough to meet Mike Linnell who had recently started working for Lifeline, and he agreed to bring 'Willy Whizz' to life. But WW was just a prototype, and quickly became history as Lifeline launched the brilliant

TOUGH SHIT THOMAS

THE DEAD LEG
JUNKIE
CAT WITH
NINE LIVES



'Smack in the Eye', closely followed by the notorious poly-drug antics of Mike's most lovable characters, Peanut Pete and his pals.

Unlike similar stuff from other agencies, Mike's publications are properly informed by interviews with drug users and scientific research, and the cartoon medium is not just another convenient vehicle for varying the delivery of drug information. Why they work so well is that they are first and foremost classy, original funny cartoon stories in their own right. Mike's cartoons and comics are as good as if not better than any of their counterparts in the commercial market, and

manage the difficult task of imparting useful information about safer drug use without coming across like a poorly disguised health education message from straight 'do-gooders'. Positive and negative effects are equally addressed (another rarity), and the message and mood is always intelligently and impressively geared toward the worldview of the target audience. Sometimes slapstick and sometimes surreal, the humour laughs with drugs users, and not at them. In fact, the tone of a Linnellian cartoon couldn't be further from the serious tone found in most other drug information products, which is why they get passed



round and read by lots of people rather than quickly skimmed and dumped like most drug leaflets/booklets.

In short, in addition to spending two decades providing drug users with masses of useful information in an attractive form, Mike has also made a major contribution to comicbook art by evolving his own distinctive style and 'stable' of cartoon characters, whose images and words are loaded with his unique interpretation of druggie humour, culture and wisdom. But best of all Mike's cartoon world always buzzes with the true spirit of harm reduction, the user-friendly attitude of old,

now lost to so many of the professionalised and bureaucracy-laden drug agencies of Blairite Britain.

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James Kay - Chairman, Healthwise.



James (called Les in the days I knew him) Kay was responsible for putting an Ad in the creative and media section of the Guardian, that led to me being employed by Lifeline in the old North West Regional Training Unit (NWRDTU, we liked long acronyms in those days). James left Lifeline and set up Health Wise (he's now the Chairman).



I remember interviewing Mike for his job at Lifeline. We had gone through all the usual interview stuff and at the end I asked Mike how he would "characterise his approach to art". Looking long and hard at me he eventually said "... well ... I'm a sort of angry, young abstract expressionist." Then he grinned and I realised that he was taking the piss. This was more than a little risky in a job interview with someone he had never met before - even if I had just asked a pompous and silly question.

Later Mike came up with the idea of a comic - 'Smack in the Eye'. I didn't like it at all and at first argued against it but Mike pushed



hard and we took it too our management committee. During the heated debate that followed an Assistant Chief Probation Officer made a critical intervention. He described the comic as “outrageous” and told the management committee that he had already written to all the probation offices in Greater Manchester instructing them to have nothing to do with “this scurrilous publication”. Mike’s response was to ask the committee if he could modify the front cover to include the new tag line “Banned by Greater Manchester Probation Service”. This, he was sure would make it much more attractive to the target group of drug injectors.

I can’t remember whether or not we did include that tag line but it was a turning point in the debate and in my understanding of Mike’s work. Of course material that would make drug injectors laugh out loud would probably offend lots of others. But they weren’t the target audience. We had to be prepared to tough out the flak if we wanted to do this type of work. In all the time that I have known him Mike has continued to make some people laugh out loud and others wince. And in the resulting debates, a lot has been learned that was important. Long may he continue.

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Andrew M Bennett - Director, HIT.



Andy Bennett was at MDTIC and then developed HIT into what it is now. It is a measure of how much things have changed, that HIT are now doing campaigns for the government. This would have been unthinkable twenty years ago.



Mike - only following government guidance?

It's a fact that Mike's publications are informative. Open to interpretation is their potential to offend. Do they cross the 'fine-line' between educating and offending? However, the 'fine-line' is impossible to define due to the fact that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to the business of communication. The meanings people attach to communications of any kind vary with the type of message, the media employed, the audience targeted and the channels of distribution used. Specifically designed drugs communications are no different.



Government guidance on drugs communications state that they should:

- Target a single well researched group
- Be accurate, credible, and non-didactic
- Use language, values and styles which appeal to their target groups
- Conduct developmental or pre-testing research
- Use distribution channels that are easily accessed and appropriate to the target groups
- Use a range of advertising channels, both conventional and less conventional

This is what Lifeline's publications do. Keep following government orders and long may you continue to take the flack! Congratulations Mike.

As for my favourite? It has to be 'Locker Room Lenny is Reconstructed Man: Doctor Flap opens her files' taken from 'Smack in the Eye', issue 9. Next favorites include the E' By Gum leaflet; the High in the E-Stand poster and the various comic strips featuring Grandpa Smackhead Jones.

Harry Shapiro - Editor, Druglink.

Mike on Harry

Topic

Harry is editor of Druglink and an author in his own right. He has written numerous books about 'rock stars' and drugs and in the case of the brilliant 'Waiting for the Man' both at the same time. It is always a comfort to know Harry is there, ever constant, always questioning, always supportive, and always sound in his judgment and opinion. Harry looked the same twenty years ago as he does now; which is either good or bad depending on what you think of Harry's looks.



A while back, I sat in a conference where one of the speakers stood up and said, 'I usually start my talks with a joke, but drugs is far too serious a subject to joke about'. I thought then that comment was crap - and I still do. Humour serves to normalise and domesticate - if you can laugh about something, it is not so threatening, it makes it easier to deal with. Mike has known this for years - and his pioneering work in presenting crucial health and safety information about drugs in a very accessible format to all sorts of hard to reach groups is something to be celebrated. And as we all know, Mike's unique approach has proved very threatening to the forces of moral outrage and over the years,

NEWS

MPs demand cut in funds for agencies accused of promoting drug use

BY DAVID BAMBER
Home Affairs Correspondent

DRUGS ADVICE agencies are encouraging young people to

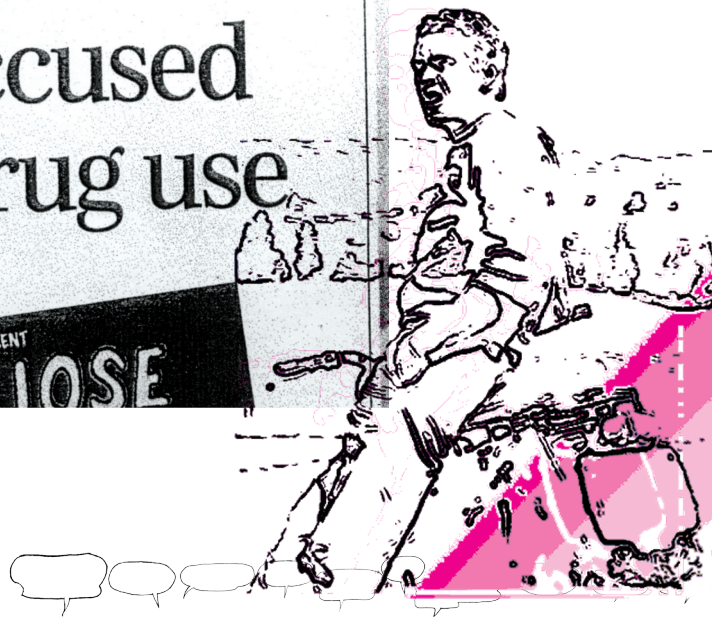
LIFELINE PUBLICATIONS PRESENT

LOSE

Lifeline has teetered close to the edge of funding cuts, closure and even arrest.

This is the point when I should be saying something like 'we need more people like Mike' - but if you have a Mike, you also need an organisation like Lifeline prepared to ride up to the barricades like Steve McQueen in the 'Great Escape' - and in this day and age, that seems increasingly unlikely. But for Mike, of course, there is no escape ... and I should know. So from the bottom of the K Hole, I salute you ...

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Jon Derricott - Chair, UKHRA.
Neil Hunt - Director, UK Harm Reduction Alliance.
Andrew Preston - Exchange Supplies.

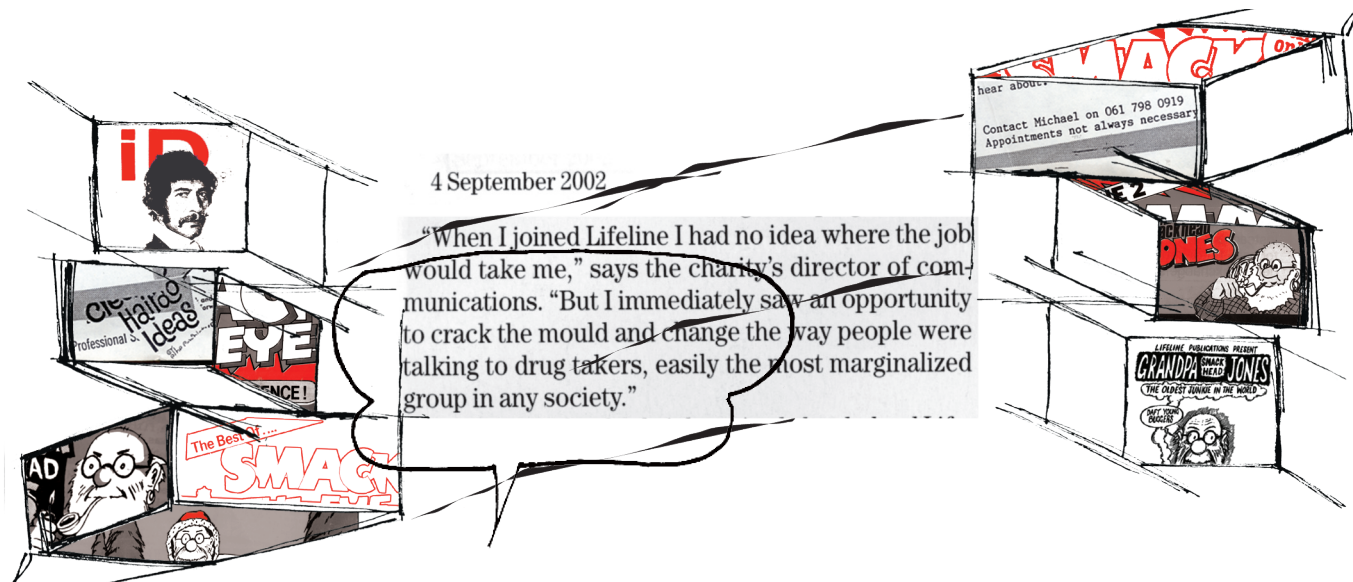


Although I've never worked directly with these three, I do bump into them fairly regularly in some fairly strange places. Neil, Andrew and Jon along with others established UKHRA and made it what it is today. Neil is one of those rare breed: an academic who puts 'the cause' before his own career. Although he does occasionally lapse into inappropriate beard wearing. Andrew came into the field as a nurse, but along with Jon had the nous to develop the provision of needle exchange equipment into a social enterprise with Exchange Supplies. Andrew is one of the few people in the harm reduction movement that you could take home to see your mum. I found out recently (in a 24 hour bar in Sydney) that like me, Jon had theatrical leanings before starting work in the drugs field. My last job before working for Lifeline was as a comedy acrobat and the night before starting work with HIT, Jon was a juggling unicyclist on stage at a Van Morrison concert. Amongst other things Jon is now an independent trainer.



In his own words 'an ageing Lothario', Mike will always be a Mike to us, although he seems to have recently decided to become a Michael - maybe he's growing up? If that is the case, we can only hope that he doesn't lose his desire to stretch the elastic of what is possible and acceptable in drug information.

Everyone working in harm reduction in the UK knows about Mike: he's been around from the start. Our first memory of Mike's work is, of course, the legendary Grandpa Smackhead Jones – it made us chuckle at exactly the right time: starting in drugs work (at opposite ends of



England), we didn't have that much of a clue, and could have got our priorities completely wrong. It helped to shape us into right-thinking boys!

Other moments that stand out...Mike's stunning designs and contribution to the international day of action opposing the murder of Thai Drug Users. And more recently his focus on smokers' rights - a timely reminder of the need for vigilance wherever public health and human rights are in tension. Top Drawer!

PS He's still at it: last weekend Jon's 12 year old son picked up the 'Big Blue Book of Drugs', read it cover to cover – and declared it "boss!"

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Colin Wisely - Adult Services Commissioner, Salford DAT.



Colin was the director of Unit 51 in Huddersfield when it merged with Lifeline. Colin became Lifeline's International Director, persuading a number of colleagues (mainly me) to follow him around the world to work on various research and harm reduction projects. Colin Wisely was responsible for me ending up in the middle of Siberia. He now works for Salford DAT.



Back in early 1997 I read an article in the BMJ about rising levels of HIV amongst injecting drug users in the Russian Federation. Within months I began a personal Odyssey that took me into the murky world of international drug policy. One of my companions on that journey was Mike Linnell. My work with Mike began as the last century drew to a close and took us from the icy Siberian forests of the Altai district, all the way to the sunny beaches of Miami. On the journey we experienced the highs and lows of attempting to make a dent in the HIV epidemic in Russia, examine social exclusion amongst drug users in Western Europe and even tried to open up shop in the good old US of A.



The epidemic in Eastern Europe continues to this day, drug users remain some the most excluded individuals, even in liberal Western Europe and as for the United States; well they obviously weren't ready for cool Britannia and all her treasures. In hindsight it was all folly but what a folly!

Behind the fart jokes and the swearwords of Mike's publications there lurks a very serious purpose: to give truthful information about drugs to drug users in a language they can understand without moralising. In an age where appearances always seem to win over substance, there is little room for truth. Mike's willingness to attempt to speak the truth on behalf

of drug users has often brought trouble from those who would prefer more palatable messages.

At the beginning of this century, Mike and I went to a party hosted by a group of street outreach workers based in Moscow. Under pressure from all sides these young people, many former users themselves, were attempting to develop harm reduction from scratch within the midst of an epidemic that has now affected an estimated million individuals in Russia alone. Upon walking into the room Mike received a standing ovation! What better accolade? For once even Mike was lost for words. I hope that Mike's work will continue to inspire many others for years to come. ”

