

SELF-IMAGE AND PROFILE

The information was presented by:

JES BUNDESVERBAND e.V.
JUNKIES | FORMER DRUG USERS | PEOPLE IN OST

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„Drug users like all other human beings have a right of human dignity. They don't need to obtain it through an abstinent and conformist behaviour.“

JES founding declaration, June 1989



**SELF IMAGE AND PROFILE OF THE JES BUNDESVERBAND
JUNKIES, EX-USER, PEOPLE IN OST**

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WHO AND WHAT IS JES?

What unites us

We are involved with JES because there are parts of our biographies where we see ourselves as drug users, former drug users or people in OST. We follow on from experiences we have had with specific psychoactive substances, particularly with opiates, amphetamines and cocaine.

The integration of these drugs into our own lives happened very differently to each one of us. Under the present societal conditions, we are bound to each other both through common experiences with living environments distinguished by certain preferences, e.g. by certain ideas on life in general, on the different ways of living together and on communication. Last, but not least, we are connected by our integration into drug scenes with a partly personal cultural self-image, common values and drug using rituals.

Criminalisation, prosecution, imprisonment and illegality, social discrimination, stigmatising, systematic discrimination, often poverty as well, homelessness, health hazards, early death of friends and relatives as well as our role as patients or clients in the drug service system form part of the experiences that bring us together.

JES does not consist of labels

As drug users, we are continuously confronted with pre-conceived ideas the public perceives as a life with drugs. Our reality tells us that so called “drug careers” which apparently lead „automatically“ and directly into social decline, destruction of personality and early death are not the rule. We, the members of the JES Network can meanwhile prove that a life with drugs can be very dynamic, with different phases, progress and regression, breakdowns and leaps. Thinking patterns and labels not

only describe this wrongly, but prevent us from developing through their effect of stigmatising. JES decisively rejects these types of thinking patterns.

The JES Bundesverband as an umbrella organisation for JES groups and individuals takes up the interests and needs of people using drugs in their respective specific life situations.

J stands for “Junkie” and is thus the symbol of a life situation created by prohibition, distinguished by life on the scene and illegality, thus frequently by criminality, poverty, homelessness, fear of loss, prostitution, health hazards but often also by indulgence, solidarity and adventure.

E stands for “Ehemalige”, (German for “former,” i.e. former drug users) whereby “Ehemalig” can stand both for former drug use as well as a former life of dependency and criminality.

S stands for “Substituierte”, (German for people in opiate treatment – OST) whose life is distinguished by the prescription of medication. This life includes both possibilities of re-integration and rehabilitation, stabilisation of health, reduction of drug problems. It also includes decision making by others, patronising behaviour and a loss of prospects with respect to integration in many areas of social life.

JES is not just a way for people in OST to help themselves

Currently JES' ongoing work is usually carried out by men and women in OST. This appearance is often deceptive and shows JES as a self-help group for people in OST alone. People overlook the fact that the way our network functions is the result of conditions set by drug policies under which not only drug users in Germany have to live at present. Whereas life as a junkie leaves little time and energy for stable and reliable work in our network, the acknowledgement of former drug users of their life with drugs puts the often difficult achievement of integration into social relations in so called „normal society“ at a risk. Thus far, it is understandable that people in OST in particular make use of possibilities granted to them through OST to commit themselves to their own, but specifically to the needs and requirements of other drug users.

Living a life of human dignity with drugs

The description JES very consciously signals an affirmation. It is specifically understood as a confrontation of slogans related to drug policy which moralise, such as „Say NO!“ The name makes it clear that drug use is not fundamentally negative in itself, that a life with drugs does not just consist of difficult, destructive parts and the possible dependency on psychoactive substances does not always have to be a hindrance. Integration of drug use into our lives occurs in different ways. The more successfully this quite appealing process takes place, the more people can gain as a whole from it. JES therefore also stands for a provocation against simple thinking that only knows „All or Nothing“, „Abstinence or Misery.“ Society places basic conditions for a life with drugs. These are currently responsible for the failure of many drug users when confronted with the task of integrating drugs into their lives. The painful experiences many of us have gathered in this context form an integral part of our responsibility in committing ourselves to dealing with drugs in society. Our chosen principle **„Living a life of human dignity with drugs“** is binding as a minimum consensus for all groups in the JES Bundesverband. It forms the basis for our common work. It is often misunderstood as an invitation to use drugs or consciously misconstrued. But we know that under present social framework conditions, a life with drugs is often connected to health hazards, vio-

lations of human dignity, lawlessness and discrimination. In this light, but particularly because we respect and demand the right to self determination of each one of us, also with respect to the decision for or against use of certain psychoactive substances, we the members of JES are far removed from idealising and propagating drug use. The guiding principle of our network is to orient **„Living a life of human dignity with drugs“** towards the common goal of creating social conditions in which people can live with drugs in dignity, i.e. without the threat of prosecution, discrimination, stigmatising, pathologising and being at a permanent disadvantage. JES not only accepts people who want to decide for themselves what drugs they use. With our work, we support drug users, by working towards the corresponding framework conditions or by creating them ourselves, disseminating knowledge, as well as encouraging and motivating the development of skills and competencies to avoid self-destructive drug use (safer use). The aim is to enable a lifestyle where no one is harmed, but which consists of independence, self-respect and enjoying life.

PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF JES

As a network of junkies, former drug users and people in OST, the JES Bundesverband takes up the interests and needs of drug users in its work. The following main tasks can be derived from this purpose.

Helping people help themselves

The individual JES groups have developed into a social network in their regions where the helping, supporting and stabilising role of relations between people bears fruit. People who have gathered experiences with relatives, friends or professional helpers and have experienced a similar fate and suffer from stigmatisation, exclusion and discrimination come together here. Therefore, the group as a social community is important to JES, where the individual feels understood, safe and well. Here, contacts can be built up, an exchange of experiences developed and

new social contacts can be maintained and cultivated as well as social shelter and safety be found. Here, care, recognition and solidarity and thus the often missing social support when overcoming life's tasks and crises can be found, which are not found in other social contexts. Life in the regional JES groups also provides important initiatives to work on ourselves and to realise personal values. This includes self-experience, the development of self-respect and feelings of self-esteem, the experience of pleasure in life and emancipation. Group life offers each and every individual space to find new social behavioural patterns, to practise them and to become stable. Finally, the necessity and the advantage of a community of equals where work on immediate, „customised“ and thus suitable aids is carried out can be experienced in the JES groups.

Social commitment

We see ourselves as a part of society and JES activists contribute significantly through their commitment. The many positive effects of accepted drug self-help not only concern drug users themselves. The consequences of stabilisation of health and awareness relieve social classes through their re-integration into professional life, etc.

Socio-political commitment

The JES network does not want to limit itself to helping individuals help themselves. As users of illegal drugs, we are confronted with the fact that social framework conditions prevent or make difficult living a life with drugs in dignity on a daily basis. The work in the JES network therefore also aims at societal changes.

Drogenpolitik als Hauptfeld unseres politischen Wirkens

This particularly concerns changes to the current drug policy regulations and laws. Drug users are continuously exposed to the pressure of persecution due to these laws. They expose us to the black market with bad and unclear substance quality, unsafe supply, excessive expenditure and its criminal structure characterised by violence. The laws force us into an urgency to acquire drugs and make imprisonment an impressionable life experience for many of us. Moreover, laws and regulations for health hazards including life threatening illnesses of drug users are also responsible. As those directly affected by these bad situations in drug policy, we have the right and the duty to stand up for a new order in drug policy. In view of the social conditions, JES' political work cannot limit itself to commitment at the level of drug policy. Rather, it is necessary, to become actively involved in many areas of policy. Maintenance of the "principle of solidarity" must be demanded within the scope of socio-political work. This will be dissolved during the course of the re-structuring of the welfare state bit by bit to the disadvantage of the socially weak, which includes many drug users. JES is therefore involved in socio-political resistance against the so called change in values and, together with its „natural“ allies - representatives of other marginal groups excluded by society - drives the development of a new solidarity forwards. On the other hand, socio-political commitment can also prevent social security and protection from turning into official paternalism, total supervision and disciplinarian behaviour. The reality of our lives has shown us the value of social support through professional systems. But we also experience social work as excessive supervision and how it can lead to us becoming passive precisely in those areas of life where self management is indispensable. JES therefore ensures that the services of the welfare state are oriented to the needs of drug users and the crossing of boundaries is rejected. The obligation deduced from this for JES is its right to participate and to demand joint management of care structures for drug users and to actively take them up.

Education, work, employment and participation

We live in a society in which material security, social recognition and estimation as well as self-respect are mainly created through work and employment. Drug use and partly also substitution treatment, however, are often used as an opportunity to exclude us from this aspect or to strongly limit our chances. As the JES Bundesverband, we therefore commit ourselves, on the one hand, to ensure that drug use and opiate substitution treatment are no longer used as an excuse to lose opportunities for training and employment. On the other hand, we are involved in ensuring that the distinctive features of our biographies do not lead to lifelong disadvantages that cannot be overcome. As the JES Bundesverband, we continuously point out to those politically responsible that equal opportunities in education and employment for us - as well as for other disadvantaged groups - means being granted basic conditions in which our specific needs are taken into account. Specifically this means, for example, another way of planning education, support in job training and policy on the labour market when (re-) entering employment. It is only in this way that we can work on what we have missed and on deficiencies and can actually integrate into all areas of life in our society. We know that with our work in the JES network, many of our members are given the chance to be meaningfully employed, to learn and practise skills as well as to acquire self confidence and self respect. The commitment of the individual is important and right for our drug self help activities. However, we resist tendencies to denounce our rightful claims to a meaningful and socially recognised job with reference to the work in the JES network. Rather, we work toward society granting us real integration opportunities, not shoving us into therapeutic relationships or calming us down through short term employment relationships, from which we always drop out and lose a lot of what we could build up during this period.

Health policy

Our commitment to health policy is closely connected to our work in drug policy. As the JES Bundesverband, we commit ourselves to the treatment of drug users as „normal“ patients and their being granted exactly the same natural right of speaking out and being involved in decisions when determining treatments. The social delegation of order and control functions to medical organisations carries prejudices and fears (of contact) on to the doctors so that we are often not diagnosed and treated properly. Often, the development of a relationship based on mutual trust towards us as patients is considered impossible, so that there is a lack of effort on the part of the doctor and instead, unethical and, for us, often demeaning control practices (e.g. urine sampling under supervision/inspection of the intimate areas/connecting medication used for treatment with punishment) are used. As the JES Bundesverband, we therefore work, not only on the removal of prejudices, discrimination and ignorance in the area of our health supervision and medical treatment. We also use our specific competence to get involved in well founded training of all medical care givers involved in treatment, to enable them to deal with us drug users and our needs and problems in a dignified manner, and to develop an understanding for certain aspects of our lives. JES is actively opposed to the increasing lack of solidarity in the health system as well, which is evident in the privatisation of risks that we are supposedly responsible for ourselves and not in behaviour in accordance with the therapy. These symptoms are the first steps in the adoption of the solidarity principle which we cannot and will not accept.

Socio-legal function of JES

As a representative of the interests of junkies, former drug users and people in OST, JES Bundesverband also has a socio-legal function. Disregard and pathologising by society are mainly responsible for the fact that drug users often do not develop the skills and the courage to articulate their interests and to insist on their interests being taken into account in political decision making processes. Of course, there are people with different levels of education in our network. We do not overlook that many of our staff members did not have the possibility to complete school and further education and to obtain recognised educational degrees. JES fights against the narrow-mindedness in parts of society which believes that people with a lower level of completed education are not in a position or are not capable of overcoming their problems on their own and of asserting themselves in their own interests. We also see ourselves confronted with the fact that drug users hardly have a lobby in society. The interests of junkies, former drug users and people in OST are usually taken up by those helpers who are immediately confronted with the life situations of drug users through their professional activities. Although the representatives of drug users' interests through professional systems is important, we cannot overlook that this means that only a small, if important section of the interests of drug users is looked into. JES has therefore taken the articulation, involvement and enforcing of the interests of drug users into its own hands. This means continuously checking the changing framework conditions for certain life situations of drug users, to draw attention to discriminating developments and to identify loopholes in care. In its socio-legal function JES is an interest group of drug users. This group perceives its legal right to democratic involvement and joint planning as a part of its work.

JES als kritisches Gegenüber des Drogenhilfesystems

Self help, particularly that of drug users, who insist on their right to a life of dignity with drugs, is confronted with the resistance and resentment of professional helpers as always. Constructive approaches to enter into cooperative work with JES are not the rule, and can be found in drug and AIDS assistants who accept the situation, in particular. This principle does not change the fact that, as always, employees of the drug service systems, the medical and social areas, who find access to the area through a professional qualification, confront JES staff with more or less openly formulated scepticism. This originates not only in experiences and prejudices. JES' function as a critical opponent of this system also breaks through the interests of many service systems by securing their vested interests, makes people feel insecure and creates distance. As a critical observer of developments in the professional drug system, JES presumes that professionalism develops specific qualities. These can be found particularly in professionalism, professional specialisation, work motivated by employment and, not to forget, from the secured existence of those providing the service. These traits of professional work are not only represented as advantages. They are seen under different aspects, at the same time as their limits. They not only bring their own dynamic interests to the securing of position but also form an integral part of tendencies to orient themselves towards costs and methods. As an association and network of junkies, former drug users and people in OST, the current needs and interests of drug users are immediately accessible to us. JES can therefore act as an early warning system for current and new problems and indicate the future requirements for professional drug service early on. JES is also a critical opponent of the fact that professionals, under a qualitatively high standard of work, not only (mis-) understand the adherence to fixed working standards. By means of discussion, the professional service system receives important incentives to develop more results oriented offers compliant with needs. Following on from this, we assume that the service system is dependent on JES as a critical guide in the process of developing the drug service system. JES thus sees itself as a provider of incentives for the modernisation of existing professional approaches.

JES as a service provider and part of the drug service system

In its self-image, JES assumes that self-help and the professional rendering of services are based on very different things, start out with different conditions and aim at other goals. The special strength of JES lies in the special access to those seeking help and their problems developed by JES and attached to the competencies of those affected. Through the development and intensification of informal networks, new and qualitatively different potentials than those accessible by the professional drug service system can be achieved. Self-help manages to both activate those affected in a different way and to use, intensify and strengthen competencies and resources that have hardly been used or not used at all. The distinctive features of the JES work consist both in the developed organisational and networking forms that are almost or immediately established in the world in which drug users live. Finally, JES' work distinguishes itself by the combination of self-help approaches and acquired specialist consultancy. In a special way, it promotes innovative incentives and methodical imagination in the development of help and support. JES' work could be particularly attractive as a learning space full of ideas for professional areas. It follows that the personal work of those affected and professional specialist knowledge can be linked up to mutual advantage. JES thus understands its offers of help and support as more like a supplement to professional work and thus as an increase in the effectiveness of corresponding offers. In this function, JES has already proved to be a responsible, reliable, „profit generating“ partner of the care system. JES wants to stabilise and further develop these experiences.

OUR WAY OF WORKING IN THE NETWORK

We assume that “the“ JES way of working does not exist. Rather, every group must find out for itself the working method that „suits“ the needs, interests and goals of its members. Of course, individual JES groups can learn from each other in the process. However, our association is far from standardising work in the individual groups. We do not require any strict specifications to react individually to regional needs. Offers that are necessary to overcome the problems of individual members can thus be worked on in a better way. The necessary organisational form is set flexibly by each group in the process. Subsequently, with the appropriate self-image, there is a big difference between the working methods of the different JES groups. This difference is not only accepted because it is in line with the JES self-image of democracy. On the contrary: it is particularly valued because it can become an important source of innovation.

We have a lot in common in our work

In spite of these differences, there are a series of binding common aspects in our working method. An important common aspect is, that the groups in the JES Bundesverband are connected by common content and goals in the areas of drugs, health and social policy as well as through a common self-image. This finds expression in the common principle „For a life of human dignity with drugs“ which is recognised and represented by all groups. A further common aspect of JES work: it is not primarily motivated with a view to paid employment. Instead, it concerns a voluntary commitment of work by drug users for drug users carried out by JES members.

Linking up of qualified specialist consultancy and self-help

JES' work goes beyond private solidarity with family members and friends, for example, as here, qualitatively high value specialist advice and an exchange of experiences as well as working on problems with those affected can be linked to each other. Practical experience also shows that these aspects of JES' work do not go hand in hand, rather, there is a close correlation. A specific (self-organised) qualification and of self-help, as well as making it professional, also intensifies possibilities and the readiness for mutual help and for the solidarity of members amongst each other. This linking up provides JES' work with a unique and essential quality which also differentiates it from the possibilities of a professional system. Therefore, one of the most important concerns of the network's work is these two aspects of JES' work - competence of those affected and solidarity of those affected - to be stabilised and further developed systematically and in a targeted manner at all levels.

Self chosen goals and group relationships instead of therapeutic supervision and paternalism

JES works at all levels for responsibility for oneself, independence and sovereignty of drug users. The principles of "Self chosen goals instead of ideological paternalism" and "Self chosen work and group relationships instead of external organisation" are therefore guiding principles in our work. They are not only an integral part of JES work at all levels of the network but also in the relationship between JES and the professional system. We are aware that we can reach our limits as a self-help group when overcoming problems within the group or those that are specific to the field. It would be irresponsible and negligent to exceed these limits. We therefore not only work at recognising our own capabilities on time in our network (and acknowledging them) and on realising from what point professional help cannot be avoided. Rather, we also make an effort to develop the required cooperation and transparency between self-help and professional systems as well as free access to the latter. However, the conditions for this approach are that JES has access to essential specialist knowledge. It is only through the qualification of self help groups that skills are formed to estimate our own possibilities realistically as well as working together in a cooperative manner and as partners of the professional system. As the JES Bundesverband, we consider the

development of appropriate training and offers of further training a huge responsibility.

JES' work wants to actively manage and plan

JES works actively at the planning of all levels of the network and against the creation of passiveness, against tendencies of calming down and excessive supervision by welfare authorities. We therefore do not see our commitment as a critical accompanying factor to the professional system and as issuing orders to state authorities based on the motto „You have to do this and that.“ Rather, we attempt, based on our own methods and possibilities to achieve specific goals and work on pending problems. With this basic understanding, we put self organisation before the issuing of care contracts and give voluntary commitment priority over paid standardised work.

Maintenance of democratic principles

We can only do justice to our role, if we maintain a critical – not to forget – self-critical stand towards established methods and procedures in our own network and question our own communication and working structures. We therefore make an effort to have a productive discussion and argumentation culture at all levels of our network. The way in which we behave towards each other will make it clear that the opinion of each individual is required and desired. We do not accept the claims of individuals to represent JES in bodies or in the (specialist) public without JES' permission. The highest principle of work in our network is therefore, to let all members, groups and regional associations participate actively through a systematic exchange of information. We place a high value on the transparency of decision processes.

THE LEVELS OF THE JES BUNDESVERBAND

JES' work takes place within the scope of a national network with different levels. Each of these levels has a specific organisational form with a focus on different activities and offers:

- Groups and individuals committed to the interests of drug users and partly of offering practical support and survival help on site in cities and communities;
- Regional groups and structures, in which individual groups have merged considering their geographical proximity to exchange experiences, to show solidarity and support to each other and to represent claims to have a say and make decisions concerning the drug service system and those politically responsible in their regions;
- The national level of the network, represented by the JES national board of directors. Experiences, problems and demands from different regions are brought together here and the national opinion formation process is implemented into socio-political developments. National actions, events, further training offers etc. are organised and claims to participation vis a vis the drug and socio-political specialist associations as well as politicians are represented offensively at the national level.

Our network structure is organised in such a way that the JES groups can work autonomously to a large extent. We consider it a big advantage that JES' work can be achieved directly without much bureaucracy. Starting with the respective given requirements, the groups not only structure their working methods very differently. They also aim at a different level of institutionalisation and each perceives very different functions.

On-site work

An often underestimated form of working together is the informal coming together of people, whose main focus is to commit themselves for each other and the needs of group members. The focal point of the work of these more internally oriented groups is forms of exchanging experiences and direct practical help in overcoming daily problems. However, many regional groups do not just orient their work towards the needs of group members, but also commit themselves to work for others. These groups, which also work outwardly, make an effort, for example, to explain things, for example through extensive public work as well as the preparation and execution of informational events and further training, to those affected, relatives and helpers. The aim here is not just to confront the possible consequences of illegal drug use preventively. At the same time, preventive clarification will work against prejudices and myths, against ignorance and irrational fears, so that the discrimination and exclusion of drug users is dissolved and offers of help are sought and accepted by them earlier on and more specifically. Through the political work and work in specialist bodies and working groups, these groups also make an effort to do justice to their claim. A few JES groups have succeeded in creating a more stable and more reliable institutional framework for their work. In addition to the commitment directed inwardly and outwardly, this enables competent and reliable consultancy and support to people seeking advice and help. These groups fill loopholes in the drug service systems with their offers, gather experiences of those affected, try out new forms of overcoming problems and create a basis for the modernisation of the traditional network of social care through their immediate, practical work. These JES groups are more likely to work in institutional structures in the form of promoted initiatives and projects and can depend on the commitment of paid staff members. These organisational forms stem from the experience that extensive JES work can only be done continuously, on time and at a qualitatively high level if the support for this commitment is secured materially. These forms of organising work do not contradict the aim of our association in any way, i.e. to develop JES' work primarily into a motivated and institutionalised offer of services in the area of employment. The more intensely institutionalised groups are also distinguished by the fact that their achievements are mainly based on the voluntary commitment of group members, that self-help and external help - even if with a different emphasis in each case - are connected to each other and the permanent employees in particular work as disseminators and organisers for drug users.

Work in the regional groups

The basic idea of our work at the level of regional groups is the merging of individual activities of groups, associations and initiatives distributed over a specific region. Particularly groups in rural areas that have to work at long distances from each other and for the so called individual fighters, both women and men, who have been standing up for the interest and rights of drug users for many years without support, the support and the exchange of experiences in a regional group is indispensable. Within the total structure of our network, the speaker of the regional JES groups („Schiene-Koordinator“ i.e. regional coordinator) is given a great deal of responsibility. This person is responsible for bringing together the regional problems, experiences and special aspects which link up and coordinate the individual groups on location. The individual groups can indicate their need for support to this person and appropriate mutual help will be organised etc. The speaker also has a key role with respect to communication at a national level. He/she gathers information on the developments in the region and informs the national bodies of our network. He/she must ensure that information, resolutions and common actions are communicated at a national level through the regional groups up to the individual local groups. Only when information flows in both directions, does the work of our JES network reach the needs of those affected and we can avoid individual groups being isolated, having to fend for themselves and/or working without noticing and acknowledging each other.


Die bundesweite Arbeit des JES-Netzwerks

The national work is carried out by the board of directors of the JES Bundesverband. The JES national board of directors is also the political mouthpiece of our network and is thus primarily our representative to the public, at conferences and national events. A further highlight is the preparation, execution, management and documentation of the JES series of seminars. Within the scope of the regularly held directors' meetings, the different wishes, needs and concerns from the regions of our network are put together and discussed and national events are prepared and processed afterwards. The work of the national association not only represents JES' political goals and demands towards the public, other nationally functioning organisations and politicians. The JES Bundesverband also works in political decision making bodies and national

expert groups working with drugs to include the interests of junkies, former drug users and people in OST in these areas. International cooperation and work together with user networks and connected to this, the transfer of knowledge and experiences from drug self-help work is also a part of the work of the representative of the national association. Moreover, we must promote the development of new groups and support the networking of already existing groups. The national board of directors merges the regional experiences with which our network's approach to work can be further developed as a concept. The national board of directors plans and organises national programmes and ensures that important information reaches all regional groups, on site groups and individual JES members. Our magazine - DROGENKURIER - is essential for this work. It introduces information on political changes and medical developments both on an international and national level as well as reports and experiences from individual groups and regions. A highlight of the work of the board of directors in the JES national association is the acquisition and proper utilisation of finances. In view of the claims made on our work as a drug self-help organisation, most of the funds have to be put in the self-organised education and further training of JES members and thus flow into meetings and workshops of the network. The funds also offer an opportunity of developing and producing our own media such as brochures, flyers, videos, documentation and posters. These media support the group within the scope of prevention, health promotion, de-mystification and clarification.

OUR POLITICAL DEMANDS

To implement our goals and partial goals with respect to the re-structuring of German drug policy, JES carries out extensive work in drug policy on site in cities and communities, in the individual regions and on the national level. This includes public relation with which large parts of the population are enlightened on the connection between drug use and drug problems in a realistic manner. We must create awareness in society on what undignified conditions and destructive processes drug users are presently confronted with, how they come about and with what pragmatic steps these connected effects can be eliminated.

-  Immediate release from prison of HIV infected people suffering from AIDS, other seriously ill people and drug users exclusively charged for reasons of drug use without having done any damage to external legal property or interests.

Criminal law represents the hardest means of state social control, instead of – as in other areas – using it as the last possible means, it is often used first as a solution to the „drug problem“. German drug policy hereby criminalises the drug user and promotes an immense amount of drug procurement criminality. From the point of view of the JES Bundesverband, a prohibitionist political approach banning illegal drugs promotes a fully uncontrollable black market. In addition to this, prohibition and repression miss their target of reducing drug use. JES therefore supports an ideology free and scientifically based new beginning. At the centre is a legalisation of all drugs, a government regulation for sale and a strengthening of drug users and youth protection through licensed special shops, for example. JES agrees with many academic specialists and practitioners that the chances that more problems can be solved with an alternative drug policy than new problems created, is reason enough to stand up for a fundamental shift in drug policy in Germany.

This must be characterised by:

- The renunciation of paradigms of abstinence and prohibition.
- The end of repressive and undignified persecution of drug possession, drug use and drug users.
- The creation of framework conditions designed not against, but for people.

Necessary partial steps for this purpose are:

- The replacement of the narcotic law by a set of regulations for dealing with psychoactive substances without parts pertaining to criminal law
- The establishment of all encompassing offers for diamorphine supported substitution treatment that meets all needs
- The expansion of OST possibilities by permitting all means suitable for this purpose (e.g. Slow release oral morphine) including injectable solutions
- The maintenance and intensification of the solidarity principle as well as a clear rejection of the privatisation of health risks
- The creation of framework conditions enabling a mature handling of drugs (introducing the topic „drug“ in schools)

- Establishing extensive work and employment projects for re-introducing drug users and people in OST into society
- The initiation of and support for self help organisations and self support
- Participation of organisations of drug users as full and equal discussion partners in all matters concerning drug policy.
- Immediate release from prison of HIV infected people suffering from AIDS, other seriously ill people and drug users exclusively charged for reasons of drug use without having done any damage to external legal property or interests.

FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS AND PROBLEMS

In spite of the great commitment of individual members, it would not be correct, to describe JES' work as a continuously growing national network. Rather, JES has experienced leaps in growth in the past years, phases of positive development and stabilisation as much as stagnation, failure and instability. The principle of „stronger, higher, faster“ usually aimed at in society does not apply to the development of the JES Bundesverband and its national network structures. The reasons for this vary, and are not only to be found in the efforts and motivation of individual members but also in the social framework conditions of our work.



Rejection of paradigms of abstinence and prohibition

Underestimation of our work in society

Working in the network is mostly unpaid voluntary commitment by JES members, not usually bound to institutions. This is unfortunately not respected in our society by paying for it. As with similarly placed work, which is not done within the scope of gainful employment (e.g. raising children, housework, helping in the neighbourhood), JES work is also subject to underestimation in society. In our society, which likes to be „blinded“ by data evaluated monetarily (in terms of money), the value of self-help remains hidden, although the usefulness of JES' work is not only to be found in its high ideals, the mutual support, exchange of experiences, well being and social protection for members in the group. The public relation of JES groups, the critical appraisal of the drug service system, the active offer of support and help within the framework of prevention and promotion of the health of and for drug users and not least, the work on decision making in drug and social policy in the states and communities are an indispensable contribution to the development of the community.

The difficult process of development and stabilisation of on-site work

As the JES Bundesverband, we are sometimes confronted with the fact that groups already fail while they are being created. Some obstacles will probably always accompany our work, others, on the other hand could definitely be eliminated. We often experience a large gap between the willingness of illegal drug users and their actual commitment in JES' work. There are many reasons for this:

- The obstacles in implementing the interest in JES work into actual commitment are a result of the difficulties faced by the women and men in their respective life conditions. Life as a junkie with pressure to acquire and the pressure of being persecuted, leaves little time and energy for reliable and continuous work. This actually also becomes a coming out for those who have hidden their drug use up to that point and could thus be socially integrated or re-integrated. Well founded fears of being exposed to stigmatisation through commitment to JES result in some drug users deciding against our network. Finally, commitment to JES is also opposed to the efforts of individual

drug users to separate themselves from scene oriented life conditions and/or the drug specific part of their biographies.

- In spite of the achievements that our network has brought to prevention and promotion of health for drug users in the past years, our self conscious commitment for a “life in human dignity with drugs“ is, as always, misunderstood. We are stigmatised as “those who cannot learn“ and “those who make excessive demands.“ In this type of social environment there are hardly any helpful incentives to motivate people to work for JES. Rather, it requires a great deal of self confidence for individuals to commit themselves to our drug self help programme. In this way, the access thresholds to our work for those interested are often insurmountable.

The status of full time work in our network

Full time work and drug self help are not mutually exclusive. After years of struggle against a lot of resistance, we have succeeded in having full time workers in our network too. The experiences of the past years have also shown that securing drug self help programmes through full time work done is linked to an increase in continuity and intensity. It is only then that, in many cases, we can work on the same level as the professional system. Therefore, it goes without saying that for JES, in the promotional models for the national association, as well as for on site groups, the necessary personnel costs must be taken into account. Full time work in drug self help programmes also contributes considerably to the process of re-integration into professional and social relationships.



On the difficulty of making compromises

Compromises often have to be made for public financing institutions to enable the installation of a self help project to advise and guide drug users. In this type of system, several customers often turn up, who also ask for certain conditions to be met for the funds to be granted, which are not always in accordance with the self-image of the JES national association. We use the exchange and the togetherness in the JES Bundesverband to consciously discuss these contradictions, to think about compromises we have made, to check them for their proportionality and if necessary to correct them. We know that once a consensus has been reached it can not always be valid forever since not only the basic conditions of our work but also we ourselves continuously change. One of the main criteria for the evaluation of compromises ought to be, to what extent our claims are actually reflected in reality or to what extent will and reality diverge. To critically examine compromises, an environment in which the courage for honesty and self criticism have a chance is decisive. However, we do not shy away from drawing the required consequences if the principles of drug policy and working methods of individual groups do not go hand in hand with those of the JES Network.

JES between radical opposition and an alliance ready to make compromises

The discussions in our network have shown that different interests and ideals coincide here, that cannot always be (easily) linked to each other. Particularly in the founding phase of the JES network as well as at the beginning of the nineties, JES appeared as the „radical opposition“ due to its demands and objectives at the time, which for many seemed illusory and unreasonable. JES, as a then new form of representing interests of drug users, felt good in this role on many counts – after all, there were no public funds to lose and no alliances that could break. Looking back, this type of public representation was right and important at that time. The situation of drug users, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS was such, that the views and opinions of many had to be scandalised, and that's what JES did. Demands, that were already right and obligatory for JES at that time, but were not included in any discussions (e.g. handing out heroin, safer injection rooms, substitution) have now been partly or fully implemented. Today we must secure the progress we have achieved and work on further improvements.

To this end, the view emanated over the years that JES did not have the necessary clout without partnerships with allies in drug and social policy, to introduce and enforce necessary demands. Today we have found a middle path we can tread. Public money must be used in such a way that areas of work are developed and offers optimised. At the same time it is essential to continue to point out wrongdoings and to promote a drug policy that respects human dignity and to thus articulate the demands of drug using people. On the whole, we see ourselves as an independent national association, capable of and willing to form alliances. We do not rule out the critical observation of the drug service system and possible partnerships with this system. As a network of drug users, former drug users and people in OST we have gone through many changes in the past two decades and have shown a high degree of flexibility. As in the past, in the future we will always confront ourselves with new challenges as the JES Bundesverband and will find our place in the drug service system under continuously changing framework conditions.

Our ideals, convictions and objectives, as we have presented them here, will continue to apply in this process.