

Reader's Guide to THIS IS OHIO

From author Jack Shuler:

Thank you for reading *This is Ohio*. I hope that it provoked as many questions for you as reporting and writing it did for me. Every project I work on begins with a question--and generally as I get deeper into it, I have many more. I started reporting this story because I wanted to know why so many people were dying of unintentional overdoses in Ohio and in the United States. In the end, I feel much closer to solutions as I learned from people who are on the ground getting their hands dirty and saving lives.

I would like to point one thing out about the book's organization. Yes, it moves chronologically but it also moves from my own lack of knowledge about harm reduction as an approach to substance use disorder, as opposed to abstinence. I was, admittedly, ignorant. So I began the first few chapters in a place that was familiar to me and moved to one that was less so. Over the course of that journey, I learned that in order to make change, we must be open to transformation.

- What does it mean to keep showing up?
- How widespread -- and personal -- is the overdose crisis?
- What is person-first language? How does it change our perception?
- How does awareness change our discourse?
- How does the stigma associated with drug use endanger those who use drugs?
- How does this stigma keep them in the cycle of use and abuse?

Prologue: The Corner

- Lunch and harm-reduction kits: How does this approach at the Corner reduce stigma?
- What are the problems with this approach? How are they handled?
- How does community trauma intersect with recovery?
- How do multiple crises (housing, health care, economics) intersect with the overdose crisis?
- How much of the overdose crisis goes unseen?

Part 1: The Heart of it All

Chapter 1: Rusted Belts and Think Tanks

- How does our view of "the other" make us willing or unwilling to help?
- How does a single story affect our perception of the whole person?
- What do unemployment numbers tell us? And what don't they tell us?
- Allen called poverty the "big invisible." What do you think of that statement?

Chapter 2: The Calvary's Not Coming

- How did you first hear about the overdose crisis in Ohio?
- What responsibility do drug companies have -- or did they have -- in this crisis?
- How does the act of "putting out fires" affect the outcome of this crisis?
- How does addiction affect the brain?
- How has our understanding of the effect of addiction on the brain changed over time?
- How does cultural dislocation or integration interact with addiction dynamics?
- As Alex Vitale writes, "There is no way to reduce the widespread use of drugs without dealing with profound economic inequality and a growing sense of helplessness." What do you think about this statement?
- Trauma and resiliency are often related -- how do they interact?

3) Hope Shot

- How does our prison system treat different groups of people?
- How does incarceration institutionalize poverty and racism?
- To quote Eric Lee, what is a "Hope Shot" and how does it help people who use drugs find another way out?
- What is your opinion of -- or your experience with -- 12-step programs?
- How do drug-related felony convictions affect people well after their sentence has been served?
- How can a community help people who use drugs in ways that 12-step programs or traditional recovery systems can't?

4) Semicolons

- Are we dealing with an addiction crisis or an overdose crisis?
- How does this crisis affect those who are close to the person using drugs? How does it affect the larger community?

Part 2: Movement

5) Swimming Upstream

- Why is it important for those affected by a cause to be included and "at the table"?
- How does the Newark Think Tank on Poverty support and develop this approach?
- What is the "dominant narrative" surrounding poverty? Drug use? Relationships?
- How does the Think Tank approach the "dominant narrative" surrounding these topics?

6) Systems of Care

- How is the Think Tank a system of care?
- How are the communities that Eric Lee participates in also systems of care?
- How can small setbacks derail recovery?
- How does resiliency intersect and interact with addiction?
- How does the overdose crisis intersect with social services?

7) None of Us are Bad People

- How does substance abuse affect those who use drugs as well as their families and friends?
- How are communities affected by drug use, writ large?
- How do charges of drug induced homicides affect drug use?
- How do laws surrounding drugs affect drug use?
- How do drug-related felonies affect future careers?

8) The Churn

- What does drug addiction look like in your community?
- What are the causes of the addiction crisis or the overdose crisis?
- How can communities answer this crisis?
- What outreach efforts are working? Why?

9) Any Positive Change

- Why are people who use drugs hesitant to speak up in public?
- Why are many communities opposed to needle exchange programs?
- Why do needles exchange programs lower overdose rates?

10) The Foot of the Mountain

- What hurdles must drug users go through on the way to recovery?
- How do different courts handle drug charges? Are some processes more effective than others?

11) The Person Next to You

- How can communities help answer the overdose crisis?
- What is harm reduction?
- How is the overdose crisis related to human rights?
- Why are many communities hesitant to engage in harm reduction programs?

12) Punk Rock Harm Reduction

- How does a tainted supply of drugs affect the overdose crisis?
- How have various communities responded to the tainted supply of drugs?
- How could they respond more effectively?

13) Rainbows and Unicorns

- How are drug users characterized in the midst of crises like the overdose crisis and the AIDS epidemic?
- How have needle syringe service programs lowered the transmission of diseases?

Part 3: Nothing About Us Without Us

- How can rebuilding communities, especially those communities that have been traumatized, address the overdose crisis?
- Why is it important to include those affected by a crisis in the solutions surrounding the crisis?

14) Beyond Rat Park

- How is addiction related to systems that are traumatizing?
- How is grief "feral energy"? Do you agree or disagree with this characterization?

15) Moments of Recognition

- How do communities view homelessness?
- How does this differ from or match the view of the unhoused, themselves?
- What challenges to people without homes face?
- How are these challenges answered?

16) Corners

- Why is it important for those who use - or have used - drugs to share their story?
- How does the judicial system address drug offenses?
- How does our current judicial system support drug offenders?

17) "Every Overdose is a Policy Failure"

- How is the overdose crisis in Vancouver similar to and different from the crisis in the US?
- How do perspectives vary both inside and outside the community of people who use drugs?
- How is overdose a public health failure?

18) Worth Our Keep

- How are community groups working together to address the overdose crisis?
- How are courts addressing the issues surrounding the marketing of pharmaceuticals?
- How does this crisis expose the gaps already existing in our social safety nets?

Postscript

- What do you think of the ways in which this community is addressing the overdose crisis?
- How could it be done better?
- How is your community addressing addiction and overdoses?

Some Resources

- To learn more about person-first language: <https://www.changingthenarrative.news>
- CDC data on overdose deaths: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm
- Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users: <https://vandureplace.wordpress.com/>
- A Brief History of the War on Drugs: <https://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/brief-history-drug-war>
- A research-based approach to drug education for young people called Safety First: <https://www.drugpolicy.org/resources/drug-education-resources>
- How to dismantle the drug war: <https://www.drugpolicy.org/resource/dismantling-federal-drug-war-comprehensive-drug-decriminalization-framework-drug-policy>
- Some principles of Harm Reduction: <https://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>
- Harm Reduction Ohio: <https://www.harmreductionohio.org/>