

Jude Therese Byrne 07/08/1957 – 05/03/2021

CAHMA and The Connection would like to pay tribute to the life and achievements of our treasured friend and colleague, Jude, who sadly passed away on Friday 3rd of March after a brief illness.

Jude was truly one of the pioneers of harm reduction in people who use drugs. Back in the 1980s, when the Australian Government, with surprising foresight, realised that reducing the incidence of AIDS in Australia meant consulting with affected communities, Jude was there, advocating on behalf of people who inject drugs, a demographic that governments and bureaucrats had always previously chosen to ignore. When the first needle exchange opened in Canberra in 1986, Jude was there as a voluntary outreach worker offering advice and support.. Jude was involved with establishing peer-based drug user groups locally (ACT IV League), nationally (AIVL), and internationally (The International Network of People who Use Drugs or INPUD), and negotiating with politicians, bureaucrats and researchers to get money to fund their activities. CAHMA, the new iteration of ACTIV, exists in large part to Jude's work in securing funding and advocating for the human rights of our community.

Jude has been an inspiration and a mentor for so many of us who work in the peer based harm reduction space. She has been a passionate advocate for our right to live as we wish without stigma and judgement, and the right to consume whatever chemicals we wish without being arrested, beaten up and sent to jail. Jude fiercely opposed discrimination of all types in both her professional and her personal life and she always stood up against oppression, no matter the personal cost to herself.

Over the past few days, we have been very moved to see tributes to Jude flooding in from around the world and the many people from around the world that joined the streaming of her beautiful and soulful funeral. One of Jude's greatest achievements was her involvement in the establishment of INPUD, a truly international drug user movement.

It is during sickness and illness that people who use drugs really see the sharp end of prohibitionist discrimination. In Jude's case it was around access to pain medication. After spending her lifetime building and supporting drug user organisations, CAHMA and AIVL were proud to be able to swing into action and ensure that Jude did not face discrimination and had sufficient pain relief to ensure her human rights when she became seriously ill. Here we must thank the excellent staff of the Calvary Hospital Palliative Care Unit, who's understanding and compassion made a previously impossible obstacle a simple conversation. Thank you for ensuring Jude's human rights.

Sadly, we still see drug users demonised by authorities, the media and society at large in every country throughout the world. Jude didn't live to see peace break out in the International War on People Who Use Drugs. She is no longer here to fight for us so we must look to her for inspiration and live her example and continue to fight for the human rights of people who use drugs. Thank you for all of your courageous and brave work Jude. We promise to take the fight on from here until all of our people are free from discrimination, stigma, poverty and repression.

Vale Jude Byrne. CAHMA and The Connection salute you.