



SUBJECT: DRUG USE AND DEPENDENCY

Statement of position

The Salvation Army advocates a drug-free lifestyle¹ at the core of the wellbeing and health of all people. The Salvation Army recognises the damage caused by drug use, to individuals, families and communities. In recognition of these risks, Salvation Army soldiers commit to a life free from harmful and mind-altering drugs, whilst refusing to judge or condemn those who use drugs or struggle with dependence.

Some people stigmatise drug use, treating the issue as one of reckless decision-making and self-destructive behaviour. However, The Salvation Army recognises that personal circumstances and background influence drug-using behaviour and the likelihood of dependency. Consequently, The Salvation Army offers compassion rather than condemnation to those affected by drug use. It offers emotional, therapeutic and practical interventions to people negatively impacted by the use of drugs.

Background and context

People use a wide range of mind-altering drugs, including sedatives, stimulants and hallucinogens. Drugs are used for various reasons and have a range of effects and risks.

Some argue that it is possible to use drugs in a safe and acceptable way, but there is always the potential to create harm or dependency. Intoxication increases the risk of accidental injury and reduced inhibitions can lead to other risky behaviour. Drug use may lead to violence, injury to physical or mental health, poisoning or death. It is also often implicated in human trafficking and exploitation.

Long-term or heavy drug use can result in dependence or in a wide variety of physical and mental disorders. Once established, drug dependency creates a cycle of increasing deprivation and desperation. This may include job loss, family breakdown, social isolation and homelessness. Cravings, withdrawal and the need for larger quantities can quickly lead to financial ruin and push individuals towards acquisitive crime or prostitution.

There are strong associations between drug use and previous trauma. Adverse childhood experiences - such as parental mental illness or separation, domestic violence, abuse or neglect - have a profound effect on brain development and future wellbeing.² This includes a much greater likelihood of using drugs.³ Consequently, The Salvation Army seeks to address these underlying factors in our work across various sections of society.

Grounds for the position

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God and have unique and intrinsic value.⁴ Accordingly, The Salvation Army promotes the welfare of the body, mind and spirit.⁵ The Salvation Army's position on drug use aligns with its position on alcohol and our soldier members demonstrate a drug and alcohol-free lifestyle as a positive life choice.⁶

Societies often stigmatise and exclude certain groups. In first century Palestine, these groups included tax collectors,⁷ people with leprosy⁸ and women accused of adultery.⁹ Today, people who use drugs are often treated in a similar way. This Salvation Army position is inspired by the example of Jesus as shown in the New Testament, who acted with compassion and grace to reconnect people to their community.

The effects of intoxication, such as impaired decision-making and reduced inhibitions, are highlighted in the Bible.¹⁰ In the context of discipleship these may lead to other behaviours that are not Christlike. Being under the influence of psychoactive drugs is often harmful both to self and to others, and drug dependency traps people in an existence of difficulty and distress whereas it is God's desire for them to know joy, peace and freedom from oppression.¹¹

Practical responses

- Identifying with the call of Jesus to love our neighbour,¹² The Salvation Army UKI commits to providing whole-person care for individuals and families affected by drug use.¹³ This support is provided through community-based drug services, floating support and residential rehabilitation, delivered within a trauma-informed framework and focused on delivering excellent care.
- The Salvation Army UKI provides supported accommodation in towns and cities across the UK and the Republic of Ireland and is committed to providing addiction support in these settings. These programmes embrace harm reduction as an essential and pragmatic starting point but consider abstinence to be the ultimate goal.
- In Salvation Army UKI centres and corps, opportunities will be given for people to explore their faith beliefs, recognising that, for some, spirituality is an important part of the recovery journey. This is an excellent way for Salvationists to get involved, through the creation of supportive small groups, just-looking courses, such as Alpha, and accessible models of church, such as Core Recovery.¹⁴
- The Salvation Army UKI is well-positioned to break the cycle of multi-generational drug use and will use its work with children, individuals and families across different sectors of society to tackle the root causes of drug use and dependency. With over 600 faith communities across the UK and Republic of Ireland, there is a unique opportunity for The Salvation Army to provide wrap-around care and to intervene positively in the lives of people experiencing addiction. The therapeutic effect of helping people to feel safe, included and valued should not be underestimated.
- There is work to do in reducing and combating stigma. Salvationists can make a difference by learning more about the causes of drug use, by being careful with use of language and by challenging unhelpful attitudes within society.

- The Salvation Army UKI is concerned about the combination of funding cuts and short-term contracts that result in overstretched services, loss of continuity of care and a lack of long-term planning. It will advocate on behalf of those affected, calling for a compassionate response without stigma, for more resources and for the provision of treatment that is easier to access, more flexible, more holistic and more consistent across the UK and Republic of Ireland.

¹ In this statement we will use the term ‘drugs’ to refer to harmful substances that have a mind-altering affect. This includes both illegal drugs and legal medication that has a harmful effect when misused. We affirm the use of prescribed drugs to treat medical problems, such as pain or mental illness.

² There is a strong body of evidence showing the association of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and difficulties later in life, including drug and alcohol dependency. The original ACE study was conducted by Dr Vincent Felitti in California. This has been replicated internationally in various settings, including the 2016 study by Kathryn Ashton for Public Health Wales.

Felitti, Vincent et al. ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences’, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 1998.

Ashton, Kathryn et al. ‘Adverse childhood experiences and their association with health-harming behaviours and mental wellbeing in the Welsh adult population’, *The Lancet*, 2016.

³ <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/aces-and-their-impact-on-health-harming-behaviours-in-the-welsh-adult-population-pdf/>.

⁴ ‘Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:26 and 27).

⁵ ‘Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own...’ (1 Corinthians 6:19).

⁶ Salvation Army soldiers sign a Soldier’s Covenant, including The Salvation Army’s 11 doctrines (statements of faith) and 10 lifestyle statements. These include the following commitment to abstinence: “I will abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult, and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.”

⁷ ‘Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” But

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:1-10).

⁸ 'While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table' (Matthew 26:6 and 7).

'Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him - and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:11-19).

⁹ 'At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:2-11).

¹⁰ Biblical warnings regarding excess and intoxication: 'Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine' (Proverbs 23:29-30).

'Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, pipes and tambourines and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of his hands' (Isaiah 5:11 and 12).

'Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy' (Romans 13:13).

'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...' (Ephesians 5:18).

'For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you' (1 Peter 4:3 and 4).

¹¹ ““Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.’ (Isaiah 58:3-9).

¹² ‘Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”’ (Matthew 22:37-39).

‘But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”’ (Luke 10:29-37).

¹³ The Salvation Army also provides similar support for other addictions, including alcohol and gambling.

¹⁴ Core Recovery is a Salvation Army model of church in the UK and Republic of Ireland designed for people in recovery - with a focus on being accessible and welcoming to all. The aim is to support people in their individual journey of recovery and their personal journey of faith while providing appropriate pastoral support. Core Recovery is active in a growing number of corps and Lifehouses across the UK.

All Bible quotations are taken from the *New International Version* 2011 (UK) edition.