



# Zendo Project Year End Review: 2015

SARA GAEL



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The Zendo Project, started in 2012, is a Psychedelic Harm Reduction community outreach program which provides tranquil spaces at events with trained volunteers to help those having a difficult psychedelic experience to help transform those experiences into one that can offer a valuable learning opportunity and potentially even healing and growth.

It is our mission to:

- 1) Provide a supportive space for Guests undergoing difficult psychedelic experiences or other psychological emergencies in order to help turn those experiences into opportunities for learning and personal growth, and to reduce the number of drug-related psychiatric hospitalizations;
- 2) Create an environment where volunteers can work alongside one another to improve their harm reduction skills and receive training and feedback; and
- 3) Demonstrate that safe, productive psychedelic experiences are possible without the need for law enforcement-based policies.

2015 was a huge year of growth for the Zendo Project. We expanded our services to additional festivals, trained new volunteers, and continued to provide harm reduction education to the public. We raised \$64,000 through a successful Indiegogo campaign, which made it possible for us to invest in two new structures. These structures will be utilized for harm reduction services for years to come.

Public trainings were held at each event to provide education on how to work with challenging psychedelic experiences and to create a platform for honest and responsible conversations about substance use. Our trainings provide individuals with helpful tools and techniques for addressing someone having a difficult psychedelic journey.

## EVENTS

Staff and volunteers provided psychedelic harm reduction services at the following events in the US and abroad:

### Envision Festival, Costa Rica

In February, The Zendo Project provided psychedelic harm reduction services at Envision festival in Uvita, Costa Rica, where



*From left: Inside the cardboard Zendo at Burning Man; building the cardboard Zendo; volunteer Bryce Montgomery at Symbiosis Gathering, Zendo volunteer training at Lightning in a Bottle; Zendo volunteer training skit at Burning Man; and Zendo volunteer training group at Burning Man (all images 2015).*

we were able to assist 83 guests having a difficult experience, psychedelic-related or otherwise. Volunteers worked closely with RGX medical and security staff to help reduce the number of hospitalizations and arrests.

**Afrika Burn, Tankwa Karoo, South Afrika**

The Zendo Project helped develop the Sanctuary space at Afrika Burn, the world’s largest regional Burning Man event. The Zendo has been partnering with Afrika Burn since 2013 to help provide assistance to attendees in need of support.

**Lightning in a Bottle, Bradley, California**

Zendo staff and volunteers worked alongside RGX Medical, LIB Rangers, and High Rock Security to support attendees at Lightning in a Bottle. We were able to assist 62 individuals during the event.

**Denver Cannabis Cup, Denver, Colorado**

The Zendo Project was invited to provide services at the Denver Cannabis Cup, the first Cannabis Cup held since legalization in Colorado. Volunteers created a safe space for disoriented guests during the event.

**Burning Man, Black Rock City, Nevada**

The Zendo Project offered services at Burning Man in Black Rock City, Nevada. During the event, 170 volunteers contributed a combined 1,700 hours to the project and were able to assist 161 guests going through difficult or overwhelming experiences, psychedelic-related or otherwise. MAPS staff and volunteers organized a four hour harm reduction training, open to the Burning Man community. Now with two locations across the playa from each other, the two Zendo’s successfully provided peer-to-peer counseling, a safe space to rest, water, and electrolytes to Burning Man’s approximately 70,000 attendees.

**Symbiosis Gathering, Oakdale, California**

Working alongside RockMed, Zendo volunteers provided compassionate care to 124 guests at Symbiosis gathering. This was the Zendo Project’s first year partnering with Symbiosis and we look forward to collaborating in the future.

**Youtopia, San Diego, California**

21 Zendo Volunteers provided compassionate care to 40 guests at Youtopia, San Diego’s Regional Burn. This was the Zendo

Project's first year partnering with Youtopia and we look forward to supporting the event in future years.

### MOVING FORWARD

In 2016, the Zendo Project will expand psychedelic harm reduction services to additional events, train more volunteers, and continue to develop educational resources for the public. We look forward to another great year of providing safe spaces at events and festivals around the world.

We would like to express our gratitude to all of the people who helped make 2015 such a successful year for the Zendo Project, including volunteers, donors, and festival producers. Thank you for supporting these critical services as we help to

create an environment of safety for those who choose to use psychedelic substances. 🌱

*Sara Gael, M.A., has been involved with the Zendo Project since 2012. Since then she has helped coordinate harm reduction services at festivals all over the world including Burning Man, Afrika Burn, Envision Festival, and Lightning in a Bottle. Sara works as a psychotherapist in private practice and received her Master's in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology at Naropa University. She is an intern investigator in the Boulder, Colorado Phase II Clinical Trial of the Safety and Efficacy of MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy. She can be reached at saragael@maps.org.*



*"I think the Zendo Project is a wonderful resource on the playa and fills a much needed and underappreciated need. I found the work incredibly fulfilling and grounding. It is a unique and valuable experience to receive the experiences that are most difficult to share."—Zendo Volunteer*

### 4 Principles of Psychedelic Harm Reduction



#### Safe space

If someone is having a challenging experience try to move them into a comfortable, warm, and calm environment.



#### Talk through, not down

Without distracting from the experience, help the person connect with what they are feeling.



#### Sitting, not guiding

Be a calm meditative presence of acceptance, compassion, and caring. Promote feelings of trust and security. Let the person's unfolding experience be the guide.



#### Difficult is not bad

Challenging experiences can wind up being our most valuable, and may lead to learning and growth.