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Getting Sober: Life After Addiction in Zanzibar

A radio documentary by Christopher Connelly

In the last twenty years, the Eastern African islands Zanzibar have become a top destination for tourists. They come for the beautiful beaches, the food, the history and the architecture. But in the last two decades another economy has developed: the drug trade.

Capitalizing on the island's strategic location on routes between Asia, Africa and the Middle East, drug traffickers use the island as a transit point to get heroin from Asia to Europe. And with that trade, heroin addiction has become widespread. Mahmoud Moussa, who works in the health ministry's substance abuse division, says that the problem is so massive that there is an addict in just about every family. "There's no family in Zanzibar, particularly in Stone Town, not being touched by this problem substance abuse," says Moussa.

Government and society tried to find effective strategies to fight the epidemic of addiction, but the problem only grew. In the last few years, however, addicts have taken it upon themselves to help get clean. They set up a system of sober houses—part rehab, part support group—and are showing the community that addicts can not only recover, but that they might be the best option for battling addiction.

This documentary explores life in the sober house and the story of how sober houses are beginning to change the way Zanzibaris see addiction as a changeable condition.