

MANAS. From a mutual support group to artistic and holistic practices - on the road to a new service in the city of Lisbon

Joana Canêdo, Magda Ferreira, Ana Luisa Melo, Cláudia Dias, Teresa Melo, Larissa Lewandoski e Adriana Curado

Problem

The worsening of needs in the context of pandemic revealed bigger asymmetries and greater vulnerabilities. For example, women and girls, non-binary and queer people who use drugs and do sex work, from different ages, who experience homelessness, migrants and/or racialized, less qualified, unemployed, with children (single mothers) have seen their fundamental human rights denied. Part of these women are also impacted by the war on drugs, are living with HIV and have a greater probability of experiencing incarceration, aggressions or sexual abuse. From the need and aspiration of neutralizing violence and structural oppression, MANAS appeared as considering the gender issue in order to achieve efficient public policies and self-managed safer spaces.

Description

MANAS was born inside a peer-led initiative promoted by the first mobile drug consumption room in the city of Lisbon (PCVM), with the support of EuroNPUD and YouthRise. Starting with a documentary, the group scaled-up its activities to mutual empowerment, seeking self-expression and sharing experiences. The weekly meetings started in January 2021 in the cultural association - Sirigaita, at Intendente neighborhood (scenario of coexistence between drugs, sex work and tourism). In decades of discrimination against these women and non-binary people, strengthening the collective has generated solidarity and stronger responses to structural problems.

Scope of Action

- 1) Peer Support Group Among Women Surviving Violence (GAMEM)
- 2) Capacitation and training workshops
- 3) Artistic practices
- 4) Yoga and meditation
- 5) Sexual and reproductive health, linkage to care, harm reduction & other basic needs (clothing, food, hygiene).



Pictures from the weekly meetings: artistic practices and Fast Track Cities #zerodiscrimination

Moths	Nº Peer Support Talks	Topics	Artistic & holistic practices
June-August	11	War on drugs, sexual education, dreams, self-image, gender identity, sex work	22

Primary results & Lessons learned: on the importance of promoting participatory processes and diagnosis, fostering self-managed spaces

In six months, the group consolidated the construction of its identity, contributed to a participatory diagnosis and extended its performance to artistic practices, acquiring bodily awareness and reclaiming WUD and sex workers rights. We are no longer just a support group, as **MANAS takes shape in the hands of the 40 women and different activities. Constructing a peer-led safer space, open 24h, for and by women and non-binaries surviving violence is seen as a common goal by the participants.** At the weekly meetings, in a non-mixed space, women and non-binaries increased hours of mutual support, reducing competition among themselves, allowing stronger ties of sisterhood and solidarity, reinforcing the fight against stigma, sexism, male chauvinism, racism, serophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. The collective has now its own identity based also on advocacy common agendas: regulation of sex work, drugs legalization, enhancing access to sexual and reproductive, health and social rights, including the right to maternity, accordingly with the diagnosis of the needs and aspirations of the protagonists. **Reclaiming our rights as women who use drugs, through bottom-up initiatives and peer-led responses sensible to gender specificities should be granted as a first step to generate new specialized services in the city of Lisbon.**