

Peer-led mutual support groups as a comprehensive and affordable strategies to reduce inequalities

GAT

**GRUPO DE ATIVISTAS
EM TRATAMENTOS**

Membro da Coligação
Internacional Sida



*Lx Addictions 2022, 24th November 2022
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Context

Drug policy needs to acknowledge that relying on “narratives of deficit: prohibition, pathology, risk and trauma” (Chang 2020, building on Foucault 1981) do not always serve the best interest of drug users, namely of women using drugs.

Ineffective decriminalization policy addressing gender inequalities.

Lack of grassroots mobilization with women experiencing social exclusion.

“Right to the city”.

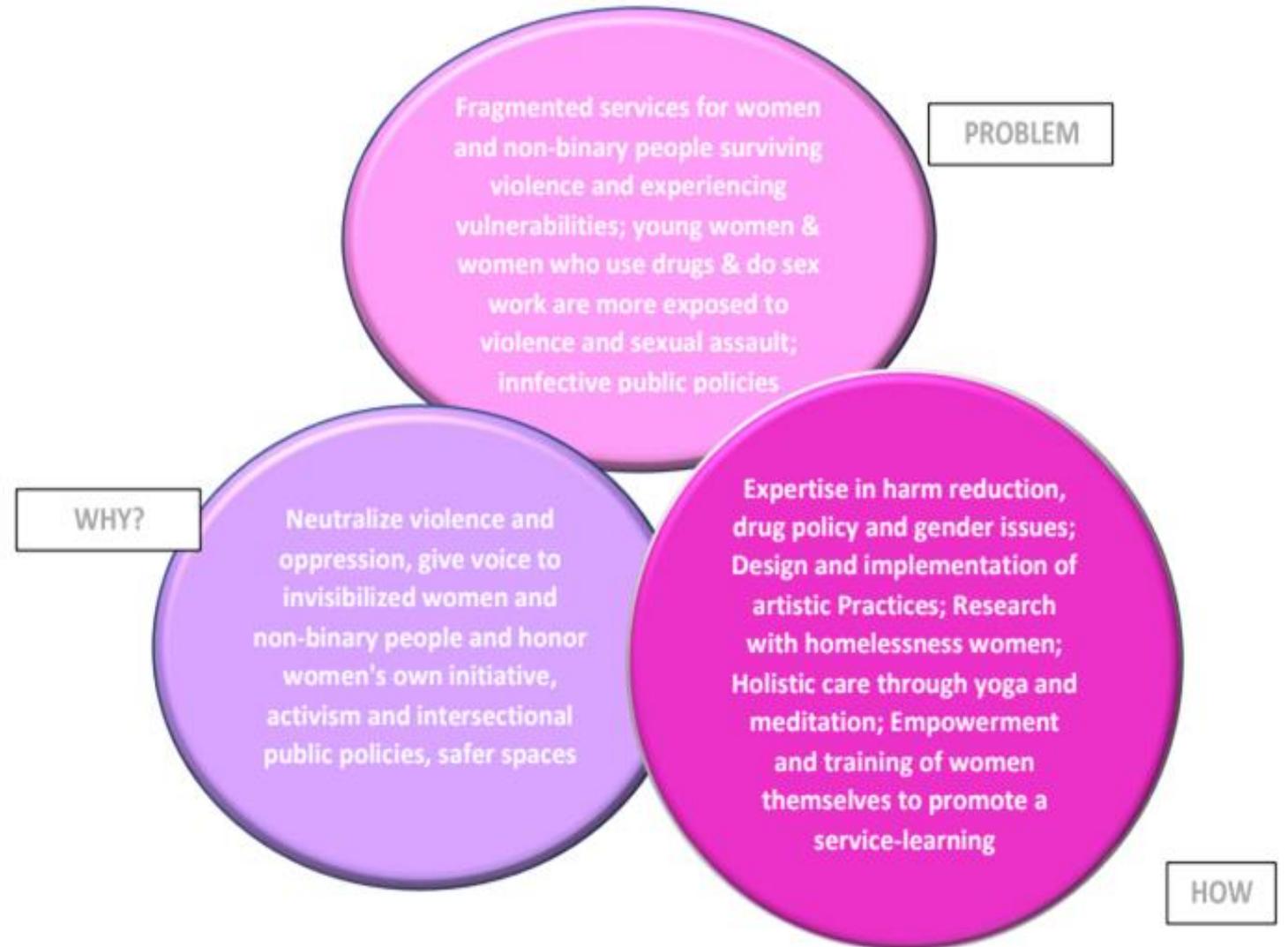
Bottom-up approaches to drug policy

Who we are?

MANAS (*sisters*) is a peer led project by women and non-binary people experiencing multiple vulnerabilities based on mutual support, artistic and well being practices, and an ongoing construction of a safer space for and by vulnerable women using drugs and doing sex work.

Since the launch of the documentary "[6 Women, 1 Seed](#)" directed by Larissa Lewandoski we have become a group of women using drugs, migrants, sex workers, homeless women and non-binary people, some of us living with HIV, who meet weekly in a cultural association, Sirigaita, scenario of coexistence among drugs, sex work and tourism at the heart of Lisbon (Anjos neighborhood).

Collaborative and participatory process of co-creation, open to the proposals of all women using drugs and doing sex work who wish to participate.



How to organize a social movement?

1st year (Nov 2020-Dec 2021)

"Back and forth feedback" - work on the collective identity, fulfilling gaps and organize a social movement

Community and neighborhood engagement - overcoming stigma barriers and occupy public space

Include artistic practices in the meetings

Permanent mobilization of those interested in participating

Small Grants project (YouthRise, EuroNPUD)

2nd year (Jan 2021 - Nov 2022)

Try and error - adjust and readjustment of activities taken apart from mutual support moments

Small Grants INPUD well being grant

Looking for funding, action-research opportunities (CEDAW, EuroNPUD)

Consolidate partnerships at local level (more resources)

Stronger mobilization; influence other local HR services to adopt specific programs for women using drugs and doing sex work

3rd year (Nov 2022- Nov 2023)

BIP ZIP: Local partnership for development - "Intendente Insurgente"

Safer space (more permanent) at Largo Residências (arts & crafts community inclusion program)

Continuity of the mutual support group at thursdays

Permanent evaluation of new activities

Our affordable and comprehensive principles

a) *Do it ourselves*

a) *Implementing ourselves*

a) *Monitoring and evaluating ourselves*

a) *Advocate ourselves*

a) *Community care: linking ourselves to gendered health services and social services*



From a mutual support group to artistic practices

Goals

- Provide an organic self-safer space based on the needs and desires of participants
- Foster #Narcofeminist #femdrug movement in Portugal;
- Exchange survival experiences among participants and enhance peer support;
- Address gender based violence, drug policy reform and harm reduction on drug use and sex work;
- Take care of each other (community care & self-care);
- Foster capacitation in advocacy on the rights of women who use drugs and do sex work: right to housing, right to maternities; right to health (sexual and reproductive);
- Action-research and, audiovisual testimonies.
- Fanzines.

[TRAILER: MANAS](#)

Scope of Action

1) Peer Support Group Among Women Surviving Violence

(GAMEM) - bullying, motherhood and substance use, gender violence, sex work, sexual aggression to fight back male chauvinist violence, highlighting surviving strategies among those who are experiencing homelessness through solidarity, mutual aid, peer support and trauma informed care, **WWUD and sex workers labour rights**

2) Capacitation and training workshops

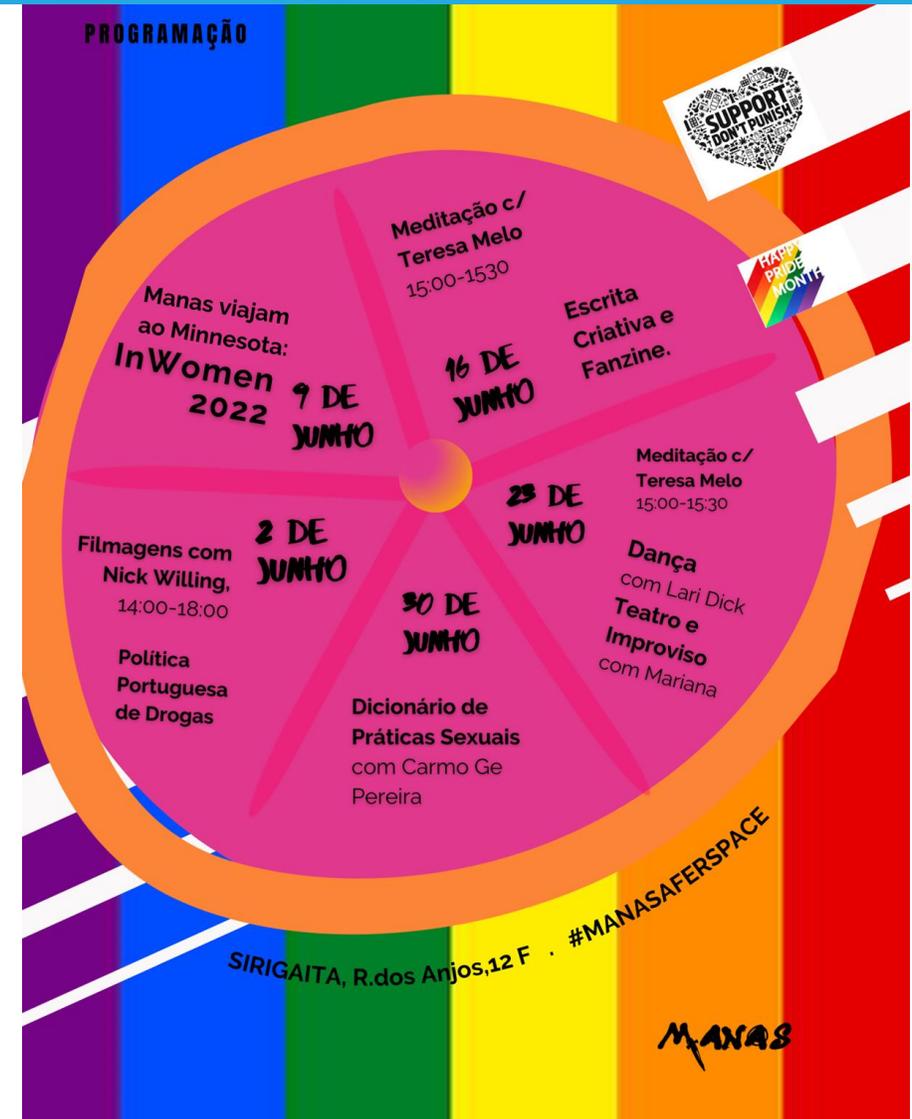
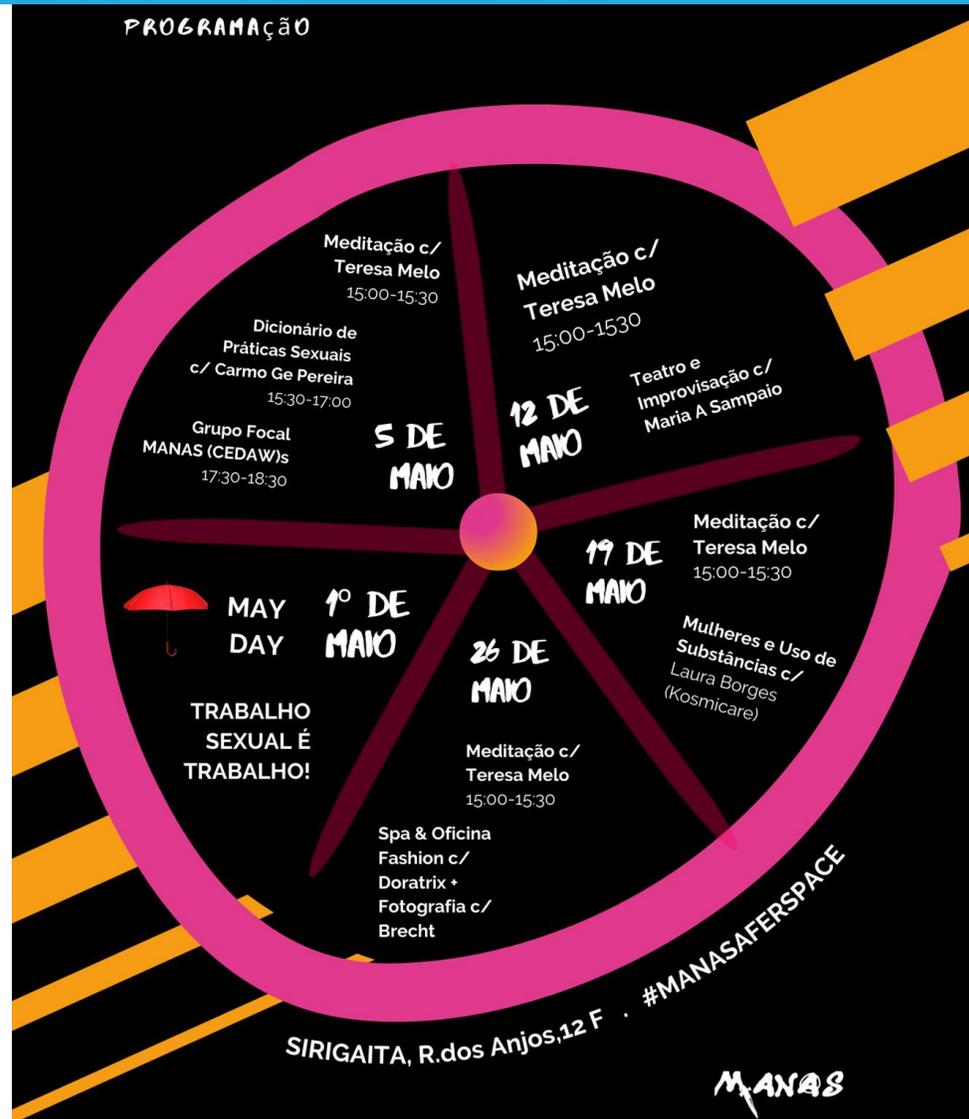
3) Artistic practices

4) Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

5) Sexual and reproductive health,

linkage to care, gendered social services, harm reduction & other (fighting period poverty,...).

Monthly agenda (May, June 2022)



Action - Research: focus group on WUD surviving violence, monthly joint assemblies, in depth-interviews

Direct results:

- Friendship and sisterhood:

Women are more aware of right to live with freedom, questioning power relations and defining new advocacy agendas.

Low threshold employment program as all the participants in each session of capacitation, training and artistic workshops are paid.

Identity and sense of belonging to "Manas" as a collective.

- Improving social determinants of health:

Linkage to rapid tests, HIV, Hep C, Tb treatment, IST medical appointments and other sexual and reproductive health issues (e.g. abortion, maternities), Housing First.

Informing services on the need of addressing gender-based violence through trauma informed care and harm reduction.

- Increased number of participants and activities:

MANAS takes shape in the hands of the 55 women and non-binary people using drugs and different activities. Fighting back the war on drugs, male chauvinist violence, stigma, racism, serophobia and prohibition - reclaiming WUD drugs rights & sex work labour rights & regulation

Months	Capacitation & training workshops	Nº Peer Support Talks	Topics	Artistic & Holistic Practices					
				Dance	Video	Yoga	Meditation	Hairdress	Creative writing
June - December	30	30	War on drugs, sexual education, harm reduction, dreams, self-confidence, gender						
			identity, sex work, LGBTQIA+, STIs, HIV, Hep, Tb	11	6	8	6	3	6

Indirect results:

- Improved access to food, hygiene, clothing and HR paraphernalia:

different sex toys, crack pipes, syringe kits, naloxone, masks, alcohol gel and intimate female hygienic products (intimate wipes, tampons, and pads);

- Increased well being through artistic practices:

recognize more freedom in ideas and movements, increased self-esteem, improved mental health, "brightening the spirit" and reinforced group cohesion - "we have grown has women, individually and as a collective and we have worked on our image".

- Increased visibility of the collective MANAS through the implantation of raising awareness campaigns and participation at other events (festivals, Sirigaita dancing nights, cinema sessions...) - denouncing institucional, police and health care violence and calls to action addressing GBV and having fun!

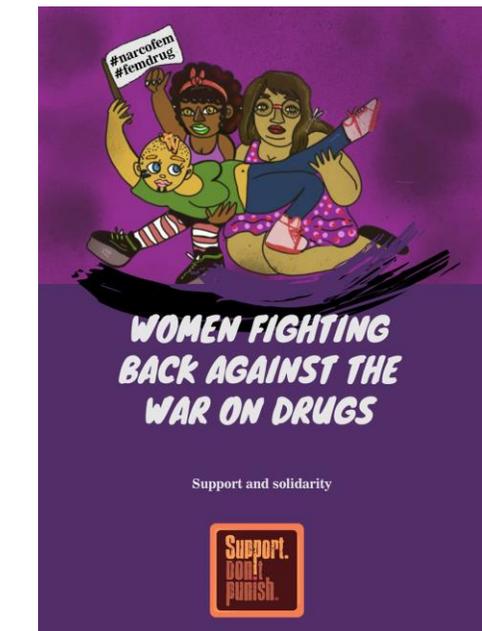
“We are all activists”



WHRIN
Women
and
Harm Reduction
International Network



EuroNPUD
European Network of People who Use Drugs



*16 days for the elimination of violence against women using drugs,
International Women's Day,
International Sex Workers Day,
Support Don't Punish -
Global Day of Action,
Hepatitis World Day,
International Overdose
Awareness Day*

On the road to a new learning-service in the city of Lisbon: future steps

Strengthening the collective has generated solidarity and stronger responses to structural problems.

Awareness

Self-expression

Leadership with and by women experiencing multiple vulnerabilities

Partnerships with feminist collectives

Co-design of new peer-led community interventions

Contributions to public policies

Vision: Self-managed safer space (safe house), open 24 hours, where all women can seek self-expression, empowerment, health and social rights according to the community of WUD and doing SW own desires, needs and dreams.



COMMENT

Open Access



Harm reduction calls to action from young people who use drugs on the streets of Vancouver and Lisbon

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Abstract

Vancouver, Canada, and Lisbon, Portugal, are both celebrated for their world-leading harm reduction policies and programs and regarded as models for other cities contending with the effects of increasing levels of drug use in the context of growing urban poverty. However, we challenge the notion that internationally celebrated places like Lisbon and Vancouver are meeting the harm reduction needs of young people who use drugs (YPWUD; referring here to individuals between the ages of 14 and 29). In particular, the needs of YPWUD in the context of unstable housing, homelessness, and ongoing poverty—a context which we summarize here as “street involvement”—are not being adequately met. We are a group of community and academic researchers and activists working in Vancouver, Lisbon, and Pittsburgh. Most of us identify as YPWUD and have lived and living experience with the issues described in this comment. We make several calls to action to support the harm reduction needs of YPWUD in the context of street involvement in and beyond our settings.

Keywords: Young people who use drugs, Homelessness, Harm reduction, Activism



Future steps: 2022-2023

Local Development Fund: BIP ZIP

1. Training with Insurgentes Library on feminist literature, gender based violence & harm reduction
1. Insurgente Editions: writing and editing of magazines and videos: "our stories, our bodies, our rights"
1. Practices: becoming a bookseller
1. Participation in Book Fairs and other events
1. Employment grants for managing the library
1. Feminist cultural events: dj sets, cinema,...

Thank you!

“When we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.”

A Litany for Survival by Audre Lorde



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