

Peer involvement revival with municipal support

“At the end of the 1990s the first initiatives on harm reduction started in Antwerp that really involved drug users.

In our city the pioneer and main supporter of harm reduction has been, and is the Free Clinic, the main service provider organisation in town. They introduced the concepts of harm reduction and peer support and continuously hammered away on the fact that drug users must be at the front and centre of services and policies. They also made a strong point that users can make the difference. That recognition of our expertise by the Free Clinic triggered our desire and wishes to be heard in a more structural way. We started a user organisation, received some funding, and were able to contribute to the work and debates that related to us. After 4 years the funds dried up and the organisation became silent.

Newer initiatives had similar and more instable success. They came and went.

At the moment there is revival of peer involvement in our city. Experienced people are now hired by the municipality to support services and to work on greater, genuine participation of people using drugs. The initiative was on the side of the City, and they wanted a counterpart. This resulted in



our current initiative Gebruikers Overleg Andtwerpen (GOA), comprising on users getting noticed. We received practical support from other activists, supporters of our work and other individuals, including agencies that sympathise with our work. Next to that we were also invited to take part in the municipal advisory body on drugs.

The current shift in priorities in Europe, away from social and health policies and with a more growing focus on security and safety, is also clearly visible in our city. (The mayor of Antwerp recently announced that his city will revitalise the War on Drugs with strong police investments). That makes our peer involvement even more important. We are presently part of significant municipal debates or we initiate them ourselves. For instance we plan to have a couple of meetings on drug consumption rooms and we are working on dedicating an afternoon on hepatitis C information, that includes information on testing and treatment. We also plan to have a questionnaire among the Antwerp drug users, like we did in former times, to let everyone know that we are here again, what we are gonna do, and

organiseert een Gebruikers-DAG

OPEN DEBAT
met de Antwerpse
Politieke Kopstukken

OVER...
de verloren strijd tegen drugs,
cannabis-gebruik en -teelt,
gebruikersruimten.

MODERATOR: Robert CRIVIT
Algemene Coördinator vzw 'UIT DE MARGE'

DEUREN:
*vanaf 12:30u
(voor (ex-)gebruikers)
*vanaf 15:00u
(buurtbewoners, politici,
geïnteresseerden en pers)

START: om 13:00u

in het PERMEKE-Auditorium
De Coninckplein - Antwerpen

we will check on the needs of our community. The basis and foundation for a solid initiative is laid, and with support from other agencies, and from other peer initiatives like INPUD, we are ready to build our organisation. 2014 will be vital year for us, that's for sure."

GOA

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