

Joost Brantas Rotterdam, The Netherlands

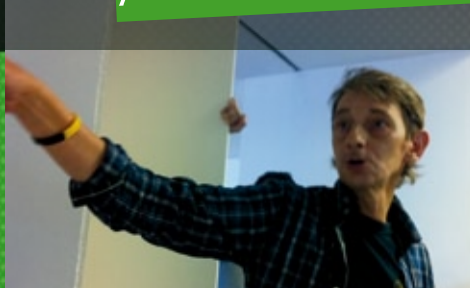


“Self organising is my second nature. Since the early days of my drug using career I have been involved in all sorts of drug user organisations. In the early 90s, I was involved with the Rotterdam Junkie Union, and represented the local initiative at the national platform. I am currently on the client board of the municipal health service, have also worked at the union of people living with HIV (where I co-ordinated for sometime the section on HIV veterans ‘the Die Hards’), and have been in anti-prohibition groups, including many other of initiatives.

Holland has had a strong tradition in drug user advocacy. Especially in the 80s and 90s. For over the past two decades there has been a strong movement of users and individuals who supported our case. Including people like academics, some religious leaders, and critical service providers. The Junkie Union in Rotterdam was one of the first drug user self organisations in the world. It was driven by a charismatic drug user activist, Nico Adriaans. Later, after Nico died, it was supported by and managed by non-users, and the ideas of the users union got carried on by some other agencies as well.

I have worked in many initiatives in my town. Some were extremely important and were very effective getting the ‘junky-issue’ on the agenda. But I also witnessed many personality clashes, the rise and fall of talented advocates, often refelcted in the rise and fall of their initiatives. A dreadful drain of energy. So many initiatives vanished, and nowadays I work together with all kinds of organisations.

,Veteran activist still going strong'



Personally I'm good at advocacy. A fancy word, but to put it simple: I'm not afraid, and when I see any injustice I simply raise my voice. I'm vocal. Vocal on my rights. If I see any neglect, or unjust or unfair treatment, I step up and raise my voice. And there is much injustice in the life of us drug users. Police controls and beatings, no proper treatment, bad informed doctors, lack of proper medications, urine checks, mafia dealers, social stigma and so on and so on.

Some months ago I was invited to an international Correlation training on hepatitis C and activism. That was a another boost for my activism. I learned about the importance of early testing and early treatment. Now I still do whatever I can. I am no longer in a organisation but simply on my own supporting people and initiatives that can use my energy. Last week I gave two lectures on HIV and drug use, one of them in a school. So in fact I'm on my own. Actually I'm a one-man pressure group. Not by principle, but by character. I don't give up. During a recent presentation I wore a T-shirt with the tekst: 'I am HIV positive, but I will outlive all of you.' That says it all."

Joost Brantas

Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Tel: +31650875431

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/harmreduction.rijnmond>

