

SEX WORKERS ACTING as PEERS, in THE SPECIFIC APPROACH of STI/HIV PREVENTION



AUTRES REGARDS is a community based health organization: we work for and with sex workers.

We support and promote the respect of fundamental human rights, and the equal access of all sex workers to the health services;

We fight against any kind of discrimination and stigmatization;

We develop STI/HIV prevention by raising the awareness of one of the most exposed population on possible health risks and unsafe practices and by passing on basic specific protection skills during workshops.

Listening to people on the street ...



... at the association office.

From outreach prevention on a D-Day...

Living together the WORLD AIDS DAY and the SOLIDAYS

Our action for the WORLD AIDS DAY

Initiated and encouraged by Barbara, transgender sex worker and Vice president of our association, we organise every 1st December since 5 years a united and collective awareness session with all the organisations fighting against AIDS in Marseille.

This event takes place at the Old Harbour of Marseille, an historical and typical place in the centre of the city. In order to promote health prevention, we distribute informative leaflets on safe sex with addresses on "where to go for an STI/HIV test", condoms, lubricants and, of course, red ribbon pins.

Our action for the SOLIDAYS

SOLIDAYS is a national festival taking place in Paris in order to raise the awareness on AIDS and its prevention. It is a combination of concerts, conferences, workshops with the presence of many active organisations.

These actions are successful as more people rally to it each year. They are key points in the life of our organisation and the group dynamics is really important. Before both sessions, a training is provided to volunteer's sex workers in order to re-fresh their knowledge on health prevention and to help them in their communication to the general public.

These action aims at fighting against AIDS but also at empowering sex workers and fighting against stigmatisation of sex work. Sex workers become health prevention's actors and get active in raising the awareness of the general population on safe sex.

This is also a possibility for them to interact and communicate without any judgement with other organisations, with the society in general.

... to regular outreach prevention

Our prevention tools and messages must be adapted to migrant sex workers –up to 63% of the sex workers we meet - because they often do not have access to the general information and campaigns on health prevention: this may be linked to a language barrier or to a cultural misunderstanding. Migrant sex workers are often not aware about the risks linked to sexual practices and how it can affect their own body, or they have an incomplete knowledge of STI/HIV prevention and of their rights to access public health services.

The presence of cultural mediators in the team, a Bulgarian speaking mediator and an Arabian speaking one, makes our outreach work and prevention easier. These persons enable a much better mutual understanding of the situations and of the needs of migrant sex workers; they also help creating a more confident relationship

Our regular outreach work allows us to adapt our prevention messages: we can meet a person who refuses any kind of testing, by fear of the results, or by fear of a heavy treatment; we can also meet another person who denies putting herself at risk. Thanks to these personal and regular contacts we are able to support and accompany sex workers more efficiently.

Prevention and testing among our targeted population

The doctor and the nurse together with the team encourage and promote health and STI/HIV testing through several actions:

- COUNSELLING on health issues
- PREVENTION by raising the awareness of sex workers on unsafe sexual practices
- ORIENTATION towards testing centers or specific public health services
- NETWORKING with health and social partners and organisations
- EVALUATION and UPDATING of the staff's knowledge on STI/HIV and hepatitis prevention
- TRAINING sessions for the staff and sex workers on harm reduction tools
- SUPPORT and ACCOMPANIMENT of transgender: counselling on gender identity and specific follow up during the sex reassignment program

Working on body acceptance/ Sensitization with a work around the body:

Hygiene is a public health issue. Good sanitary conditions are essential to reduce the risks of infectious transmissions (SIDA, tuberculoses, flue...).

Precariousness increases towards sex workers, as they often face difficulties to access to a decent place to live or the places where they live do not have basic facilities.

To face this problem and after demands of several sex workers, the team have been developed since 2008 a « Wellness » workshop project where sex workers can find a washing machine, a shower but also a time dedicated to their body.

During this cosy moment, sex workers can speak with outreach workers or mediators about their health, habits, their body, but also about basic prevention measures.

This is another approach and it allows the team to interact with sex workers more easily on the subject of body acceptance.

OUR STRENGTH AND ASSETS :

- We have a multidisciplinary TEAM: sex workers, social and outreach workers, doctor, nurse, psychologist, project manager, anthropologist are part of the team
- We work WITH and FOR sex workers.
- Sex workers are part of the project and they are themselves ACTORS in the health and STI/HIV prevention. We learn from them concerning specific needs and problems targeting national and migrant sex workers. They participate in the elaboration and implementation of new tools of prevention and harm reduction adapted to sex workers. They actively take part in the decisions taken by the board of directors as some are also member of it.
- Sex workers are PEER EDUCATORS. They teach their experience to other sex workers. Some of them are the necessary intermediaries between the sex work community and public services in order to make easier the access to their rights, especially for public health services.