

Fixpunkt Berlin, Germany

There are approximately 8000 IV drug users in Berlin. Around 3000 of these are currently in methadone substitution treatment. For a large proportion of those in substitution treatment, the parallel use of cocaine, alcohol or prescription drugs must be assumed. Many users continue to have contact with the drug scene.

Berlin does not have a large public drug scene; rather in a number of locations in the city smaller scenes have become established in which dealing and, in some cases, consumption take place. A maximum of 60 drug users can be found in any one of these scenes daily. The majority of users obtain drugs through the private/hidden drug scene.

Fixpunkt is a non-profit, non-governmental organization. The aims of Fixpunkt are:

- support of drug users to improve the conditions of health and social life, especially those who are infected by HIV or Hepatitis
- support self-help activities, self-control and survival strategies
- harm reduction, prevention of infections which are related to i. v. drug use
- offer various low threshold employment facilities

We accept the decision not to or the incapability to get off drugs.

Fixpunkt actually runs three projects

One is „**Treffpunkt Druckausgleich**“ – a self-help-meeting point for people undergoing substitution treatment. The low-threshold contact store is situated in Kreuzberg – a Berlin district where many drug addicts live – and is nearby a public drug users' meeting place at Kottbusser Tor. People can meet at Druckausgleich, have a coffee and a nice breakfast. They can use a washing machine or a personal computer. They can organize or participate in leisure activities like football, playing chess, visiting a cinema and so on. They can deliver used needles and get new needles and condoms. Druckausgleich offers information, social counseling and legal advice about all questions concerning methadone maintenance treatment and living with drug addiction. Drug addicts get the opportunity to work instead of going into prison or pay fines. They can help in the café or pack the boxes needed for the syringe machines.

Most important to notice is that the project is run together by two social workers and several drug users undergoing substitution treatment. The drug users are financed by the Berlin Department of Labour or by the city Office for Social Welfare.

„**IdeFix – Everything a dog needs**“ is a project which offers jobs and qualifying measures for drug addicts in methadone treatment. The main focus lies in supporting drug addicts in methadone treatment by self-help and self-organisation. A welcomed effect is an increase in the general public's acceptance of drug users because there is a uniting factor, the shared affection for dogs typical in German society - especially in the local community where many drug users can be found.

A large proportion of drug users in methadone treatment have dogs and the responsibility for a dog plays a big role in their lives. So the idea behind the project is to simultaneously draw on and exchange the participants' knowledge about dogs and dog care as well as to extend it. At the same time, the project aims to offer service, help and support in education and care of dogs for dog owners, especially those who are in methadone treatment.

IdeFix offers job training and employment on a low level basis (for a few hours weekly, financed by public welfare). Because most of the drug addicts have low level schooling (many of whom dropped out of school before completion) and few or no work experiences, it is important to offer differentiated job facilities and basic education/training, adapted to the individual.

IdeFix offers:

- dog sitter services
- sales of dog supplies (treats, toys) which have been made by the project
- Information services for dog owners (law, care, education)
- Leisure activities together with dogs
- Veterinarian counseling (treatment will be offered soon)

IdeFix started in the beginning of 2002 on minimal funding. In 2003, the project received funding for two years from “Aktion Mensch”, a kind of foundation. This allows us to employ a social worker and a sales manager (both part-time) to further develop the project. So far, the drug users in methadone treatment are working hourly, either on a volunteer basis, financed by social welfare, or work instead paying a due fine.

The third project, **Mobilix**, has operated in the public drug scenes for over ten years, providing preventive measures (such as syringe vending machines, needle exchange, condom distribution, etc.), social support services and basic medical services, and undertaking health promotion campaigns like a hepatitis information and vaccination campaign. In addition, we published and provided a lot of information sheets – for example about safer sex and safer use, methadone treatment and overdose management. In January of 1999, as a complement to these efforts, a drug emergency project was introduced as a pilot activity. Since January of 2002 we build up a pilot project for dental care and treatment for drug users.

Mobilix’s work is carried out in vans and ambulances that are stationed in the public drug scenes. All of its medical services began as innovative model projects which underwent scientific evaluation. Emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach (including social workers, nurses and physicians) and the incorporation of the drug user’s ability to develop self-managing strategies.

Additionally we are developing strategies to reach so called hidden drug users (e. g. those who don’t appear on public drug scenes and don’t contact low threshold or counseling units):

- printing information on syringe/needle-boxes sold by our syringe vending machines
- internet communication
- cooperation with pharmacies which sell needles and syringes
- offering home counseling (“tupper partys”)

Now some details and data:

Syringe machines, operated since 1988

12 machines in six Berlin districts (Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Tiergarten-Mitte-Wedding, Charlottenburg, Spandau, Neukölln)

Selling about 150.000 packages each year (amount depends on the site, minimum 10, maximum 150 packages a day)

Packages contain: two needles, two syringes, two alc-pads OR two different condoms OR injection water (NaCl), ascorbin acid, skin care.

Prevention vans (2), operated since 1991 and 1996

2 vans, working in four Berlin districts (Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Tiergarten, Charlottenburg), 9 times, 5 days a week, 5 different sites

Offering needle exchange, condoms, drinks, food, clothing, seats inside the vans, social information and counseling, safer use advices.

2002:

15,000 visitors,
6,100 times needle-exchange (142,000 needles, 43,000 syringes, 79,000 alc-pads, 26,000 condoms)
more than 2,600 contacts/general conversations
more than 650 counseling/social advice

The syringe vending machines and the two vans are run by 5 part-time social workers (one of them is an ex-user, 2 national service workers and ca. 10 volunteers

Health van, operated since 1993

1 van, working in four Berlin districts (Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Tiergarten, Charlottenburg), 5 times, 4 days a week, 4 different sites

Offering medical advice and treatment (especially drug related infections)

Each year

1,500 - 3,000 treatments (2 - 4 per hour)

Two part-time nurses in the permanent staff, supported by ca. 10 physicians on location

Drug emergency project operated from Dec 1998 until January 2002

Operated by 1 van, working in 1 Berlin district (Kreuzberg)
1 time a week, 1 sites and at other places (detox-center, prisons, counseling units)

Model project-aims: support the capabilities of drug users in life threatening situations, support peer support, explore the chances of Naloxone distribution

Offering first-aid-courses and naloxone in the van in various facilities of the drug support system and detention centers

Dec 98 – December 02

1351 participants of first-aid-courses in institutions (826 professional helpers, 525 drug users)
246 participants in the Naloxone project
103 Naloxone applications reported by 70 participants

1 part-time physician

Hepatitis project

Offering information about hepatitis, vaccination against hepatitis A and B

1996 – 2000

701 blood tests
554 patients who can be vaccinated
415 patients who started vaccination

255 vaccinations finished
compliance (means: vaccination finished) 61,4%

since 2001

continuing counseling and vaccination by the health van

Short time vaccination scheme (against Hepatitis A and B) (0 – 7 – 21 days, booster vaccination after 12 months)

Aims: Reach sufficient immunization of highly risked drug users quickly after 28 days (instead of 6 month). Check the immune defense of short time vaccination. Increase the compliance of drug users to complete the vaccination.

Dental van

since January 2002 (temporary set-up with basic supplies)

twice a week at two different sites, providing:

- dental check-ups and treatment of toothaches/dental pain
- information about tooth and gum care and dental cleaning
- necessary dental care supplies; and
- referrals to local dentists' offices

2002

324 contacts (282 counseling, 151 medical treatments
= 2 consultations per hour

1 dentist (paid hourly on a freelance basis)

1 dentist assistant

in preparation/planned:

Drug consumption van

Beginning in June 2003

five times a week, two different sites

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