



## Drug Users Make Pentagon Safer

### Community Work for a Better Neighborhood in Pentagon

Pentagon. The neighborhood of Bratislava, well-known for the **open drug scene**. The faces of the community have been changing, however, **public drug use, drug sale and drug litter have** remained a problem within the community for over a decade. It is a place where **the majority lives next to the minorities** and the **relationships** are mostly **negative** and fuel the existing problems of the neighborhood. Pentagon is always struggling between two poles. On one hand, it gets a lot of media coverage, on the other it is **at the margins of political interest**. Non-governmental organization **Odyseus has been working in the community since 2001**, focusing mostly on syringe exchange and outreach work for people who use drugs and sex workers.

For a long time, outreach workers from Odyseus have been facing displeased inhabitants of the community who were blaming the NGO for accumulation of drug users or supporting the drug use. Of course, this came from the long term frustration of the community as well as the „not in my backyard phenomenon“. We realized that this community really deserves more than a syringe exchange, **it deserves broader solutions**. We decided we want to cooperate and support not only the minorities; we want Pentagon to become a better place to live for all. We decided to **move from outreach work to community work and community organizing**.

### Our goal

*To contribute to the protection of public health, social inclusion, better living conditions and safety in the Pentagon neighborhood through:*

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Meaningful community involvement  
Outreach work and help for minorities and public health protection  
Knowledge and cooperation building



# What do we do and what have we achieved so far?

## *Outreach work and syringe exchange*

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Weekly, we come to the community to offer help to drug users and sex workers. We offer a variety of counselling and syringe exchange program. Yearly, we contact over 400 people who use drugs in this community who bring us more than 30 000 used syringes for exchange in order to contribute to public health protection and social inclusion of the vulnerable communities.

## *Involving people who use drugs as peer volunteers*

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We cooperate with 2 peers, active drug users, from the community who are willing to provide syringe exchange and counselling for other people who use drugs and collect used syringes.

## *Collecting discarded used syringes with local parents*

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We manage to cooperate with one active parent whose children attend primary school next to the Pentagon. She did not want to just “sit and complain”. **We encouraged this active mother, taught her the way how to collect discarded syringes** and now we participate when **she organizes the collecting of syringes with other parents.**

## *Neighborhood cleaning*

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During the autumn we organized several clean-ups with the help of people who use drugs. We managed to involve **20 people who use drugs who helped to pick up litter and used syringes.** [You can learn more about the activity in the short video.](#)

## *Workshops “How to safely pick up the used syringe” in maternity centers*

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We organized workshops in the maternity centers which are situated near the Pentagon. Overall, **19 parents have learnt how to safely pick-up a used syringe** and the first aid so they would understand the risks and know how to help their children in case of emergency.

## *World Hepatitis Day*

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On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, we organized a special day for the community in Pentagon. Our team of workers was offering information on hepatitis in order to bust the myths around this infection (often connected with drug use) to the majority living in Pentagon.

## *Survey “We listen” among neighbors*

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We organized a meetings of our workers with the locals in Pentagon in the streets to ask them how the living in Pentagon is for them and what their needs are. We also had a chance to introduce our work in the community to those who were not familiar with it and discuss the myths connected to our work. We offered to present their suggestions to the mayor.

## *Meetings with the mayor and the city district*

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Odyseus managed to “stay in touch” regularly with the local mayor who supports the work of Odyseus. He is willing to listen to new ideas; he organized a panel discussion on safety in the district and invited Odyseus there. We are currently discussing new possibilities about how to improve the situation in Pentagon together.

## Key values of the project

(or How is our project innovative?)

### *Novelty*

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- We advocate for meaningful participation of the community.
- We move from classic social work approach into community organizing.
- We address community which is on the margins of society or interest.

### *Involvement – meaningful participation*

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- It brings mutual dialogue, supports solutions finding.
- It shows that social problems may be handled directly by people who are facing them.
- People who use drugs are active in activities, alongside other stakeholders.
- It fights the stigma by showing positive examples of cooperation with minorities.

### *Effectiveness*

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- The project does not hesitate to work on different resources – from volunteers to paid workers, from the community members to social workers, unpaid volunteering as well as grants from foundation and municipalities.
- People who use drugs are becoming more active and curious – they want to look for new solutions with us.
- The whole project is designed as a living organism – its activities are flexible and are realized on behalf of the current situation within the community.

### *We encourage a public dialogue (Innovation in Public Perception – Serving as an Example)*

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- We try to invite clients, local stakeholders to plan, implement and evaluate the activities.
- The mayor supports our project and has promised cooperation.
- We inform about the activities in local newspapers and we use new ways how to promote project activities – local Facebook groups and video.

## Funding and resources

This long term project is funded by several smaller and bigger grants from the municipality, city district, city and local foundations. Currently, there are 5 full time workers and 4 part time workers within the organization, 2 peers volunteers from the drug users' community and several volunteers and stakeholders (together with active parents, mayor, etc.) who are participating in the project implementation.

## Future of the project

We are planning to build up on the activities mentioned above to nurture the benefits for the whole community. We are currently working on creating a **drop-in center** there. We would like to focus on more activities which could create a space where the whole community can meet and discuss. Furthermore, we plan to get in contact with **local caretakers** in order to discuss the needs of the local community and how Odysseus can cooperate.

For us, you are a key partner who guarantees extremely effective professional help to the specific groups. Odysseus can speak the language which is understood by the community and it respects this NGO. You achieve great results and do the great job which could never be performed by the city district."says Mayor of the city district, JUDr. Ing. Martin Kuruc.