

Tatyana Semenova, 29

In May 2001, I left the rehabilitation centre where I had been treated for addiction to opiates. I had been the only HIV-positive person at the centre for the last two years, and I was looking for support from others in the same situation. Accidentally, I came across a pamphlet with the number of a support group, and decided to go.

It was truly amazing to meet people who, like me, were living with what I used to think of as a “dirty secret.” I was cheerfully greeted upon arrival, and people of all ages were chatting animatedly. The biggest surprise was the fact that everyone was open about being HIV-positive and some also addicted to drugs. I found the courage to tell my story, and from that moment I began fighting for my rights, my life and my future.

I attended a training course on the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, and became closely involved with related work. Sometimes, I was a social worker for high-risk groups, other times I coordinated self-help groups for HIV-positive people or worked at a mobile facility for exchanging syringes. I was also able to participate in seminars and conferences abroad, which is how I got the idea to start a drug users’ group.

The Minsk Drug Users’ Group was established recently, but people throughout the region know our work already. We are also receiving many calls from drug users who want to help fight for proper medical, social and legal services. And finally, we are demonstrating that we are not simply “drug addicts” or “AIDS sufferers,” but strong and capable people like everyone else.

HIV +



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