

Elena Antonova

Head of the Estonian Community of people using psychotropic substances "LUNEST"

Motivation letter.

My experience in working in HIV / AIDS sphere began in 2012.

It all began in prison with a meeting with a peer. This meeting gave me an understanding of what I will do in the future. After two and a half years I started to work as a volunteer in my city. For half a year I gave out condoms, organized actions for testing, created a group of anonymous drug users. Since January 2013, I started working in the project in the Estonian Network of PLWH. My work included the delivery of ARV drugs to rehabilitation centers, conducting lectures on HIV. In parallel, I began to work in the project "Test and Treat". I was engaged in organizing and conducting actions for rapid HIV testing, accompanying for treatment. Since 2014, I have created and headed the representation of the Network of PLWH in the North East of Estonia. I began to coordinate volunteer activities in my region. Created a testing team. Since 2014, I have been working as a peer consultant connecting testing with treatment. I am engaged in the support of PLWH, the search of lost clients, and work on adherence to ARV. Working with vulnerable population groups, in particular with PWUD, I saw the imperfection and inefficiency of the existing Harm Reduction Programs in Estonia. While the state finances these programs, PWUD in Estonia remain the most unprotected population group. The high level of discrimination against PWUD and PWID by society, medical institutions and state structures is a barrier to socialization, access to available services and the quality of life of these people. Thus, the idea arose for the creation of the PWUD Community, the first and only in the country.

In May 2016, we created PWUD community in Estonia LUNEST. The leadership of which I took upon myself. The organization is aimed at protecting the Human Rights of PWUD and PWID and to reduce the level of discrimination against vulnerable groups. Separately, in this community, a group of women who use drugs was created. In December 2016, the LUNEST Community was officially registered in the country.

Since the first days of the organization's creation, we have been supported in every possible way by the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA). Thanks to the information and technical support of EHRA, we conducted monitoring and organized meetings. We went to trainings and conferences. We have found partners and gained experience and skills for successful activities. We became recognizable in our country. We met with representatives of PWUD communities of the Baltic States and other countries. This allows us to exchange information and experience.

As the head of PWUD Community of Estonia LUNEST, which is a member of EHRA, I propose to consider my candidacy as a member of the EHRA Steering Committee from the Baltic States. Having little experience compensates a huge desire to change attitudes towards PWUD both in my own country and in other countries. A clear understanding of the strength of community unity gives me hope for a successful job in this position. I certify my readiness and ability to act responsibly and actively as a member of the Steering Committee.

Throughout my career, I have participated in conferences, training seminars on HIV, Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, WHO recommendations, rapid testing, harm reduction, advocacy.

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