

## **Berlin Organisation of Mental Health Service Users and Survivors of Psychiatry**

### **VALUE FRAMEWORK**

The scope and the structure our organisation, the decision-making processes and other rules can be found in our Statute. Beyond those formal rules we feel the need to explicate some more values and principles that we wish to adopt in our work. Those values and principles grew out of our many experiences in user/survivor activism, including some bitter lessons learned. However, we do not mean to suggest any kind of additional regulations or bylaws but rather articulate the kind of relationships we aspire with each other and what kind of space we would like to create in our organisation. This is not an exhaustive list and is also not written in stone; rather than writing these approaches down we seek to actually realise them. Here are some issues that we think need extra attention:

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Even though we all have experienced psychiatric diagnosing and treatment we know that we come to the psychiatric system from different places and that our encounters with the system are not the same. Here we do not only mean positive vs. negative experiences but the fact that we don't live in a world of justice and equality and that our different social positionings also affect the psychiatric diagnosing and treatment we receive and importantly shape our experiences. Those unequal positionings range from the question of ethnicity and (non-) belonging to the dominant culture; they relate to our gender, age, educational and economic background, religion and belief, sexual orientation, physical and sensory impairments and many other determinants of our lives. We want not only to acknowledge these differences but also understand the way they affect us and approach each other with respect and equality. Aspiring much more than political correctness we want to truly engage with asymmetries of our lives and not reproduce oppressive structures in our work. This means not only distancing ourselves from racism, sexism, ableism and other discriminatory practices but actively addressing and working against them by engaging in counter-practices.

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The focus of our work is psychiatric oppression and discrimination. However, this doesn't mean that we focus on 'mental health' in isolation and separately from the rest of our lives. In distinction to any narrow, medical approach we adopt human-rights discourse in our work. This means that we see psychiatrisation as inseparable from social, economic and political structures and claim equality and fundamental freedoms in all those areas.

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The fact that we all have psychiatric experience does not imply that we share same opinion on psychiatry and mental health services. We know that we hold not only different but sometimes also opposing stances, including on central issues such as the (non)validity of psychiatric diagnosis, concept of 'mental illness' or medication. Rather than arguing and engaging in the promotion of any 'right' and 'wrong' we want to create space for mutual support and exchange in which each person maintains the ultimate

decision- and meaning-making authority in their own lives. This means respect for difference and search for common ground from which to take action. As people who have been subjected to our histories and views being interpreted, over-written and sometimes also erased, we don't want to engage in any similar practices ourselves and impose opinion or ideology on each other.

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Many groups and organisations have their formal and informal 'leader' figures. We don't find such structures helpful and want to work in a different and transparent manner. This includes ensuring to proportionally share information, workload and responsibilities.

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We are a self-organised, self-managed self-help organisation that does not provide 'service'. Each person brings in their knowledge and their skills and co-creates programs and activities.

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Many of us have experienced extreme states of mind ourselves and therefore have considerable level of understanding for non-conventional behaviour. However, this doesn't mean that everything is allowed and that people are seen as free of responsibility for their doings. The same as everywhere else the level of tolerance will depend on those directly involved.

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Physical and emotional violence as well as verbal expressions of racist, sexist, trans- and homophobic attitudes will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

We invite everybody who share these views to join us and help us create the space where each person with the experience of psychiatric treatment will feel welcome regardless of their background, their legal status, their command of German or any other such thing. We are happy to further our horizons and search for solutions and possibilities together.