



**Harm Reduction – Moscow Project**

**Annual Anti-Report 2014: “Contrary To...”**

**Andrey Rylkov Foundation  
for Health and Social Justice**



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We used to write annual reports in a utilitarian fashion. They were dull and dry, with figures and tables. It was like torture because for most people, writing reports and reading them causes a strong internal resistance and mental suffering. This year we decided to surrender to the pain of writing an annual report and to try to write our report so that it is fun to write, and of course, to read.



## INTRODUCTION

Moscow is a metropolis with a population of about 12.5 million which includes people who suffer from drug dependence. Moscow's capital city status attracts a lot of people looking for a better life; some of them are drug users. It's hard to say how many people with drug dependency live in the capital. Treatment clinics provide statistics for those who are registered as drug users and those who have contacted drug treatment specialists in public clinics. In 2013, there were about 30,000 such people in Moscow. But this figure does not reflect the true number of drug dependent people, because few of them reach drug treatment clinics due to the possibility of ending up on the registry which restricts the users' rights and stigmatizes them for life. Few are willing to register as drug users. Also, there are statistics provided by the head of the Federal Drug Control Service, General Ivanov. But these statistics vary depending on the conditions and on the desire for increased funding. As always, the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, and this truth says there's a need for social work with drug users.

One of the first and most important steps in social work with drug users is work on the streets. Street social work with the drug user community is necessary because it is proven to reduce the risks of HIV and hepatitis infections, the negative consequences of drug use for individuals and society at large. It is about preventing overdoses and preserving human lives; about reducing the risks and consequences of post-injection complications; about recovering lost social connections and about many other things that are useful for society. It should be noted that this work primarily helps make society safer and significantly reduce the financial burden on government agencies such as the AIDS Centers, infectious clinics and other clinics. Street social work helps preserve the lives and health of drug dependent people and provides additional opportunities and incentives for reintegration into society.

Andrey Rylkov Foundation has existed since 2009. Our mission is to promote and develop humane drug policy based on tolerance, protection of health, dignity and human rights. The Foundation contacts the community of drug users and engages in social work with them directly where they are - on the streets. Andrey Rylkov Foundation is the only community based organization that goes to the streets for "horizontal" social work, preventing HIV / hepatitis and overdoses and doing many more things that can and should be done to make our city and society healthier and cleaner and to reduce social tensions. We present to your attention the results of our work in 2014 that we achieved despite many obstacles and difficulties.

## SOCIAL WORK

### Drug-related harm reduction, HIV and hepatitis prevention

***Contrary to: Lack of stable funding and government funding. Official structures do not approve of HIV prevention through syringe exchange. Lack of social work targeting drug users.***

Throughout 2014, as well as over the past 4 years, we consistently worked to reduce the harm caused by drugs. Harm reduction is a pragmatic approach to minimizing the harmful consequences of injecting drug use for individuals and communities. The harm reduction approach does not detract from the importance of trying to help people withdraw from drug use, but it admits and acknowledges that for many users reaching this goal may take a long time, and in the meantime the risk of virus transmission (first of all, HIV and hepatitis), as well as the risk of other diseases, would be very high. That is why working with drug users should not be only about full withdrawal, although it needs to be addressed too, but also about other problems associated with drugs, and should address harm minimization.

In our daily work, we distribute clean **syringes and other injecting equipment** to ensure that drug users do not get HIV and hepatitis through contaminated syringes, and, naturally, to ensure that in the future they do not accidentally infect their friends, family and others in their environment. This work helps reduce the number of HIV-infected drug users who would have to receive treatment in the future. We also distribute bandages, ointments and other materials necessary for post-injection complications, and we offer consultations on HIV / hepatitis, post-injection complications, drug treatment and legal issues.



We **involve active members of the drug user community** in our work. We also use the results of their labor, both on a voluntary and paid basis – they work similarly to other employees of our Fund doing social work and harm reduction, thus benefitting society in a tangible way. Street social work is carried out in evenings four-six times a week throughout the year in different parts of the city. Here you can see what our outreach work looks like: <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/hr-moscow/outreach-chronicle/jan2015> (in Russian).

We should note again that this year, the ongoing social work with drug users was often carried out against the odds. Earlier in the year, we had no money to purchase our materials, and at the end of the year we spent several months working for free. We have spent a few years on the streets, and we know that for many drug users our communication serves as one of the few bridges that link them to society, so in this situation we simply could not afford to drop everything because of a lack of money.



To reinforce the above with figures, here is a brief note on our achievements in 2014:

Total number of contacts: 2,376  
Incl. contacts with women: 624  
First-time contacts: 982  
First-time contacts with women: 253

Distributed syringes: 70,970  
Needles: 10,243  
Alcohol wipes: 27,341  
Condoms: 3,369

Distributed naloxone: 2,062



## Two Hundred Twenty Three Lives Saved

HIV tests / of them positive: 35 / 14  
Hepatitis tests / of them positive: 20 / 15

Advice on drug treatment: 117  
Advice on HIV and hepatitis prevention and treatment: 77  
Advice on post-injection complications: 231  
Advice on overdose prevention: 294  
Advice on other issues: 89

On a separate note we should mention **case management** - another direction for our social workers. Basic principles of case management for the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project include a client-centered approach, equality and ability to focus not just on reaching the goal, but also on empowering the participants of case management efforts. We help the project participants demand and receive medical and social assistance to which they are entitled. And yes, we call drug users with whom we work project participants not clients, because communication takes place on an equal footing, and there is always an exchange of information that is useful for both parties. In 2014, an important thing for us was that finally we were able to organize our experience and develop a drug user case management algorithm. We created a primary questionnaire in the context of a results-oriented approach, case management plans and other documents that are important for social workers. We have organized and interpreted our extensive experience in this regard, and we are ready to share it with other organizations that do (or would like to do) social work with drug users. Here is an example of the work of our case managers (in Russian):

<http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/novosti/nikolay>

### Newspaper “Shlyapa i Bayan”

Producing our newspaper “Shlyapa i Bayan”, published by and for the community of drug users, is an important step in our social work with drug users. In 2014, we published 3 issues with a total circulation of 3,000 copies. In the newspaper, which is distributed free of charge among drug users on the streets, we try to share the experience of surviving and preserving human dignity given the very difficult conditions in which drug users often find themselves. We also publish in this newspaper legal and medical information used for protecting the health of drug users. Naturally, the newspaper is in demand, and people on the street eagerly await new issues. The newspaper (in Russian) can be found here:

<http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/hr-moscow/gazeta-shlyapa-i-bayan/shliapa3>



We have continued to collect **second-hand clothes** from more affluent people and to distribute them among those who need it. We distribute second-hand clothes both among the participants of our case management and during street social work. This year we redistributed a lot of second-hand clothes to those who need it. We should also mention another initiative - collecting **old mobile phones** for the participants of case management. Many drug dependent participants do not have mobile phones, which complicates our case management efforts: it is impossible to communicate while they are in hospital, to organize meetings and so on. That is why we began collecting old and unwanted mobile phones. This year we received 5-6 old mobile phones that we provided to the project participants involved in our case management efforts – this has helped our social workers greatly.

Another important direction of our work is supporting the participants that have become **victims of repressive drug policies**. Many drug users end up in prisons because of the drug dependence, and some become victims of fabricated cases. We have established warm and friendly relations with many of them, and we maintain those relations as much as we can. We try to provide support in prisons, send them necessary medicines, clothes and, most importantly, letters and postcards on their birthdays and other holidays.

Of course, we continue to organize education and information **workshops for the project participants**. These workshops are dedicated to HIV and hepatitis, overdoses, legal and medical issues, and many more things. The main feature of these workshops is that we can organize them promptly on request where it is convenient for drug users - in a cafe in a certain area, in a quiet corner of a large shopping center, in a courtyard. Recently, we have moved away from the paradigm of thematic workshops. We do not start from what we have prepared for a workshop on overdoses or another topic, but rather ask at the very beginning of a meeting who wants to talk about what and who wants to discuss what problem. Ultimately we discuss things that matter to the participants, things that they are concerned about, like HIV / hepatitis, treatment, the problem of drug planting and many other things. At first, working like that seems difficult but in reality it is much more useful for the participants, and certainly more interesting. Because of that we do not just preach solemnly, for example, on what must be done to avoid HIV infection (and to avoid infecting others) but also discuss these issues in depth producing a real and lively dialogue. This, in our experience, leads to a deeper understanding and addressing problems. This year we organized over 15 such workshops.



The Project's **hotline** continues to operate at

**+7-926-887-9087.**

Using the hotline one can always get advice on health- or rights-related issues, learn about the time and place of street social work, or get answers to other questions

## HEALTH PRESERVATION

***Contrary to: Lack of integrated medical and substance abuse assistance. Strong stigma and discrimination of drug users among health and social workers. High threshold for medical assistance.***

Drug dependence is a complex problem; in addition to social issues people who use drugs often face issues of a medical nature. When working with the participants of the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project we encounter abscesses, phlegmons, extensive trophic ulcers, sepsis and more. Since we are engaged in street social work, we offer medical consultations right there, on the streets. A medical practitioner joins the social workers and provides on-site advice to drug users. Medical consultations are offered both during regular street visits by social workers and on request. For those cases when it is impossible to provide advice and solve a problem on the spot, we have established cooperation with vascular and purulent surgeons that see project participants individually. They can do vein ultrasound and offer appropriate counseling for blood circulation issues and emergency medical assistance for acute conditions.



As already mentioned, we provide **case management** services to the project participants that have medical issues. Social workers are involved in hospitalizing the participants. Together with the participants we work to ensure that they are treated well and with respect while in hospital. These joint activities focus on supporting the participants' efforts to defend their legitimate rights to health, medical assistance and human attitude from health workers.

**HIV testing and counseling** is an important direction for preserving the health of the project participants and others. Our position is that each person (especially those that are at risk as drug users) has the right to undergo rapid testing for HIV antibodies without having to endure the challenges of interacting with official institutions, including their work schedule, distance and fear of disclosure of private information. For this we purchased rapid tests, designed and printed a memo that provides information on pre- and post-test counseling and instructions on using the tests including the addresses and phone numbers to use in case the test is positive and for additional questions. Also, we provide all the necessary information regarding the risks and ways of HIV transmission, treatment options and words of support from heart to heart. We include in the test kit the memo, disposable gloves and a device for taking blood; we distribute this kit among those who want to know their HIV status. After that, people can always call our hotline number to obtain more information and advice from a peer counselor.



We would especially like to mention our **overdose prevention** efforts. Counseling on overdoses and distributing naloxone, an overdose management drug, is an indispensable component of our outreach work. We have carried this work out since the beginning of 2014, and almost all our visits to the streets bring us information about lives rescued with the help of our counselling and naloxone. People who meet us thank us from the bottom of their hearts for the lives of their rescued friends and relatives. During this year, we collected information on **223 (two hundred twenty three!) lives saved.**

This is amazing and it gives us the strength to continue!

## STREET LAWYERS AND LEGAL AID

***Contrary to: Strong stigma and criminalization of drug users among law enforcement officials. Repressive drug policies. Quota-based law enforcement policies (the so-called “stick system”) push police towards fabricating criminal cases and planting drugs on people.***

Street lawyers are an important component of the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project. We began offering this kind of assistance at the end of 2013 and finalized formulating it for ourselves and the project participants by the beginning of 2014. Today it is a very important component of our project. Earlier this year, we began collaborating with a promising young law student and the participants could not believe that an ordinary Russian drug user could change things and oppose the soulless and oppressive justice machine without VIP lawyers and using only available resources, with support from social workers and a legal consultant. But only a year has passed, and we have already accumulated a lot of examples proving that the street lawyers program works. Now we have about 15 legal cases, four fine young lawyers and a stock of successful cases. A year ago, there were hardly any drug users ready to try and defend their civil rights with our support. Today people approach us on the street, call the hotline, write and ask through friends.

**So who are the street lawyers?** As you might have guessed from the name, they are not those lawyers who find themselves on the streets for any reason. The concept of street lawyers really entails a bundle that includes a project participant who needs legal assistance, a social worker, and a lawyer that in most cases provides remote counseling to the social worker and the project participant. The most important components of this bundle are the project participant and the supporting social worker.



The **core procedures** include 5 stages:

- Informing: about the project, about rights, workshops (this stage addresses about 40% of all cases);
- Mediation: in most cases, dealing with problems solves them, and social workers can solve the problems at this stage. During mediation, outreach workers themselves become lawyers (this stage addresses about 30% of all cases);
- Official requests: addressing the source of the problem. There is a wide range of people that have formal or de facto authority, and the list of such people is unlimited (doctors, investigators, passport issuing office clerks, etc.) (this stage addresses about 15% of all cases);
- Formal complaints to the authorities: officials, police, custodial services, custody agencies, the Federal Penitentiary Service and the Federal Migration Service (this stage addresses about 10% of all cases);
- Judicial protection: the goal of this project is to solve the problem at the information and mediation stages. We believe that judicial tools should be used only as a last resort, when all preceding mechanisms have been exhausted (this stage addresses about 5% of all cases).

Street lawyers aim to give the project participants that require legal assistance both moral and legal support and, most importantly, confidence in their own abilities.



Here are some examples of street lawyers' cases: <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/advocacy/street-lawyers/nikolai/>, <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/advocacy/street-lawyers/streetcases> (in Russian).

In addition to practical assistance, under this direction of work we comment on laws and participate in the development and debates regarding the Russian drug policy. We also actively express and form an expert opinion on the Russian and global drug policy. And, of course, our social workers act as public defenders, witnesses and experts in courts, and provide social support plans at almost every court hearing in which they participate.

To date, in addition to the basic legal cases of the participants in the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project we have a case at the ECHR. This is a case of a participant and employee of our project: <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/lichnye-svidetelstva/lena-2> (in Russian).

Summing up all these three directions, we should note that they are interrelated. Today it is difficult to imagine that they once existed separately, and some did not exist at all. The results of joint implementation of these three important directions of work are very encouraging and suggest that given our realities these are best practices in social work with drug users.

## THE TEAM

***Contrary to: Lack of office premises. Lack of government support. Unstable funding.***

This year, difficulties with funding our social work once again proved that the project team is united not by monetary considerations but rather by common goals, a common vision of social work with drug users, and spiritual values. Our team of social workers is growing; this year it consists of 15 people. The value of the existing team is that it comprises real professionals practicing street social work. Participation by representatives of the drug user community contributes significantly to the professionalism and competence of the team, since who else but drug user representatives know everything about the needs and concerns of the community and about the methods of working with it.

Despite the lack of office space the project team meets regularly for planned sessions and working meetings of the project. We try to organize such meetings in inexpensive cafes. This serves as an important team unifying factor since face to face meeting of all project staff are quite rare. Training workshops for employees of the project are organized regularly; during those workshops, together with invited experts we share new knowledge about drug dependence, HIV and hepatitis, overdoses and their prevention, methods of social work, legal aspects of our activities and other knowledge required for social work with drug users. At the end of the year we decided to make these events open to whoever is interested in our work.

We would like to thank the Sakharov Center for providing a platform for our work-related and open meetings this year.

It is safe to say that the staff of the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project has become a highly professional team of social workers. In addition to its professionalism, this team has extensive knowledge of the needs of its target audience and a spirit of solidarity.



## FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR HOMETOWN

### ***Contrary to: Misunderstanding and rejection of street social work by the municipal authorities***

Despite the undoubted benefits to citizens from social work with drug users, it may seem to people who are not very immersed in the context of social work that direct action focuses solely on the drug user community. Compared to drug users, however, society benefits indirectly (although it does benefit a lot). Key reasons why this work is useful include the reduction in HIV and hepatitis incidence in the community of drug users and thus in society; eased burden (and consequently, cost savings) of medical facilities (AIDS centers, infectious clinics and other relevant medical facilities as well as regular clinics); saved lives and, consequently, improved performance of the taxpayers.

These are all important results of the Harm Reduction – Moscow Project, but our project has other directions that focus on all the residents of our capital city and benefit them directly. Here are some of these directions that we initiated this year and plan to continue in the next year:



### **Campaigns to collect used syringes on the streets**

This year we had three very important campaigns aimed at making our city cleaner and safer. The campaigns were called “Snowdrop”, “Poplar fluff” and “Falling Leaves”. In May, July and September, together with drug users we collected discarded syringes in several areas of Moscow. Such campaigns are good as they not only help clean the city, but also help reduce the social tension related to the problem of used syringes in public places. They also attract drug users; this proves once again that despite their problems, drug users want to and can benefit society. Despite the

frivolous names of our campaigns, they were very important to the city. In May, July and September, we collected over 10 five-liter containers with used syringes in 4 areas of the city. All the syringes were then sent for safe disposal to our partners, the Research Institute of Epidemiology. Here you can read about these campaigns (in Russian):

[http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/authors\\_blogs/maksim-malyshev/syringe-seasons](http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/authors_blogs/maksim-malyshev/syringe-seasons)

### **Support and psychological assistance to relatives and friends of drug dependent project participants**

Throughout the year we provided counseling, legal and psychological assistance. Calls to the hotline, in-person legal and psychological counseling, counseling by Skype, mediation between family members and drug users – these are all parts of working with friends and relatives affected by the drug use problem.

We also started a great tradition of greeting the children of drug dependent project participants. On the eve of 2015 we put on Father Frost and the Snow Maiden suits and congratulated 4 families and 5 children, wished them a happy New Year and gave them small gifts. It was an unforgettable and inspiring experience, and we will continue to do that in the future.

Here is the full story in English:

<http://en.rylkov-fond.org/blog/our-projects/newyear>



## Educational and Social Activities

The project staff participates in public debates on drug use and drug policy, in roundtable meetings and other events. This year, we had lot of opportunities for that, including the Gorbachev Foundation, the Moscow Urban Forum, the Urban Fest in Murmansk, the Moscow House of NGOs and a conference on narrative practice. We are always open to mass media interested in social work with drug users, and are happy to not only talk about our work, but also to show it.



We should mention separately a series of **workshops on social work with drug users**, organized for social workers, psychologists, and all those who are interested. At the end of the year we organized our first workshop in the series “Social Work on the Streets. Practices.” Next year we are planning workshops on such topics as “Case management in a situation of service shortages”, “Helping drug users that don’t want treatment: is it necessary, is it possible?”, “Street lawyers (legal support)”, “International experience of social work with the drug user community” and “The drug user’s family: resource or foe?” Here is a report (in Russian) from the first workshop we held: <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/novosti/pavlovskiy>

## CONCLUSION

The entire 2014 was a success. We were able to add a lot of new things, gained more experience and made a huge advance towards 2015.

We hope that 2015 will be as successful as this year and moreover, that it will open up new prospects.

See you in 2015 and we hope that the next report will be even more successful and even less boring!





## About the Andrey Rylkov Foundation

The Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice (ARF) was founded in June 2009.

Our mission is to promote and develop humane drug policy based on tolerance, protection of health, dignity and human rights.

### *Who was Andrey Rylkov*

Andrey “Iroquois” Rylkov began his work volunteering at a Moscow street-harm reduction project in 2000. As a drug user, he was well aware of the problems faced by the people with whom he worked, was never indifferent to them and never stopped loudly voicing their needs.

After several years of work, he became increasingly influential in the union of outreach workers that he founded which actively participated in the activist organization Kolodets. Together with other HIV activists he launched in 2004 the FrontAIDS movement whose main purpose was to ensure availability of HIV treatment in Russia.



“We will live – it is our policy”, the motto of FrontAIDS, empowered many of us in the struggle for access to treatment, medication, life and dignity.

Andrey died in October 2006 but for us, he will always remain a very dear friend, leader and an inspiration for our work. Above all, he remains a symbol of hope that drug policies can be humane and effective, that people should not be punished by sickness and death for drug use, that the medical system can work well to treat rather than maim, that law enforcement agencies can defend and protect, not degrade, beat and rob, and that the people affected by drug problems have sufficient forces and capabilities to protect themselves and their loved ones. This is what we are working to achieve.






## Our Contacts

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Telephone		+7-916-6425682 (Ivan, in English)
Harm Reduction - Moscow Project <b>Hotline</b>		+7-926-887-9087 (in Russian)

## ARF in social media

Harm Reduction – Moscow Project on VK* (in Russian)		<a href="http://vk.com/club4488809">http://vk.com/club4488809</a>
ARF on Facebook in English		<a href="https://www.facebook.com/AndreyRylkovFoundation">https://www.facebook.com/AndreyRylkovFoundation</a>
ARF on Facebook in Russian		<a href="http://goo.gl/YILSah">http://goo.gl/YILSah</a>
ARF on VK* in Russian		<a href="http://vk.com/club10691860">http://vk.com/club10691860</a>
ARF on Twitter in English		<a href="https://twitter.com/AndreyRylkov">https://twitter.com/AndreyRylkov</a>
ARF on Twitter in Russian		<a href="https://twitter.com/RylkovFond">https://twitter.com/RylkovFond</a>

\* VK is Russia's biggest social network

