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VIVIEN

VIVIEN - Victim Violence Educational Network

*An educational project to improve the ability to assist women victims of violence*

## The interview with FDFA

The interview with Claire Desaint from **Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir (FDFA)** was conducted on 13th January 2021. The interview was organised in Microsoft Teams and Satu Vaininen from SAMK was the interviewer.

### Main features of the centre

#### 1) Can you briefly tell us the history of the centre?

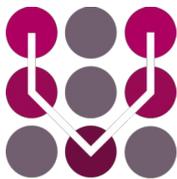
Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir (FDFA) is an association created in 2003 by Maudy Piot, a blind woman. Having noticed that associations of people with disabilities were grouping together people by type of disability - e.g., paralysed, deaf, blind, etc. - she wanted to create an association that brought together people with all types of disabilities and so-called "able-bodied" people. She also noted that most of the associations were run by men and that women were not heard. She therefore created this association to make the voice of women with disabilities heard and to shout out loud and clear that we are women and citizens before we are "disabled" and to promote the place of women with disabilities in society. The association's first event in Paris brought hundreds of people with disabilities, showing how much they needed to get out of their homes and get together. The aims of the association were: "We are women before we are disabled. We are women first." The aim was also to promote the role of a woman in society and have them heard. In public policy, disabled women were never present.

Workshops and a discussion group were organised. Maudy Piot, who led the discussion group, was frightened to discover that many women with disabilities were experiencing violence. Combating violence against women with disabilities therefore became a priority and in March 2005 a specific

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telephone number was set up to listen to the voices of women with disabilities: Ecoute Violences Femmes Handicapées - 01 40 47 06 06. This is the first helpline in France to provide reception and orientation, legal, social, psychological and administrative support for women with disabilities who are victims of violence or even mistreatment. FDFFA has since made numerous representations to the government, institutions and feminist associations to raise awareness of this violence and include the fight against violence experienced by women with disabilities in public policies.

- On what assumptions is it based?

The observation of the Council of Europe, taken up by the UN that 4 out of 5 women with disabilities experience violence, that they are not listened to or believed, and that this violence is not dealt with: difficulty to file a complaint, impunity of the aggressors, no statistical data...

- What is your mission?

Our mission is to listen to women with disabilities who are victims of violence, to accompany them if they ask for it, psychologically, socially, administratively and legally, to help them rebuild their lives and to guide them if they wish to file a complaint.

- Where were you born as a centre for women with disabilities who are victims of violence?

In Paris, France.

## **General organisation of the centre**

### **2) How many people work in your centre?**

Two persons are salaried project managers, 9 specially trained listeners. An honorary lawyer, a social worker, a volunteer clinical psychologist and a lawyer are on duty on a permanent basis, the Board of Directors is made up of 17 volunteers. Numerous volunteers participate in the life of the association by organising physical and psychological well-being workshops, welcoming and

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supporting disabled people and providing support functions.

### 3) Who are the professionals who work there?

Two project managers, retired professionals, students, people looking for a job.

### 4) How many people work there permanently? (with salary)

Two

### 5) How many volunteers? Are these volunteers stable and is their participation constant and regular?

Some volunteers are stable and have been working with FDFa for a long time, some have been working with FDFa since 2003. Because of their psychological commitment, they are not always the same. Some are stable. The other volunteers, often young people, devote a certain amount of time to the association, find a job and are therefore no longer available, others replace them. We also have skill-based sponsorships with companies.

### 6) How are the work teams organised?

The listening sessions take place every Monday from 10 am to 1 pm, and from 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm, and every Thursday from 10 am to 1 pm. The listeners choose the time slots during which they can listen in on the telephone. During the confinements, the listeners are on duty at a distance.

A lawyer provides a legal service, at present every fortnight, a social worker provides a social service every fortnight, a psychological service is organised once a week, a public writer can help to write texts with a service every fortnight, a Beauty and well-being workshop to help people feel good and rebuild their lives takes place every month. Other workshops - focusing on exchanges, on corporal or written expression or on artistic creation - are offered to women to enable them to regain social self-esteem.

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FDDA has just launched a website on 25 November 2020 - <https://ecoute-violences-femmes-handicapees.fr> - which aims to be a resource centre on the issue of violence against women with disabilities. It is intended primarily for women with disabilities who may be experiencing violence: How to spot them? What to do? How does the Disabled Women's Violence Listening Service work - +33 (0)1 40 47 06 06? For carers and professionals working on a daily basis with women victims, precise information to help them understand violence and provide support and guidance to these women.

Finally, for those seeking information on the issue of violence experienced by women with disabilities, the website is a resource centre with studies and reports, reference works, legal texts, films and reports... A digital escape game on discrimination and violence experienced by women with disabilities has also been created by FDDA to serve as a teaching aid in its distance awareness actions.

### **7) What skills do you expect from the workers in your centre?**

A great ability to listen, friendliness, commitment to people with disabilities, the ability to work together, reactivity, empathy. The listeners are trained specifically to disability and its different forms and to the processes of violence. Training is organised for volunteers.

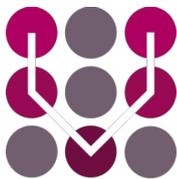
### **8) Are there other centres working like you in the region or the country? Do you network with them or with centres in other countries? What do you do together?**

FDDA is the only French association to bring together women with all types of disabilities and to ensure that they are listened to specifically. But it works with other feminist associations that listen to, guide and accompany women victims of violence. It can thus refer women who need accommodation or urgent help to other associations who, in turn, refer the disabled women who have requested it to FDDA. FDDA is part of the Clef, a network of feminist associations for the

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European Women's Lobby. FDFEA is part of the Abolition group which fights against the prostitution system. A co-president is a member of the Women's Committee of the European Disability forum and meets women with disabilities from other European countries on these issues. She is also in contact with Women enable international. Finally, FDFEA is working on the origin of violence and more particularly sexism within the collective Ensemble contre le Sexisme (Together Against Sexism). It's important to have a wide network.

### Information about training

#### 9) Does your centre organise training courses for operators?

##### Please describe these training courses:

There are two kind of trainings: for people who work in the association and for those who ask us to train about women with disabilities.

### INTERNAL TRAINING COURSES

- How are they organised?

Most of the listeners and the volunteers have to be trained about disabilities. The health crisis at Covid has modified our training actions for future listeners. Previously, we used to offer training courses with the participation of specialists (sexual violence, psychotrauma, law, etc.) over three days in order to deal with both sexist and sexual violence and the different types of disability. Since the first confinement, we have set up online training using a MOOC and videoconference support.

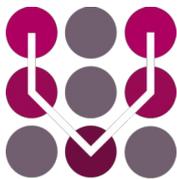
- What content is offered?

The MOOC proposed by the University of Paris is entitled "Violence against women" and is divided into 8 video sessions with related content:

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### Course outline / Lesson plan

- Week 0: General introduction and getting started
- Week 1: Types of violence
- Week 2: Particular types of violence
- Week 3: Vulnerability and violence
- Week 4: Epidemiological and legal data
- Week 5: Consequences of violence
- Week 6: Care of victims I
- Week 7: Care of victims II
- Week 8: Children co-victims and prevention of violence against women

Volunteers were invited to follow a number of online courses each week according to a pre-defined schedule. Then the concepts covered in the courses were reviewed, adding the disability perspective, and the two course leaders answered questions and/or explored certain concepts in greater depth.

- Who are they aimed at?

To future volunteer listeners, recruited on the basis of an application form and after an interview lasting approximately one hour. The interview's aim is to know what the motives of the volunteers are, why they want to do this.

- Who are the trainers?

The MOOC teaching team is composed of doctors and specialists in violence against women. The internal trainers are the two project managers and a female listener, a psychiatrist by training.

- How long are the courses?

The distance learning courses last one month; one day in the classroom is devoted to mental and

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psychological disabilities and to the process of listening (attitude, role-playing, resources, note-taking...).

- How often do they take place?

Depending on recruitment, at least once a year.

- Are they paid or free?

Free of charge.

- Do they take place in person or online?

One part is online, the other in person.

- Who pays for the training courses?

This training is part of the budget lines allocated by private and public funders of our actions to combat violence against women with disabilities.

## **EXTERNAL AWARENESS RAISING**

- How are they organised?

Awareness-raising actions meet the expectations of the clients. Each action is adapted to the target audience. The tools used depend on the audience, the duration of the awareness raising, and the theme addressed. Each awareness-raising action is therefore "customized".

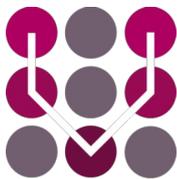
- What content is offered?

- 1) training on disability: different types of disability, legislation
- 2) training on violence: different forms of violence, cycle of violence, strategy of aggressors, consequences on disability, post-traumatic symptoms, legislation

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3) the accompaniment of women: how to identify violence, listening to women, directing them to the best interlocutors, preparing a file...

Through:

- Interactive intervention: photo language, quizzes, group discussions, etc.
- Conference
- Projection-debate on the film "Violence of silence".
- Digital Escape game (It is an escape game about discrimination and there is a part about disability. The game was designed especially for young people.)

- Who are they for?
  - Professionals in the care and health sector, social action, police, justice...
  - Activists from associations of disabled people or feminist associations
  - General public (informative animations)

- Who are the trainers?

The two salaried employees of the association and some administrators according to their expertise.

- What is the duration of the courses?

Generally, half a day (between 3 and 3,5 hours). Some awareness-raising sessions include a plenary lecture in the morning followed by workshops in the afternoon.

- How often do they take place?

Depending on demand.

- Are they paid or free of charge?

There is a charge for presentations to professionals. Awareness-raising activities with association

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activists are generally free of charge.

- Do they take place in person or online?

At present, all actions are conducted by remote videoconference.

- Who finances the training courses?

The professional principals finance the awareness-raising for their audiences.

Actions for activists are covered by our budget lines for combating violence against women with disabilities.

**10) We now ask you to share with us an experience in which, in your opinion, the training was not successful. For example, if, after the training, there were problems in the work of a trained operator (difficulties or unsuccessful case management, etc.).**

- What did not work?

INTERNAL: Despite the care taken in our recruitment phase, it happens that trained volunteers do not integrate listening and prefer not to get involved in this mission. There are several reasons for this: they have found a job or they do not feel able, even after a period of listening in pairs with an already active listener, to carry out the mission successfully.

EXTERNAL: awareness raising does not always lead to practical application.

- Why is this?

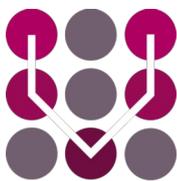
INTERNAL: It is sometimes very difficult to listen to the words of disabled women who are victims of violence and abuse. Moreover, when the caller asks for help and we cannot direct her satisfactorily due to a lack of reception facilities, it is stressful for our listeners.

EXTERNAL: Some people follow awareness-raising actions out of obligation and not out of choice or taste. For example, the client had planned teams of 4 or 5 people per computer on the digital

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escape game, despite our recommendations, so that some participants did not invest in the game or in raising awareness.

### 11) Finally, we would like to ask you to tell us about a case where the training worked well.

- What made the training work?

INTERNAL: When the volunteers join the associative project and the listening mission, when they are willing to invest in the duration (at least one year) and when they take part in the pooling meetings and additional training. It has been found that training courses are effective when they are adapted to the profile of our future listeners. For example, during the pooling meetings, we found that our listeners seemed to be struggling with legal issues. Therefore, we set up a specific day of training on these issues.

EXTERNAL: When people are interested in the subject and feel that they have acquired new knowledge that they will be able to put into practice. We adapt - as far as possible - our awareness to the needs expressed by the public, which is a guarantee of success.

- Can you give an example of a good training?

An example of a good training was in the University of Rennes. It was for people who were professionals and they wanted to make a new profession, more in social care. The themes were social discrimination and also gender equality. They were very interested. We think it is very good to have a lot of preparations. We discuss with people, so the training can be very well adapted to the target group. We must carefully listen to people. Also we have to be interactive, e.g. we show something on the screen, for example our films and then we talk a lot with participants.

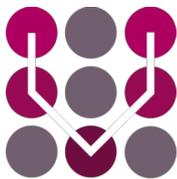
- How do deal with professionals' own feelings and experiences regarding violence? Do you have discussions within this theme?

Yes, we do, but not so many. Sometimes the participants tell us yes, now we know it was violence

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what I encountered. Before we did not know it was violence. And very often they tell us that they don't know what to do.

- Do you think the participants feel e.g. embarrassed or shamed or that kind of feelings?

Yes, a lot of times they are embarrassed. In our experience the police did not know that it was violence and sometimes disabled women are not believed at all. We are fighting for disabled women to be believed. What is this girl saying? Because she is with a nice man, at least for other people he seems very caring, so they don't believe her. For the police, lawyers and judges it's very important to believe what the woman is saying.

- Which theme is the most important in your trainings?

The most important is to make people aware of the cycle of violence. And to understand that women stay with the aggressor. Why? We must understand the time it takes and the difficulty of getting out of it. People don't understand why they stay so long. Especially for women with disabilities, because they need the aggressor. They need them for the everyday care, so it's difficult for them to get out of the situation.

- Why do we do this?

Because the training addresses a grey area of gender-based and sexual violence, that of women with disabilities.

- What skills were brought into play that made the course a success?

The internal trainers are all committed to the fight against violence against women with disabilities. One is a psychiatrist and has been an active listener for several years: in her training, she links her medical skills with her practice of listening. The other is in charge of the fight against violence against women with disabilities: she actively participates in reflection and working groups and runs training courses for professionals from the police, justice, health and social sectors... The latter is

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involved in the fight against discrimination, including the double discrimination of gender and disability: it works on deconstructing stereotypes linked to disabilities.

## 12) How do you think you could strengthen your training and what would you need to do so?

We need to invent a new way of approaching training to include the specificities of distance learning. We are planning to develop a series of videos for all our volunteers on how to welcome and support people with disabilities according to their disability. A working group is currently being set up, headed by a disability coordinator. The expertise and skills of the association's members will be called upon to draw up rules of good practice for our volunteers, whether they are able-bodied or disabled.

Funding is needed to improve our training tools and create teaching materials that are specific to us. In the near future, we would like to create a corpus of videos that would address the issue of violence against women with disabilities and complement the MOOC that we currently use. For our external training activities, we are planning to develop new digital and entertaining educational materials: quizzes, goose games or online Trivial Pursuit on themes such as societal violence, discrimination against women with disabilities in access to education, training and employment, etc.

Other projects are also under consideration, such as the addition of two testimonial films to our "Violence of Silence" series to talk about the violence experienced by women with disabilities in institutions and by women with disabilities who are migrants or from a migrant background. We see a lot of women with disabilities in migrant women and they experience violence. It is important to have a focus on this too.

Beyond direct funding to carry out these projects, we need visibility so that the issue of violence

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experienced by women with disabilities does not remain a blind spot for gender-based and sexual violence. Even if now public police is a little bit more aware of it. We also need support for our advocacy work. We need public policies to address the issue in a mainstreaming manner.

- What is important to know or to do in general? What is your message?

The message is to agree with the woman, to listen to her and say yes, she is right. It is important that the woman is aware of the fact that it's not her fault. Because they think, I'm disabled, so it's normal that the man is aggressive towards me and uses violence against me. It is important that they know it's not their fault and they are not the only ones to whom this occurs. It's a very gender-based violence and it's not their fault. Especially women with disabilities might have thoughts like it's my own fault, I'm not a good woman, I'm not so pretty. It is difficult for them to think it's not my fault.

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