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VIVIEN - Victim Violence Educational Network

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

REPORT ON THE BEST PRACTICE “DIFFERENZA DONNA” – ITALY (Rome)

General description of the Centre

Differenza Donna (Difference Woman) was born in Rome (Italy) on March 1989 with the aim of bringing out, knowing, fighting, preventing and overcoming gender-based violence. From the beginning, the Association has been clear that discrimination, marginalization and oppression of women are a serious, complex and widespread social phenomenon, which only specific skills can effectively combat. It was born as an association from the feminist movement, and in 1992 they opened the first shelter house in Central- South Italy (together with other association in Bologna and Milan).

Differenza Donna, since its establishment in 1989, has been committed to fighting violence in Italy and in any other country, convinced that women can be a great social resource only when their rights and dignity are fully respected. Only those countries that counteract violence against women can be truly defined as advanced societies. Differenza Donna's mission is to support each woman to become economically independent, influential, rich in dignity and wisdom: a woman who knows the value of diversity and is able to interact with other women

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on the basis of solidarity. As a strategic tool of intervention Differenza Donna has chosen the women's shelters, conceived as places of protection, empowerment and re-planning of life for women and children affected by violence. Yet the shelters serve as well as a social laboratory and places of research and study, since an effective response to violence needs to be based on solidarity relationships among women and on studying the female condition within the

framework of legal history, medicine, psychology, sociology and culture.

The association was born from the Feminist movement, and it based on the feminist philosophy, with feminist practices such as: starting from oneself, circularity of experience, socio-political analysis of the contest and of the phenomenon of violence. The socio-political and cultural analysis is very important in the work of the association, because the first step is to know the discriminations to welcome the women. They recognize different discrimination for different women in different contests, but they consider the violence of the patriarchy culture the same in every gender violence case.

In their work the welcomed woman is not considered a "patient" or "user" of the service, but just a woman, according to the "woman to woman" methodology. The result is a welcome modality by the associates that does not take into account the specific professionalism of the associates, but the assumption is that in this society, every woman, as a woman, could have suffered or suffer gender violence.

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As Rosalba Taddeini, member and trainer of Differenza Donna, said: “we don't like categorizing our users, but we take care of all women, none excluded.” More than working in a sectoral way, they work in an inclusive and intersectional way.

For this reason, some years after their starting, Differenza Donna was involved in welcome migrant women and from 1992 women victim of human traffic. From 2012-2013 they realized that women with disabilities did not come to the anti-violence center, and from that moment Differenza Donna has been involved in the fight against violence against women with disabilities, having a specialized division dedicated to this issue. In recent years Differenza Donna has worked with projects and initiatives to raise awareness about the perception and awareness of social services, often victims of a common prejudice against women with cognitive disabilities.

The association has also dedicated itself to raising awareness of women and girls with disabilities, having found that many of them are not aware of the existence and functions of Anti-Violence Centers and Shelter Homes or that, in some cases, they cannot reach them or ask for help on their own.

The Association also created the National Observatory on violence against women with disabilities aimed to collect and return data on the phenomenon of gender-based violence against women with disabilities, every year in November. Data collection will be carried out through questionnaires, projects and specific focuses. The elaboration of the results will allow

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a better understanding of the mechanisms of violence, developing reflections that will make the tools to combat it more and more effective. It will be particularly important to collect the testimonies of the survivors, in order to understand what cultural barriers, stereotypes and prejudices they encountered when they reported the violence suffered. This will bring to light the cultural, social and political obstacles to the emergence of violence, on which there are no specific studies to date. The Observatory also aims to make an important contribution to a cultural change leading to a new way of thinking about social policies: a more scientific analysis of the phenomenon is crucial to build, think and implement gender policy interventions more correctly and to monitor the impact on quality of life. Among the objectives is also that of being a tool for dialogue and networking among the realities involved in this issue, encouraging comparisons, exchange of information and collaboration. At the moment they welcome women with motor, cognitive, sensory and psychiatric disabilities.

The association manages 11 centers with each 10 workers more the lawyers. The total number of the member is about 150 and the permanent staff is about 100 women with different professionalism:

psychologists, social workers, educators, medical workers, sociologists, lawyers. The centers are in the cities of Rome, Salerno (near Naples) and Palermo (Sicily).

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The work of the staff is organized on shifts of 6 hours. The shelters are open h24, the centers Monday-Friday 9-17, but the availability is h 24.

After a training of 9 months and a mentoring of 1 month, the skills expected from women working in the centers are: the awareness about the culture and context and the ability to unveiling this culture while welcoming women victims of violence.

The specific method of Differenza Donna work is the analysis of the demand, taking into account the cultural and socio-political analysis of the context, and thus create projects for the elaboration of violence and the escape from the contexts of violence.

Numerous Local Authorities and Institutions have recognized the Association for their professionalism and competence, among them, at national level: Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Labor, Department for equal opportunities - Presidency of the Council of Ministers, La Sapienza University of Rome, Roma Tre University, Lazio Region, Tuscany Region, Calabria Region, Municipality of Rome, Province of Rome, Local Health Authorities. At the international level, the European Union, the Italian Development Cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Differenza Donna is a founding member of the National Association D.I.Re. - Women on the Net Against Violence, the national network of anti-violence Centers and Women's Homes, of which she was part until 2019. Since 2015 she has been part of PICUM - the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants as an expert NGO. In the same year

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she was admitted to the Association of Italian organizations of international cooperation and solidarity - AOI. In 2016 Differenza Donna obtained consultative status at ECOSOC - United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In 2019 she joined CILD, the Italian Coalition for Freedom and Civil Rights. Since 2020 she is a member of the European network WAVE - Women Against Violence Europe.

Differenza Donna is in network with gender associations and collaborations with national associations of people with disabilities: AIAS Italian Association of Spastic Assistance, FISH Italian Federation of Handicap Overcoming and the Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association.

Training description

Differenza Donna offer different training paths:

- Training to their member, the future activists, the women that will work in centers.
- Training to the women who want to know better the phenomenon of gender violence and that will be the voluntaries in their centers.
- Training to other Anti-Violence Centers.
- Training to professionals, public bodies, companies or other associations (example: doctors, nurses, psychologists, police...).

The training to the future lasts 9 months, once a week for 3 hours and at the end of the training there is a month of internship alongside the senior workers.

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The training for the voluntaries has a duration of 3 months, once a week for a whole day (6 hours).

The training for other centre or professionals are agreed with the requesting institutions according to the needs of the situation.

The contents of the training are: analysis of the phenomenon of violence against women, what does violence mean, analysis of data on gender-based violence, multiple discrimination, intersectionality, laws.

As for the training of its staff, the goal is to give the ability to evaluate the case of violence by inserting it in the socio-political and cultural context.

The trainers are member of the association with different professionalisms, such as lawyers, psychologists, social workers of our association. Usually the trainers are the member of staff who have more experience, but to ensure that the skills are transferred within the association, each senior trainer is supported by a junior figure.

The training is frontal, laboratory and experiential. They work a lot on concrete and real experience and stories. As Rosalba Taddeini said, the assumption is: if you feel that you could be the victim of gender violence too, you have a very different response respect thinking that gender violence could happen to a not précised person far from your perspective and your

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feeling. “If you can make that story feel a little yours, a little close to you, that trainees feels part of it and responds.”

During the training is important giving information about the difference, because knowing the differences is fundamental to help different woman, there is a difference with migrant women, with women victims of trafficking, also women with disabilities bring differences. For example, in Differenza Donna opinion, an operator must absolutely know the fact that the education that a disabled woman receives is different (the expectations of society, of her role as a woman), otherwise the risks is doing what most operators do, that is instead of talking directly with the woman with disabilities, shifting the communication and interfacing only with the people who accompany the woman with disabilities, and therefore taking away from the woman that right of being a subject of law.

Specially for training for its staff, the methodology is a feminist methodology: self-awareness, starting from oneself, centrality of the bodies.

Before to start to work about disabilities, the association's members did an internal training focused on their physical bodies, starting and sharing their personal experience. The association's members are different women with different stories and situations (disabilities, migration, victims of rape, of genital mutilation) and sharing experiences. The difference is their richness, as the name “Differenza Donna” said.

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All trainings are subject to a fee. The funding can come from privates (women who wants became worker or voluntary of the association), from associations, companies or public bodies for the training in those realities. At the end of the training each trainees receive a certificate of attendance.

Before the COVID pandemic all trainings were in person, during COVID lockdown all the trainings were on line, at the moment (summer 2020) a part are on line and a part in persons.

Usually the trainings for professionals are committed by the institution in which they work, the participation to the training is considered a working day. Sometime the trainees chose to attend the training, other time they are forced to attend it.

Specially about situation of disabilities, the role of the network between professionals is much important: doctors, nurses, psychologists, police, social workers. Without a network the women with disabilities does not arrive to ask help to the anti-violence centre. There is a problem of accessibility, but as Taddeini said "it's not about physic accessibility but mental." It means that if a woman with disability is considerate for example by the social services, "a disable" and not "a woman", the specific gender violence is underestimated, and the risk is a second victimization by the operators of the services.

For example - an example used during the training to focus on the accessibility- the association discovered through a research in a small town that a girl with Down syndrome had had 13 abortions in 13 years.

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Therefore, the passage was not only from her home, from her family, but: from the social worker, from the counseling center, from those who practiced the abortion and so on. No one had ever thought that 13 abortions in 13 years could hide situations of violation. No one had ever thought that this woman, this "woman", not this "disabled", but "this woman" perhaps had some problems inherent perhaps to an exploitation sexual, or is it not known, an abuse in the family, it is not known, but each one, at least these three figures she met had to make some thoughts about this process of 13 abortions.

After the training in institutions or other anti-violence centers, Differenza Donna keeps the contact with the institution/center. Precisely because of the accessibility problem, even in the structures that could accommodate the women with disabilities, they have kept ourselves very open to situations of women that professionals could intercept, so as not to make them feel alone, when they are faced with a difficulty that is multiple. In this way Differenza Donna opened a national observatory precisely because when an operator from any city on the Italian territory, finds herself managing this situation of a woman with disabilities with multiple discrimination, she can rely on Differenza Donnas, both legally, therefore with Differenza Donna lawyers, both in terms of support to the right procedure to be adopted to help the woman with disabilities.

Furthermore, the work of Differenza Donna on every single case requires a task force of the network with different institutions and professionals: staff of Differenza Donna, policy, social

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services, lawyers. This helps Differenza Donna to keep link with different institutions and professionals.

Description of the told training experiences (positive and negative)

During the interview with Rosalba Taddeini, she said they don't have experience of negative or problematic training. Every time there is some kind of success, at least increasing the professionals' ability of recognizing forms of gender violence.

A positive experience of training, told by Taddeini, is a training held in June 2002 for an anti-violence association of Bologna, an association that has chosen proximity, in the sense that it is not centered only in the city, but also in the province, so there are more centers on the province to get as much as possible to women. Precisely for this reason several women with disabilities have come to them.

“The training was experiential and it was wonderful because we started by addressing the topic through a video that we made. There was an analysis of how we came to this process, from the research that gave us certain types of results. Did we realize that what was practically happening? The woman victim of violence who had multiple discrimination, did

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not arrive at the center why? Because the services managed them. Not thinking that a woman, just because she is a woman, needed something different” Taddeini explained.

The trainer started from the experience, talked about the process, how they got to this type of path, the traveling desk, the itinerant center and so on. From there, then, they projected a video that talks about women with three different stories. “This went very well as training” Taddeini continued, “because we felt the participation, prejudices also came out, but that's okay, because at least we talk about them, we work on these, and also the fears, because *“if I find myself on Friday evening managing a woman who has a physical disability, where should I send her? because that service could tell me so.. because that other shelter could tell me what ...”*. We make them feel support, that they are not alone.

How can the helping network be activated? It happened to us, a girl who had a motor problem indeed had a degenerative pathology so she already had the catheter and was in a wheelchair and in any case, we managed it, however we managed to give her the opportunity to get out of the situation of violence. So, this was great, that training was very important.”

To the question about what suggestions would come based on experience of *Differenza Donna*, to develop skills to welcome women with disabilities, Taddeini answered: “In my opinion it is more functional to do a training linked to an experience. If you bring the cases, you present them to the theme you want to consider. For example we were talking about this

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woman who was hosted by us for many years, you can read her story on many fronts, you can read her story putting the focus on prejudices, because in any case she is a girl who has never been taken in charge by any service despite having all the difficulties, you can read her story about the violence she suffered, rape in the family, group rape, they sold her, she was mistreated, she was exploited by the father on the street. It depends on what you want to argue, you bring a story of a real woman, who unfortunately lived a lot of violence, a woman with disabilities, and you begin to tell her story on this type of perspective: stereotypes, prejudices rather than violence, accessibility to justice, reproductive and sexual health. The important is starting from a case, a situation, this has a lot of effect, it makes you feel that this woman exists, maybe you know her because she remind you of someone, and this is very important. All the women who were present at the training said "*oh, you make me feel bad, because I knew a woman with a disability that this thing happened to her*". Each of us, at school, the neighbor, knows a story like that, which can be a discrimination story, because maybe that little girl was isolated, rather than you knew very well that she was exploited, that she was mistreated, that she had a pension, but it was taken from her by her parents and so on.

For better or worse we know all these stories, and therefore they resonate to you and if they resonate to you they are powerful.”

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