

Sabrina Vidot: What Support Don't Punish Means to Me

While the world mark the Global Day of Action on International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADA), dedicated to champion support for People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs), under the slogan *Support Don't Punish*, for many the day may whisk away just like any other day. However for Sabrina Vidot, a 33 year old Seychellois woman who has been on drugs for 17 years and currently on Methadone, it's a very personal and definitive day as she observes "This is my day" To her, the call for health and human rights based policies for PWUDs is central to her day to day life and to the lives of hundreds of thousands of PWUDs the world over.



Sabrina Vidot

My interaction with Sabrina gives a very clear picture on the day to day struggles that PWUDs and their families go through and why it's important for policy makers and health program opinion leaders to fully understand the policy and health challenges affecting PWUDs.

Sabrina's addiction to drugs dates back 16 years ago, while living in Canada with her mum and brother. In 2006, in one of the many attempts to get her off drugs, her mother sent her back home to Seychelles for a detox program, the assumption being that the change of environment and the perceived

'unavailability' of these hard drugs, she would easily be weaned off, and be back home in a years' time. However, six years later, she was still in a rehabilitation center on Coetivy Island, on and off drugs.

Sabrina's initial drug of choice was cocaine, but soon after landing in Seychelles, she transitioned to heroine due to the scarcity of cocaine. In 2015, she joined a facility based methadone detox program at the Wellness Rehabilitation Centre for a year and a half, after which she relapsed, three months after her discharge from the facility.

Sabrina's mother relocated back to Seychelles, to help take care of her two children, so that she could join the community based methadone program at Victoria hospital. Since October 2016, Sabrina has adhered to the methadone program, taking her dose every day. Despite the constraint associated with the daily visits to the hospital, she highly appreciates remaining integrated in the community as she undergoes through the program. Her observation is that although sober houses

are great for recovery, clients that from confined hence coping with an open environment remains a challenge especially in dealing with cravings.

She is grateful for the methadone program stating *“I am feeling that my life is back, I am able to think of my children and mum”*. She however observes that one of the major setbacks of the



methadone program is the notion that methadone is a quick fix coupled with the urgency of the Ministry of Health officials to wean clients off methadone. This has resulted in low titrated doses that often do not meet the clients' needs thus forcing them to use other drugs such as heroine and alcohol to manage the cravings. This has resulted to clients being expelled from the program.

“Presently, we are 19 out of 120 people who started the program. With methadone, you need enough time to go through the process”

Sabrina's present unemployment brings to focus the socio-economic struggles faced by recovering drug users. Challenged by the need to access treatment everyday coupled with mistrust by potential employers due to

her drug use record, she observes that everyone thinks you want to steal from them.

Sabrina joined the Drug User Network Seychelles (DUNS) in January 2017. The network was formed by HASO with the support of [HIV and Harm Reduction for Eastern Africa](#) project managed by KANCO and funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. Through the network she believes they could influence some policies and practices like on needles and syringe exchange program, *“I was lucky I did not get hepatitis C, although most of my friends contracted it along the way because they could not access clean needles and syringes”*

She sees the network as a great avenue to advocate for issues of concern to PWUDs. Through DUNS, Sabrina has been trained as a peer educator and currently is the peer mobilizer for Cascade district in Seychelles where she has been working closely with the District Administrator, Ms. Lilianne Biong.

My first meeting with Sabrina was at a meeting convened by District Administrator Cascade district where Sabrina had mobilized 16 PWDUs to participate. Her past experience as a drug user makes her a better peer educator. In Cascade, Sabrina is reaching about 150 drug users who have access to even her house, which to her is a great achievement. *“Twice, I have been able to take clients to hospital for Hepatitis C screening and management”*

Her parting shot *“together we can create a world where users can start a new life”*

My interaction talk with Sabrina brought to life the real meaning of **Support Don't Punish** and the critical role of each stakeholder in making it a reality. Traversing from better policies and health services access, family support, to making choices in life while remaining safe and supported by the environment, to function and became productive citizens of the world.

Article by Peter Kamau

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District Administrator Cascade District
Ms Lilianne Biong and DUNS
Coordinator Joseph Banane