

# SHE in Germany: Empowering Women Living with HIV in Peer-to-peer Workshops

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## Background

According to the recently published data on people living with HIV (PLWH) in Germany (RKI: HIV/AIDS in Deutschland - Epidemiologische Kurzinformation 2021) women remain a minority (>20%) who live especially isolated. The recent stigma index on PLWH in Germany (DAH and IDZ: positive stimmen 2.0) shows: more than two-thirds of the people interviewed cannot talk openly about their infection in many areas of their lives. The persistent stigma around an HIV infection can prevent many women from speaking openly about their infection and/or reaching out. Additionally, HIV-support programs are often primarily aimed at an MSM target group. Therefore, HIV-positive women in particular suffer from this isolation. This lack of community support can have a significant impact on their (mental) health.

## Methods

To counteract the isolation, the SHE-program offers peer-to-peer workshops for women living with HIV (WLWH). The name of the program is an acronym for **Strong HIV-positive Empowered women**, which already hints to the aim of the project. At the center of SHE is a team of currently 11 women, who have been living openly with HIV for at least two years. They are specifically informed and trained on a regular basis to offer peer-support. The trainers organize regular workshops all over Germany where topics such as partnership, employment and traveling are discussed in relation to HIV. Additionally, they inform each other about empowering tools such as self-care and resilience. SHE offers a safe-space for sharing information, exchanging experiences and the opportunity to network. Thus, SHE provides an opportunity to finally talk openly about living with HIV.

The SHE workshops are often organized in cooperation with counseling centers, HIV practices and ambulances. Thanks to the financial support of partnering pharmaceutical companies, the SHE trainers are compensated for their commitment, while the workshops remain free of charge for the attendees. Moreover, women can attend most workshops anonymously. These conditions facilitate a low-threshold access to the meetings. To allow workshops even during the Covid19-pandemic two new formats have been developed: outdoor and online workshops were added to the classic face-to-face meetings.



Members of the SHE-team at the train-the-trainer event 2021. All rights reserved: GSSG



Locations of the SHE-trainers all across Germany.

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## Results

In 2021, a total of 15 SHE workshops were held despite the difficult conditions caused by the pandemic. In addition to 7 face-to-face meetings, 3 online and 5 outdoor workshops were offered. 80 WLWH attended this wide range of workshops. All participants were encouraged to provide anonymous feedback and these comments confirm: community support and the opportunity for networking in a peer-to-peer setting is well received. Thus, the SHE program contributes to the empowerment and well-being of WLWH in Germany.

## Conclusion


The SHE program is an important project addressing isolation, still a great challenge in the lives of WLWH. SHE is especially meaningful for women because most other HIV programs are targeted at MSM. While the current pandemic has made in-person meetings difficult, the additional formats "online" and "outdoor" have helped many women with HIV in Germany.

15 SHE-Workshops in 2021



Thanks to a dedicated, in part voluntary, team and the financial support of pharmaceutical companies, the SHE program has been able to empower many women living with HIV in Germany since the program started in 2012. If you would also like to support women with HIV, please consider donating to our organization.



 Strong, HIV positive, Empowered Women



Currently 11 SHE-trainers offer peer-to-peer workshops for WLWH. All rights reserved: GSSG

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