

# Creativity in Crisis : NGO Funding, HIV Support, and the Destabilization of Culture-Community Barriers

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## INTRODUCTION

In Berlin, Germany's "gay capital," the lasting effect of the AIDS crisis have continued to position HIV-positive individuals among the most at-risk members of society. However, while tens of thousands of Berliners live with HIV or AIDS, neither the city of Berlin nor the country of Germany dedicates the necessary funding to HIV and related issues.

In early modern England, theatres were maligned as hubs of disease frequented by the unwashed masses. In the twenty-first century, they are instead cloisters of high culture, safely removed from the unwanted members of society. Funding for cultural initiatives and funding for issues pertaining to at-risk individuals, especially sexual health initiatives, are positioned as diametrically opposed interests.

We can destabilize this notion by integrating artistic and cultural venues with the needs of at-risk communities.

The funding for cultural events in Berlin is grossly incongruent with the funding for sexual health. However, it is not necessary that these two goals are in opposition to each other. Initiatives like the OUTspoken Pride Poetry Slam hosted by PEERS Alliance (formerly AIDS PEI) in Prince Edward Island, Canada, illustrate the possibilities for integrating sexual health support and arts support in communities.

By integrating cultural events with positive community initiatives, theatrical and artistic venues can shed the veil of elitism, and instead lend their cultural credence to the causes they support.



Kandace Hagen, OUTspoken Pride Poetry Slam

## LEARNING FROM CANADA SEXUAL HEALTH SUPPORT THROUGH ARTS SUPPORT

PEERS Alliance, in collaboration with Kandace Hagen and PEI Pride Week, has presented the OUTspoken Pride Poetry Slam since 2016. In 2017, the poetry slam hosted Kent Stetson, whose play *Warm Wind in China* was the first Canadian play to address the AIDS crisis. The event is also a venue for young artists to present their work in a sex-positive and non-elitist space. The costs for the event are minimal, and all proceeds go to PEERS Alliance.

1. It is an artistic and cultural event hosted independently and funded by personal donation.
2. The cultural import of a poetry performance is conducive to the destigmatization and harm reduction that is PEERS Alliance's central mission.
3. The cultural import of a poetry performance highlights the cultural import of PEERS Alliance itself, and alerts people in the arts community to the NGO's local function.

500	people newly infected with HIV in Berlin each year
60	deaths from AIDS in Berlin each year
11,000	(est.) Berliners live with AIDS or HIV.
30%	of at-risk individuals not consistently practising safe sex
€56	million euros international funding designated for AIDS (2016)
€600	million annual funding for Berlin cultural bodies

## REFERENCES

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