



I dream of a place where no-one shouts at anyone and no-one complains, and at the same time everyone knows what to do. This has been my dream for many years.

Life is about reconciliation in spite of differences

Previously I didn't expect that through being involved in various types of activism I would meet such fabulous people, who I've remained in touch with to this day. I've known some of these people for ten years. Some of them have become close friends. That's something money can't buy and which you can't find on the street. It's great that these friendships just happen — says Łukasz Siemienieć, the outgoing president of the Signs of Equality Federation.

People who know you agree that you have extraordinary energy reserves. Where does it all come from?

You always ask a difficult question! Well I guess it comes from space, or maybe the earth ... I suppose people give me the energy to do my activism work. If you do something and see that it's necessary for other people and that it helps them to grow and things improve for them, that's very motivating. In a sense activism is a bit like a closed circle, where you create and absorb energy. If it's positive energy, and this is the sort of energy I try to give off, it comes back to you and gives you drive.

If you have reserves of positive energy, then things can vary from day to day. If you want to achieve something, it doesn't matter that you're too tired, that everything's falling on your head and that you're fed up. You have to grit your teeth and move forwards. Apart from energy from other people what drives me is definitely my goal, and especially, I guess, if others think it's unrealistic. I'm motivated by the sort of situation where something seems manageable to me, but to others it looks like some sort of

utopia. There's an important dependency here: everything is possible, although some things need time. Results don't appear just like that and don't spring up like mushrooms after rain. For example the process of setting up the centre took six years.

When you first had the idea of setting up an LGBT+ community centre six years ago how unrealistic did it seem?

The question of how realistic it was depended to a large extent on what exactly I imagined the centre would be like. To start with there was the idea that the centre would be an office, a shared space for activism work. In principle this could be created in quite a short period of time. There remained only the question of who would be responsible for something like this and who would make sure that there was enough money. The answer to this question was that a new legal entity, i.e. a federation, should be created. With time, as we continued our discussions the idea of an office-centre started to develop and other elements were added to it. In the end the idea of a centre developed into a conglomeration of various types of activist organisations. At that time I felt that the idea of a centre was difficult to put into practice, but of course not unfeasible. Naturally

there were people who thought it was definitely too ambitious.

The general vision of the centre in my head was like what we have at the moment. Of course I'm not talking about the shape of the building or about its name. I don't think anyone expected this. It was meant to be a place that lives. The sort of place that serves above all the community, i.e. people who want to do something, and not only NGOs

When you set about creating the centre, did you think that the process would take as long as six years?

At that time we agreed that the centre should be built on solid foundations. This applied to both the team that would be tasked with running it and would be responsible for it and to the physical infrastructure itself. We knew that first of all procedures that would allow the place to function smoothly would be necessary. While discussing the centre we came to the conclusion that a separate new organisation would be necessary that would be responsible for founding the centre and running it. This meant that we needed to set the centre up, define its mission and vision, write its constitution and register it. Then this organisation needed to become credible. Its first task was to obtain a small grant, spend it, account for how it was spent and thus prove to the funders that we were trustworthy. Only then was it possible to apply for larger amounts. Generally we didn't expect that all this would take six years. At the time we thought it would take four.

How did you chose the "small grant" that you mentioned?

It's a wonderful story! Janusz Krupa, who was a on the board at that time, had a dream ...

Not a bad start!

He dreamt that something had happened in a small place in Lesser Poland. When he woke up in the morning, he put the name of this place in Google to see what sort of a place it was. The first hit that appeared in his browser was some information about grants, offered by the Fund for Civil Initiatives, that people living in this community could apply for. Janusz started to dig around a bit more, one thing led to another, and he found some information about the Lesser Poland Fund for Civil Initiatives, which had just launched a grant competition. He proudly told us about the fruits of

his unusual investigations at the following board meeting. At that time there were three of us, Magda Mijas, Janusz and me. We applied and got our first grant. We spent it on the first edition of the newsletter, on creating a website and something else which I don't remember.

Now I want to focus on that moment in time. You already have a small grant, you're starting your activist work and you're working on a strategy. You, as an experienced activist, bring a certain amount of experience. Do you think everything was difficult?

The best thing associated with my activism that has happened to me in my life is contact with other people. The fact that it is possible to do something together, to aim for our goal together, to get to know great people along the way. At the same time the most difficult thing is working together with people and the battle with my own and their demons.

What are your demons?

Now I feel they've been tamed slightly. I think I've reconciled myself with them.

But you didn't show them the white flag, you didn't surrender to them?

No. I actually think that life isn't about fighting. Once we start fighting there are always victims and it's easy to lose sight of what you're doing or become a victim yourself. I think that in any case life is about reconciliation in spite of differences. You need to start this reconciliation with yourself. When we fight with ourselves for whatever reason, for example who we are, where we come from, why, how and who we live with, this battle sucks the energy out of us. It's very easy to lose yourself when you're in this state. However, it's usually easy to live in a situation in which we reconcile ourselves to all this. One way or the other I think that everyone must do this independently.

What was the hardest moment in your journey as an activist?

I remember it as if it were yesterday, my most difficult moment was my decision to leave Krakow Krakers Sport Club. I left at a time when we were all overwhelmed with work. Incidentally, we took full advantage of all the

author: Bartłomiej Zeron Skawski

matches and conferences we organised. Both me and the friends who made up this organisation were exhausted physically and mentally. I knew I couldn't carry on. At the same time I was conscious that I was leaving them with this problem, maybe they weren't as exhausted as me, but in any case they were very tired.

Which moment in your journey as an activist do you remember best?

There are several greatest moments. All them had one common feature — they were moments when we managed to achieve a collective goal. One of these was opening the the DOM EQ centre, when our shared dream became a reality. Other moments were the matches, the Gender and Sexual Diversity in Sport conference as well as events which I organised with the Krakers. It was fantastic when these great, lofty aims were realised and many people felt part of them. There were also great moments when I got to know open, honest people who wore their hearts on their sleeves and who wanted to get involved in activism. Moments when you know that you can move mountains.

To tell you the truth, previously I didn't expect that through being involved in various types of activism I would meet such fabulous people, who I've remained in touch with to this day. I've known some of these people for ten years. Some of them have become close friends. That's something money can't buy and which you can't find on the street. It's great that these friendships just happen

What dreams do you have now?

I've always dreamt of having my own firm with about ten people, where everyone who works there feels at home. I dream of it being a place that people want to come to to work, a place where people do something creative. I dream of a place where no-one shouts at anyone and no-one complains, and at the same time everyone knows what to do. This has been my dream for many years. I know that it's difficult to put

into practice, but in the context of what I said a moment ago, I know that realising this dream will require time, work and patience on my part.

Another of my dreams is for my parents, even though they aren't together, to start talking to each other normally and to sit down together at one table. I dream about us not having dilemmas such as who will arrive at my niece's, i.e. their granddaughter's, birthday party first. I dream about travelling, about month-long holidays during which I can go somewhere and not worry about anything.

I dream about renovating my home. However, since I'm an interior designer and am constantly involved in renovations for my clients, if I start thinking about renovating my own place I immediately go off the idea.

I also dream about learning to sing. I have a good sense of rhythm because I danced for many years. But when I

need to combine my voice with music, it isn't so easy. I hope that the LGBT+ choir Krakofonia, which I've just been accepted into, will help me get as much as possible out of my baritone voice. Fortunately Krakofonia rehearsals for baritones take place at the DOM EQ centre, so I know exactly where I need to go.

And finally, I dream about everyone being friendly to each other, about everyone living in the real world, and not in our own imaginations, thinking about ourselves and our own surroundings

Łukasz Siemieniec was talking to Mateusz Gędźba



author: Karol Potęski



Fundacja
Kultura dla Tolerancji

The Culture for Tolerance Foundation

In 2019 this foundation spread some glitter with The Only Drag Queen Revue in Krakow. "Diamonds of the Night", for that is the title of the fifth edition of the revue, produced by Henryk Pasiut from the FARO Entertainment Agency, has been giving sell-out performances since its October premier. The Revue is sure to make you happy, it guarantees good fun, it'll stir emotions and at times it'll make you think. It's different every time, every time it's special, and it's always colourful. After shows you can have unforgettable conversations with the artistes — often until the early hours, which these days is rather unusual.

In 2019 the public had the opportunity see the drag queens in a place other than the stage of Barakah Theatre — which we consider to be an enormous success on our part. They appeared in front of TV cameras and performed in programmes such as "Let's sing: All Together Now" and "You look familiar" on the TV channel Polsat. They also took part in meetings, artistic events and congresses, first and foremost revealing the secrets of the art of drag. Last year the foundation supported the show "My Way, My Dream, My Life", whose premier took place in June 2019. Papina McQueen was the star of the show and she was accompanied by two dancers. Papina talked about the beginning of her career, her adventures on the stage and how she made her dreams come true, she sang, she danced, she made you laugh and cry. 2020 will be special for the organisation — Culture for Tolerance celebrates its 15th birthday! However, our plans will remain a secret for the time being. When asked about 2020, Oskar Fusek answered slightly tongue in cheek: "It'll be very nice — we'll put together the next revue and look for some decent external funding". We can expect that The Only Drag Queen Revue in Poland to be fabulous and that we'll continue to be involved in LGBT+ issues.

A collection that will help provide counselling

The Collins dictionary defines shame as "an uncomfortable feeling that you get when you have done something wrong or embarrassing". As a result of feelings such as loneliness, shame and circumstances that it's often accompanied by, 70% of young LGBT+ people in Poland have had suicidal thoughts. It's difficult to say how many teenagers take their own lives, because often the family itself is ashamed to reveal the reason for



author: Joanna Rozworska



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Stowarzyszenie
Tęczówka

The "Tęczówka" Association

This Katowice organisation which works for the LGBT+ community invites you to join them and encourages you to join their initiative "From shame to help", set up with young LGBT+ people in mind. teczowka.org.pl – kontakt@teczowka.org.pl – [@stowarzyszenie.teczowka](https://www.instagram.com/stowarzyszenie.teczowka)



Social group

Do you like playing board games or watching films in a safe environment? Do you want to meet interesting people and simply meet and chat? Join the LGBT+ people at Tęczówka. Find out more and sign up for the Friday meeting(s) of your choice: lgbtgrupa@teczowka.org.pl



Babie Kato

A group for all women who love women. Join us, let's create an open and safe community of women together. We've created a place where we can get to know each other, integrate and share experiences. Write to us: babiekato@teczowka.org.pl



Rainbow Families

A group for everyone who lives in a rainbow family. Do you have children, or are you planning to have them? Come along and let's create a safe place together where you and your children can get to know other families, spend some time together, share experiences and make new contacts. Write to us: teczowerozdziny@teczowka.org.pl

their child's suicide. It's such a short word, yet it expresses an enormous fear of life.

As LGBT+ people we spend a long time ashamed that they'll discover, that they'll find out about our "different" orientation (in their opinion a "worse" one). Once they've found out, the insults, the bullying and the physical violence begin. At home we hear words that really hurt, such as "pervert" or that "it can be cured". Sometimes we don't talk about ourselves at all and we shut this feeling inside ourselves to such an extent that it begins to destroy us from within and pushes us over the edge, but it affects the whole of our adult lives. After all, no one says out loud that it's OK to be non-heterosexual. Some people will say that you're not the only one in the family who has problems. But when you grow up and experience your first broken heart, hurt, separation and disappointment, no-one's going to say that life is sometimes like that and that you only need a few tools to be able to cope with it.

What are we collecting for?

We're collecting money because we want to fulfil our dreams: we want to make counselling available to all LGBT+ people and their families who need it. We believe that every one of us has the right to a life in which we feel good about ourselves and the right to love without feeling ashamed.

We're collecting money in order to be able to:

- continue to provide free counselling,
- run support groups for transgender and LGB people,
- organise a series of free themed workshops for LGBT+ people, which will be led by a counsellor,
- create a list of friendly therapists and counsellors in Silesia,
- create educational materials,
- train our therapists, so they become even better at what they do.

Help us provide help!

Each of us has had a moment in life when we felt ashamed. Maybe it was an unpleasant feeling in our stomach or waves of unpleasant warmth, across our face. Maybe the world started spinning around us for a moment and swarms of thoughts wanted to rip our head apart from inside. Even now this memory surely makes us feel uncomfortable. And now imagine this one moment turning into days, weeks, months, even years.

Now you know how important your support is.

Bank Milenium 53 1160 2202 0000 0002 1234 9437
Transfer title: Darowizna na wsparcie psychologiczne
Online initiative: <https://zrutka.pl/z8xuac>



One World

An HIV/AIDS prevention and support association
This Krakow organisation has been heavily involved in dealing with the problem of chemsex — for although the name sounds rather exotic and is associated with 21st-century club culture, it is a serious issue here and now. It seems chemsex itself is neither a new nor a secret phenomenon. Currently there are disputes about how broadly it should be defined — to put it simply, chemsex is defined as sexual contact under the influence of psychoactive substances. Recent research has focussed on a narrow class of substances and has been guided by how popular they are (for example mephedrone, ketamine, methamphetamine). The effect of these drugs is that they heighten the senses, remove barriers and prolong the sexual act. You can become addicted to them. One also hears about chemsex more and more often in the context of the LGBT+ community, but for a long time we didn't know how to tackle this issue in Poland.

In 2019 The State Hygiene Department of the National Institute for Public Health conducted a research project "Chemsex in Poland — an all-Poland study into chemsex among men who have sex with men". The aim of this research was to estimate the scale of chemsex in Poland, including in the context of the spread of STDs among people who practise chemsex, and to identify what is needed in terms of infection prevention methods, addiction treatment and preventative intervention.

The tests took place in several cities at the same time and were coordinated by various people. In Krakow testing was carried out at the Monar clinic and at the DOM EQ centre — which was made possible by the kindness and helpfulness of the coordinators — thank you very much for your support!

If you happen to use chems or have chemsex and feel you'd like to chat to someone about it or you'd like some other type of help, below you'll find some institutions who will do this in a professional and non-judgemental way:

- The Monar Association Clinic for Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Therapy in Krakow – ul. św. Katarzyny 3, 31-063 Kraków
- Day Ward for the Treatment of Addictions O/K Psychiatrii for Adults, Children and Young People, University Hospital Krakow – ul. Olszańska 5, 31-315 Kraków
- Lesser Poland Centre for Addiction Therapy and Psychological Help – ul. Szlak 26/11, 31-153 Kraków

- Clean Beats Project – czystebity@monar.krakow.pl
- Krakow Addiction Therapy Centre – ul. Wielicka 73, 33-332 Kraków
- After Party – 577 756 743, afterpartyfes@gmail.com

Useful addresses: meskiebranie.pl, chemsex.pl, skaids.org