

As part of the Visual Voices project I launched my own women's group in May 2025 at BMSZKI's Women's Night Shelter on Dózsa György Road.

Since we operate as a night shelter, which technically means a one-day legal stay, the first challenge was selecting the women who would participate in the group. Unfortunately, there were many exclusion criteria—not aimed at the individuals themselves, but due to mental health or physical conditions that would have made it difficult for them to attend at a scheduled time or work together for several hours. It helped somewhat that our shelter has a special 24-hour unit, where female residents tend to stay longer and more consistently. I also received support from Évi Donkóné, a staff member at the Origóc Day Center, who tried to delegate clients from daytime services to the program. We agreed to try involving someone who had spent a longer time living on the streets.



A complication arose when two clients who had initially signed up for the group suddenly moved out of the shelter. As a social worker, I was genuinely happy about their move—it was a success story—but as the group leader, I was sincerely sorry that I wouldn't get to work with these two very creative women.

Luckily, I quickly found two new participants, and along with two of my female colleagues, we soon began our work together. During the first session, I led a group just with the two colleagues, where we discussed the topic of women's safety and their feelings around it. We reflected on how to express our thoughts through images and took some photos together. My colleague from the day center also enthusiastically participated in the photography; she symbolically captured the winding staircase leading down

into the day shelter in a particularly evocative way.

During the first session with clients, they opened up quickly. For one woman, it was a real breakthrough—she said it was the first time in her life she felt truly listened to. Her statements like "I'm stupid" and "I'm ugly" (she only agreed to speak with her hood up) came from a deep place, and she opened up in a supportive environment. Symbolically, by the end of the group session, she removed her hood—and hasn't worn her hoodie like that since!

After discussing the topic of safety, we distributed the cameras and explored the technical side of photography while enjoying snacks and tea. During later shifts, clients happily told me where they were planning to go that day to take pictures; they visited their chosen locations in small groups or alone. It was wonderful to hear that on a sunny Sunday they "just" walked around the city and took photos.



At the second session, we uploaded all the photos into a shared folder and reviewed them together. They couldn't stop telling stories—ranging from childhood memories to recent events. One of the participants found a job during the program, so I sat down with her separately one morning to talk about what and why she had photographed certain things. I

asked them all to try to put their thoughts into words. We agreed that during the next session, we would focus on this—using words to give us a glimpse into their inner world, to explain why, for example, a particular park or bed appeared in their photos.

By Boglárka Györffy, social worker

