

# ***MAD THINKING***

## **Our 2025 Report**

December 2025

## A Year of Beginnings

**2025 marked the first year of Mad Thinking.** We began in April, reaching full operational capacity in June. It has been a year of beginnings: ideas taking shape, systems being set up, conversations opening, and connections forming across geographies, movements, and struggles.

When we launched this initiative, we did so out of a shared conviction that disability organising needs space for critical reflection, collective learning, and solidarity across struggles — in ways that centre lived experience and nurture interdependence. Over the past months, that conviction has not only been confirmed, but also renewed.

We have learned so much from the activists, thinkers, and organisers who joined us in conversations about power and care, resistance and resilience, strategy and hope. From our *Disability Activism Under Pressure* webinar series to the *Disability & Solidarity Symposium*, we were part of conversations about what building power through solidarity and collective care looks like in practice.

This year reminded us how important it is to create spaces where people can connect and think with one another, and where disability and Mad movements are part of broader struggles for justice, freedom, and collective liberation.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed time, ideas, critique, and care to these beginnings. What we learned from you continues to shape how we think, organise, and move into the year ahead.

This report documents our first year, marked by planning, strategising, collective learning, and ambitious dreaming — as well as unfinished work. It is a humble reminder that building power requires both thinkers and doers, and constant attention to how ideas become action.

With gratitude and solidarity,

**Akriti & Alberto**

## Who We Are

Mad Thinking is an initiative that creates spaces, tools, and opportunities to think collectively about power, leadership, organisational strength, and solidarity, with the aim of contributing to stronger, more inclusive disability and Mad movements. We work across borders and contexts, supporting reflection, learning, and organising rooted in lived experience.

We are committed to connecting disability and Mad activism with broader social justice struggles — including feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, queer, and anti-authoritarian movements. Mad Thinking seeks to challenge dominant ways of organising and to re-imagine how movements are built, sustained, and exercised.

### Our Values

Mad Thinking is grounded in disability justice, solidarity, and collective liberation. We understand disability struggles as inseparable from broader struggles against exclusion, inequality, and oppression. We are an intersectional, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-racist, trans and queer inclusive, justice-based space. We resist hierarchical and extractive models of organising and remain accountable to movements rather than institutions.

### How We Are Organised

Mad Thinking follows a shared leadership model, with two co-directors. We are registered in Geneva, Switzerland, as an association and are supported by a Board of three members with diverse experience and backgrounds, who provide collective oversight and guidance. The initiative is intentionally small and run by the two co-directors, allowing us to remain flexible and closely connected to the day-to-day work. For administrative and financial purposes, Mad Thinking operates with the support of the Center for Inclusive Policy (CIP) as our fiscal sponsor.

### How We Work

Our approach is grounded in dialogue, critique, and collaboration with disabled and Mad activists, and in an ongoing effort to connect analysis with action across regions and struggles. In practice, this includes convening learning and organising spaces — such as symposia, webinars, workshops, and publications — that support collective reflection, strategy, and solidarity-building.

## What We Worked On

Over the course of our first year, Mad Thinking focused on convening spaces for connection, reflection, and collective learning. The work below reflects a mix of planned initiatives and opportunities that emerged through relationships, dialogue, and shared concerns.

### Launching Mad Thinking

Mad Thinking was officially launched in April alongside the Global Disability Summit in Berlin, with a small dinner convening disability organisers and allies. Co-organised with the Ford Foundation, the gathering focused on strengthening connections and solidarity for disability organising, and set the tone for Mad Thinking as a space for honest conversation, relationship-building, and shared reflection.

### “Disability Activism Under Pressure” Webinar Series

Our six-part webinar series, [\*Disability Activism Under Pressure: Resistance and Resilience in Authoritarian Contexts\*](#), brought together activists and organisers from different movements to examine organising under authoritarian rule and in shrinking civic spaces. The sessions reached a wide global audience, with more than 500 people registering. Reflections and summaries were shared after each webinar through *La Yapa*, extending the conversations beyond the sessions themselves.

### The Disability & Solidarity Symposium

We hosted two back-to-back rounds of the *Disability & Solidarity Symposium*, bringing together 19 disability organisers from different regions. Drawing on the methodology of the *Symposium on Strength and Solidarity for Human Rights*, the Symposium aims to create a protected space for candid conversations about power, solidarity, collective care, leadership, and movement direction — deliberately free from donor or institutional presence. At its core was a shared commitment to building stronger, more strategic disability movements.

### Solidarity Against Criminalisation and Institutionalisation

In November, Mad Thinking, together with the Centre for Mental Health, Human Rights, and Social Justice, and the International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy at the University of Essex, held a global workshop on solidarity against criminalisation and institutionalisation. Over 30 activists, organisers, and researchers working at the intersections of disability, mental health, harm reduction, homelessness, and criminalisation came together to analyse shared threats and explore collective responses to securitisation, medicalisation, and institutionalisation.

### Bridging Ageing and Disability Advocacy

Together with the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) and partners from the disability sector, we started an exchange in December between ageing and disability advocates to support mutual learning relevant to the drafting of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. The exchange focuses on lessons from the CRPD process, shared advocacy strategies, and opportunities for coordinated action between the two movements.

### A Bit of Writing

Alongside convening and facilitation, we published a small number of written pieces reflecting on disability organising, authoritarianism, solidarity, and movement strategy. These texts appeared both on the [Mad Thinking website](#) and in [external platforms](#). While writing has always been central to our work, this first year reminded us how difficult it is to protect time for it

alongside other forms of organising. We intend to strengthen this work in the year ahead as part of our commitment to writing as a political practice.

### **Support to WNUSP**

Mad Thinking supported the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUSP) through a report reflecting on global challenges and strategic priorities, which informed conversations about renewal, movement strategy, and future directions.

### **Engaging Across Spaces and Processes**

Over the year, Mad Thinking engaged with people and processes across movement, academic, and policy spaces. This included the Global Disability Summit 2025, the 16th International Disability Law Summer School at the University of Galway, the Brocher Foundation Workshop on corruption in mental health, the Expert Advisory Group for the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy evaluation, and the newly formed Group of Friends on Cultural Rights of Persons with Disabilities, co-chaired by Cyprus, Iraq, Italy, Mexico, and Montenegro.

### **The WHEELING Grant Simulator**

Alongside our webinar series, we launched [WHEELING](#), a satirical website designed to draw attention to structural barriers, extractive practices, and contradictions in disability funding processes, using humour and critique to reflect shared frustrations across movements.

### **Building Partnerships and Foundations**

Our first year was also about building relationships and putting basic structures in place. We developed partnerships with organisations, universities, and private foundations aligned with our values, undertook our first fundraising efforts — with both successes and setbacks — and completed essential internal steps such as constitution, registration, governance arrangements, and key organisational policies.

## What This Work Was For

In our first year, Mad Thinking focused less on scale or visibility and more on creating the conditions for connection, reflection, and reckoning within and beyond disability spaces.

### **For Connection Across People and Movements**

Through symposia, webinars, workshops, and exchanges, our work was about bringing disability and Mad activists into conversation across regions, movements, generations, and political contexts. These were not intended as project-driven encounters, but as attempts to create spaces where trust, recognition, shared analysis, and mutual learning could emerge across struggles that are often siloed.

### **For Honest and Difficult Conversations**

We tried to open space for conversations that are often marginalised or avoided in institutional and traditional settings: about power dynamics, leadership, collective care, conflict, and solidarity. We aim to continue building spaces that allow for candour, disagreement, and collective reflection.

### **For Renewed Strategy and Clarity Among Activists**

Rather than offering solutions or toolkits, we sought to support activists in reflecting on strategy and tactics, situating their experiences within broader political patterns, and reconnecting with why they organise. We paid particular attention to lived experience, especially from activists in the global South, and to question how our practices might reproduce harmful, extractive, or colonial dynamics — and how to resist that.

### **For New Narratives and Political Imagination**

This work was also about experimenting with writing, humour, and satire as political tools, aiming to challenge dominant narratives and open conversations about power, funding, and professionalisation within movements.

Overall, this first year of work was for holding space, testing ideas, and building relationships, laying the groundwork for what comes next.

## Looking Ahead

As Mad Thinking moves into its second year, our focus is on deepening the work we have begun. We want to build with intention, care, and connection.

### Priorities For The Year Ahead

In the coming year, we aim to strengthen our writing as a core part of Mad Thinking's work, including reflective essays and case studies grounded in activist experience. We also plan to expand the *Disability & Solidarity Symposium*, develop new webinar series, and create additional spaces for connection and exchange among activists across regions and struggles. Alongside this, we want to amplify the reach of our work without losing its relational and movement-rooted character.

### Questions We Want to Keep Asking

Looking ahead, we remain preoccupied with questions that feel increasingly urgent for movements: What role can disability organisers play as the international order shifts and multiple simultaneous crises deepen? How do we organise under growing authoritarianism and shrinking civic space? How do we practise intentional solidarity? How do we build power across difference? How do we build alliances and navigate disagreements without compromising core values? How do we sustain movements without reproducing harm, exhaustion, professionalisation, or exclusion? And how do we keep imagination and hope alive while responding to very real threats?

### What We Want to Strengthen or Do Differently

This first year underscored the importance of protecting time for writing, reflection, and follow-up — and of being realistic about what a small team can hold. It also highlighted gaps we need to address. In the year ahead, we want to strengthen accessibility beyond disability alone, including language, formats, and modes of participation. We also aim to work more closely with grassroots activists, whose experiences of organising often differ significantly from those operating primarily at international or policy levels.

### An Invitation

Mad Thinking exists through collaboration. We welcome conversations with activists, organisers, researchers, and allies who are interested in thinking, learning, and organising together — and who share a commitment to solidarity, care, and collective liberation. If this work resonates with you, we invite you to [stay connected](#), collaborate, and help shape what comes next.

## Thank You

Mad Thinking exists because of the time, trust, generosity, and care of many people.

We are deeply grateful to the partners who worked alongside us and helped shape spaces of learning and exchange. We are also thankful to our board members, colleagues, and friends who offered guidance, perspective, and challenge when we needed it most. We thank the Ford Foundation and the Robert Bosch Stiftung for trusting a new initiative and allowing us to work with independence.

Above all, we thank the activists, organisers, and participants who showed up — with curiosity, honesty, vulnerability, disagreement, humour, and hope — and who trusted us with their experiences and reflections. Your work, wisdom, and courage are what give Mad Thinking meaning.

We also want to acknowledge the often invisible labour that sustains this work: families, loved ones, and friends who make movement work possible in the first place.

Thank you all for being part of it.