

STREETWORK! GOOD PRACTICE 2015

Czech and foreign
experiences from
work in low threshold
social services



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STREETWORK! GOOD PRACTICE 2015

Czech and foreign
experiences from
work in low threshold
social services

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Published as a part of "Improvement of Quality of Low Threshold Social Services through Sharing of Good Practice in Select EU Countries" project (registration number CZ.1.04/5.1.01/77.00230).

This project is funded by HRE OP – ESF.

Published by Česká asociace streetwork o.s. (ČAS), 2015

ISBN: 978-80-905069-4-7

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Dear reader,

The book you have just opened follows our previous title 'Good Practice' published by the Czech Streetwork Association in 2011. Again we try to offer to our readers a mixture of practical as well as theoretical insights and experiences of people working in low-threshold services. The book does not aim to be a comprehensive and sophisticated overview of methods and 'how to' instructions. Rather, it is a loose collection of contributions written by low threshold social services workers who are reflecting on their work, who are creative and willing to test and share new methods. We intended to bring together a collection of innovations and describe the current trends in the development of low threshold services. We hope it will inspire and enrich the further development of work with the users of these services.

This book is published as a part of HREOP ESF funded project 'Improvement of Quality of Low Threshold Social Services through Sharing of Good Practice in Select EU Countries' (CZ.1.04/5.1.01/77.00230). The project aimed to deepen international cooperation, establish new contacts, and to bring new findings and perspectives to the Czech Republic. In practice this meant organising five internships – selected social workers from the Czech Republic visited low threshold social services in nearby as well as more remote countries. Moreover, two international seminars and two international conferences were held as a part of the project. Since we also wanted to provide space for innovative projects and ideas from our country, we issued a call for papers to Czech and Slovak social workers. A selection of the best submissions is contained in this book.

One of the strategic objectives of Czech Streetwork Association is active international cooperation. We are aware of the importance of the ability to confront our practices and methods with those that work elsewhere, of discovering which of the foreign experiences can and which cannot be adopted in our country, and perhaps even confirming that in some areas we are a step ahead. Throughout the project we have become more and more certain that this is the correct path – a path on which the Association should stay in the further development of its activities.

We believe that we have managed to select interesting texts for this book and that we have met our objectives. We believe that in each of these texts you can find inspiration, ideas to reflect upon, or even an entire project that awaits implementation.

We hope you will enjoy reading this book and we look forward our future joint discoveries.

Thanks to all those who participated in this publication, and especially to the authors who had the courage, energy, and desire to 'go out on a limb'.

Helena Kotová, Chairperson of the Governing Board
Martina Zikmundová, Executive Director

Part I

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM BOHEMIA, MORAVIA, AND SLOVAKIA

The first Good Practice publication was published four years ago. We believe that since that time the field of low threshold social services has undergone many changes and adjustments, new projects have been launched and new practices and methods of work with the users of the services have been introduced.

Therefore we addressed the member social service facilities associated with the Czech Streetwork Association with a call for papers for a new publication. In this part of the present volume, we offer you a collection of the submissions that have been selected by the editorial board as inspiring examples of good practice. We hope that they will become a source of inspiration, food for thought, and perhaps even a starting point for fruitful discussions. However, those texts that have not been selected for the publication in this volume will not go to waste as we will be gradually publishing them on our website **www.streetwork.cz**.

Section 1

WORK WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH
AND YOUNG ADULTS

OPENING INTIMATE TOPICS BY ANONYMOUS QUESTIONS A.K.A TOILET AS A SPACE FOR CONTACT WITH THE CLIENT

...

Zuzana Guryčová

INTRODUCTION

When working with people, staff are not always in the role of expert or teacher. Often, the staff take on the role of pupils of their clients, trying to learn something from them and move forwards in their perception of different situations. It was the NZDM (low-threshold facility for children and youth) PVC Blansko clients and their needs that inspired me to the idea of working with an anonymous question box placed in the toilets.

It all started with the case of a NZDM PVC client. She had casual sex and the condom burst. She then encountered problems while trying to get Postinor 2 at the pharmacy. Only then did I realise that many other clients might come across similar problems. I conducted a survey on sexual behaviour among the clients, focusing on the start of their sexual lives, high-risk sex, use of condoms/birth control and visits to gynaecologists. The survey results are briefly summarised below.

The survey helped us to move our specific prevention to sex, but we still did not have enough information. The important questions remained unanswered: What are the real concerns/interests of our clients? What is it they are afraid of and don't know how to ask? What is taboo for them? What is it that they fear?

We considered many options on how to get the answers and the result was the installation of a box in the toilet area, which is used by the clients for anonymous questions. All questions are consequently answered in writing by a member of the staff.

The following text elaborates not only on the client's sex behaviour survey, but also about the form of communication with the clients through the anonymous toilet box.

NZDM CLIENTS SEX BEHAVIOUR SURVEY OUTPUTS

The survey was conducted in NZDM PVC in Blansko in November 2013. A total of 44 clients participated in the survey. The average age of individuals participating in the survey was 17.4 years for boys and 16.3 years for girls. A total of 39 respondents were sexually active.

The survey results are presented below (only brief conclusions are presented in view of the fact that this text does not primarily focus on the survey):

- ✎ 48% of respondents stated that they had their first sexual experience before 15 years of age;
- ✎ 33% of boys and 5% of girls did not use a condom/birth control during their first intercourse;
- ✎ the most frequently used protection during sex is a condom followed by hormonal birth control pills;
- ✎ there is a link between a visit to a gynaecologist and the type of birth control/protection used; 67% of girls who had an examination by gynaecologist used hormonal birth control pills;

- ✎ 19% of girls have used Postinor/Escapelle; in one case Postinor was provided to a girl under 16 years of age;
- ✎ girls behave in a less risky manner compared to boys; 52% of female respondents used a condom/birth control every time they had sex; only 22% of boys used a condom/birth control every time they had sex;
- ✎ of all survey participants, 89% of girls had sex first and only then visited a gynaecologist.

The survey results provided information for improvement of specific prevention in our low-threshold club. Sex prevention topics are currently more divided according to our client's age. Prevention for younger clients (13 – 15 years) is more focused on an information service. We dispel the myths in the area of sexual behaviour within the framework of our prevention efforts and provide the clients with objective information related to sex. The goal is to improve their knowledge before they start their own sexual life, with the ultimate aim to minimise related risks. We try to motivate girls to visit a gynaecologist before their first sexual experience and influence their attitude towards birth control/condom use. When it comes to older clients (over 15 years), who are already sexually active, we focus mainly on their attitude towards safe sex and their skills. Our experience indicates that the clients who participated in the sex prevention program in our club possess a sufficient volume of information so that it is no longer necessary to provide them with an information service, as it is the case of clients under 15 years of age.

TOILET AS A SPACE FOR INDIRECT CONTACT WITH THE CLIENT

Individual NZDM (or contact centres) differ in many aspects. However, there is one thing in common. Each and every facility has a space that is used by each and every client in total privacy. The toilet is in this particular case perceived as the only part of the club where clients can be alone and enjoy absolute privacy while not being monitored. And what does this mean? A toilet can easily become the most suitable place in the entire facility for indirect work with the clients.

Possible indirect work tools to be used in the toilet area:

- ✎ information notice board with flyers (concerning topics that might be taboo for the clients – such as unwanted pregnancy, periods, masturbation, gynaecological and urological disorders);
- ✎ information about discussions with experts (gynaecologist/urologist), questions and answers mentioned during the discussion;
- ✎ contact information for experts from the area of gynaecology/urology, venereal diseases (information who to contact in case of concern);
- ✎ contact information of anonymous advisory centres in the area of gynaecology/urology, sexual violence, etc.;
- ✎ a box for anonymous questions from the clients;
- ✎ space for answers to anonymous questions raised by the clients.

Toilet and its communication tools spark interest among the clients and motivate them to ask anonymous questions or discuss the matters with staff members directly. At the same time it is important to make sure the room is not crammed with too much information, because this would “beat up” the client and prevent them from getting curious. It proved very efficient to place a “guidepost” in the toilet that concisely informs the client about where to find the respective information and how can he/she make use of the tools offered.

For example, the “guidepost” can read: While seated, you will find... on your right hand side. To your left, you can find... Feel free to use the wash basin, toilet paper, bin, etc. :-)

ANONYMOUS QUESTIONS BOX

How does it work?

The box for anonymous questions from our clients was put into our toilet facilities back in 2013. At first, we installed the box only in the women's toilets, however, we added one box to the men's toilet slightly later. Each box is placed in a visible place with paper and writing tools for anonymous questions attached.

Once the club closes, the responsible staff member checks the boxes – questions are collected every day. The responsible staff member then answers the questions in writing as soon as possible – the clients are informed within a week at the latest that they will get an answer. Answers in writing are posted publicly in the toilet premises. Therefore, the answers impact all clients and not only the anonymous inquirer. The goal of publicly posted written answers is to instigate the other clients to ask other questions. At the same time, we strive to communicate that they are not the only ones who deals with similar issues. Public answers also inform other readers and draw their attention to the fact that they should also resolve their own situation although they might think they do not have such a problem.

Box benefits – benefits of indirect work with the clients

- ✎ we are creating/strengthening the feeling of trust and respect within the club (clients realize that we respect them and that nobody is condemning them for being curious);
- ✎ we also work with clients who have not formed their relationship with the staff members yet and are unwilling to share their personal/intimate topics directly;
- ✎ we also work with our long-standing clients who are unwilling to discuss intimate topics (for example boys with erection problems);
- ✎ we can address issues that are taboo for our clients; they have never addressed these issues, but are helpless at the same time (for example masturbation, gynaecological disorders, periods);
- ✎ we also address issues the clients are afraid to ask about simply because they feel embarrassed (for example excess perspiration, why one should regularly change underwear);
- ✎ as long as we know what are our clients are interested in, we can improve specific prevention in a way that addresses their needs.

Box disadvantages

Since the questions in the box are anonymous one cannot ask additional questions and clarify how the client meant his question. It is also impossible to verify whether or not the answer was comprehensible and sufficient. Illegible questions (bad handwriting) are also a problem.

How to formulate answers

We have elaborated a set of rules and recommendations for the box over time as well as the format of answers to our client's questions. Below you will find a brief summary of our observations and findings related to written answers.

✎ You need to make a team decision prior to the installation of the box as to whether only one staff member shall answer the anonymous questions from the clients all the time. Furthermore, you need to determine whether or not you need a male staff member to answer questions from the boys and a female staff member to answer questions from the girls. You also need to agree whether the staff member's name will be mentioned in the answer or not. There are pros and cons – for example: if you decide only one staff member shall answer the questions, he/she may fall victim to stereotype over some time, missing the important signals. On the other hand if you only have one staff member answering the questions, it is easier for him/her to find his/her way in all the issues.

✎ Each and every question needs to be perceived with due respect. It is not suitable to consider client's question a joke or play it down in any way. Work on the assumption that even a 'trivial' question (from your point of view) is meant seriously by the inquirer. If you do get a question such as 'I am bleeding down there. What should I do?' the staff member may consider this question a joke by a female client, which might in turn be reflected in the quality of the answer. However, this question might have come from a thirteen-year-old girl who's never been told anything about menses before and this completely changes your approach towards the answer. You never know who is asking, hence you should take all questions seriously and approach them with due respect.

✎ The answers shall briefly summarise the question in the opening part (e.g. “You wrote that...”). If possible, it is helpful to reassure the client by emphasising that he/she is not the only one who has experienced the respective problem. Furthermore, it is advisable to reassure the client that the issue is absolutely normal and that he/she will not be alone to resolve it. The ultimate goal is to ease the situation and the inquirer while indicating that there is a solution available.

✎ The answer to any question shall be brief and concise (depending on the type of question, of course), e.g. half a page maximum. Furthermore, it is important to outline possible solutions to the situation or issue in question. The more real solutions you mention, the better. Moreover, the answer shall contain clear information about how the staff members can help the client. In other words, you can mention in the answer that there are counselling, pregnancy tests or free condoms available.

✎ You can insert pictures in your answer in order to make the answer easy to understand for your clients. This is recommended especially when the question pertains to sexual organs, erotic zones, etc.

✎ The closing of the answer shall contain a brief summary and offer of individual counselling with a staff member of the client's choice. It is important to mention that the counselling is strictly anonymous and all interviews are strictly private. At the same time it is advisable to respect that the client has opted for indirect communication with the staff members, hence you should offer this possibility of contact again.

✎ You need to carefully think about each and every question, trying to find out what the inquirer had in mind when drawing it up. You can come across questions with many different meanings. It is advisable to take this into consideration while drawing up the answer. For example, the following question can be understood in two different ways. ‘Hello! Is it possible I am pregnant when I had my period twice?’. 1) The client is asking whether she can get pregnant despite the fact that she has only had two periods in her life. 2) The client is asking whether she can be pregnant despite the fact that she has had two periods since the intercourse (breakthrough bleeding is common in pregnant women). Therefore you should answer both possible versions of the question since you do not know who raised the question and you might not get a second chance to communicate with that particular client.

Box in numbers

We have answered 35 questions since the introduction of the box.

Type of question	Number of questions
Bodily issues (gynaecological, size of genitals and breasts, venereal diseases)	8
Partnership relations (conflicts, meeting others, break-ups)	7
Sexual practices and techniques (erotic zones, how to satisfy my partner, oral sex)	5
Menses	4
Masturbation	3
Friendship	2
Virginity	2
Pregnancy	2
Weight loss	2

Sample question

Anonymous question:

When will I finally get IT!? I am 13.

Answer:

Hello, hello!

You probably can't wait to get IT! (your first period). You say you are 13. May be you feel you should have a regular period. Do you think you already should have experienced your first period?

Don't worry, there's no rush. Every girl's body is evolving in its own unique way and it is very common that

girls experience their first period only when they turn 15, for example. So you've got plenty of time and your body is certainly developing in a standard manner.

However, it is good to watch out for the signals your body will send and get ready for your first period.

Below you will find a list of signals your body will send approximately one year prior to your first period:

- Your breasts will get bigger;

- Hair will start to grow down there as well as in your armpits;

- White liquid with no odour comes out of your vagina;

If you have already observed any of the aforementioned signals, you are on your way to becoming a woman and your first period shall occur within a year.

Some girls experience their first period at the same age as their mothers. So if you want to know better when to expect your first period, ask your mother.

It's good to be prepared for your period. If your breasts are getting bigger, your pubic hair is growing or you get a white vaginal discharge from time to time, carry a sanitary towel with you so the first period does not surprise you. You also might feel backache, tummy pain, a headache or be a bit grumpy shortly before your period. So these would be yet more signals to watch out for indicating your first period is coming.

So no worries, your body is doing fine. You will certainly get “IT”.

In case you need more information or advice, female club staff members are here for you. Or you can use the ladies toilet question box again.

PS: There are free sanitary towels and tampons available for all girls visiting the club so if you need one or two, no problem. Just ask a female member of staff.

Hope everything works out fine for you and it's worth your wait!

CONCLUSION

This text describes indirect communication with clients by means of a box for anonymous questions. This form of communication is used in NZDM PVC and is based on the culture of trust, openness and mutual respect between staff members and clients. The club puts the emphasis on social work in particular – counselling and individual work with the clients. Leisure activities are only one of the tools used to establish our contact with the clients. However, the question is: How this form of communication (box for anonymous questions) can work in a club with a different culture. There are a number of possibilities:

- ✎ The box will not be used by the clients simply because the atmosphere in the club is set up in a way that the clients are not used to sharing their problems with the staff members nor they are interested to do so;
- ✎ The clients will use the box as the only form of communication (counselling) with the staff members;
- ✎ The box will influence the atmosphere of the club to such an extent that even direct communication between the clients and staff members will be formed/improved and the clients will start to make use of counselling with direct staff member communication respectively.

Contact: NZDM PVC, Blansko, Podané ruce, o.p.s., <http://pvcklub.podaneruce.cz/>

SOCIALIZATION APPROACH IN THE WORK WITH CHILDREN IN EXCLUDED LOCALITIES

...

Marcela Bucháčková, Zuzana Túčková

INTRODUCTION

"The real discovery does not lie in the search for new lands but in a different view of reality".

(Marcel Proust)

This text is intended particularly for our colleagues, social workers working in low-threshold facilities for children and youth (drop-in centres) in socially excluded localities. It presents our own concept of social work in the NZDM environment, which is based on building self-confidence and supporting the socialization process. It is a concept that projects from our organisation's culture and individual methods of work and thus actively supports the empowerment and enabling of the clients¹, even though they themselves did not apply for it. We have recently completed a year of the successful application of the concept and thus we cannot yet speak about its impact on our adolescent clients, but we would like to inspire other social workers and hope we might incite discussions about the following question: What do our clients really need to know to overcome their specific and unfavourable starting situations and how can we be beneficial for them in our social work at NZDM? We believe that after the seven years that have passed since the establishment of the NZDM social service, we are facing a new era in which we should take a pro-active approach to the solution of these issues, assume our own positions, look for new methods of social work with children and share them with other colleagues.

ABOUT OURSELVES

NZDM DROM is one of the social services provided by the Brno allowance organisation DROM, a Roma centre, designated for children from the age of 6 to 20 years.

The year 2013 was particularly important for us as we satisfied ourselves that we had managed to establish a social service which was compliant with quality standards as evidenced by e.g. a very good result of quality assessment performed by the Czech Streetwork Association.²

We started considering the effect our work should have. Despite the fact we had, in our opinion, done everything we could in order to increase our clients' chances for social inclusion, in revising our cooperation with the clients we had not noticed any results that would confirm the meaning of our work.

We decided to think about the clients and our work with them more realistically. We gave up on the idea that without education our clients can never escape social exclusion and gave up the struggle of helping them to overcome the late psycho-motoric development and knowledge inadequate to their given age. Instead we decided to concentrate on the development of social competencies our clients may achieve, which might

1/ We use the term 'client' as a synonym for the social service client in order to unify the concepts: child, youth, applicant for a service, service user.

2/ By fulfilling 94% criteria of the quality defined by the methodology of ČAS Development audit for low threshold facilities and field programmes our team was rated as "passed without comments".

considerably enhance their future independence and give them control over normal life situations. Thus we comply with the objective of social work (Navrátil, 2001).

POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL WORK IN NZDM

According to the definition of the American Association of Social Workers, that we fully agree with, social work generally is "a professional activity helping individuals, groups or communities to improve or restore their social functioning and to create favourable social conditions for the achievement of this goal" (Matoušek and col., 2001, p. 184). The task of a social worker is thus to help his/her client to restore or to achieve skills and information that would enable him/her to manage the requirements of his environment (Matoušek and col., 2001). The Czech Act no. 108/2006 Col. on Social Services defines the Low-threshold Facilities of Children and Youth (NZDM) as one of the social prevention services the objective of which is to help clients overcome their unfavourable social situations³ and protect society from undesirable social phenomena. Article 62 of the same Act defines the following activities of such services:

- a) Instructional, educational and activation activities,
- b) Intermediation of contact with the social environment,
- c) Social therapeutic activities,
- d) Assistance in practical application of rights, legitimate interests and in personal matters.

The Act also defines that NZDM clients may be children young people between 6 and 26 years of age, however, most low-threshold clubs cater for children between 12 and 18 years⁴ of age and those in socially excluded neighbourhoods usually work with children between 6 and 16 years of age. The social work with clients younger than 18 years is specific particularly because these children, in most cases, depend on their parents or families economically as well as emotionally. As for the clients from socially excluded locations, we may say they were born into their unfavourable social situation and due to their age they just cannot influence their family situation and often are not aware of how serious it is. That is why they do not seek 'help' but frequent the low-threshold clubs to participate in leisure time activities, to play with the toys and take the advantage of the possibility to play with their peers. The social work with children and young people in socially excluded neighbourhoods usually takes the form of leisure time activities which we also complement with an instructional and educational dimension. Social workers in NZDM still believe that NZDM should not provide leisure time activities, since these facilities should concentrate on social services unlike Children and Youth's Centres, Arts' Schools and similar institutions providing leisure time activities for children. The leisure time activities should be used only to motivate children's willingness to cooperate with social workers. We ourselves do not condemn leisure time activities – on the contrary, we want to attune our system to children (at least those under 12 years of age) who generally prefer to play. And if we understand play or games as an instrument in promoting a motivated and natural way of learning, in which the client and the social workers become partners (Úlehla, 2005), we want to utilize these instruments as much as possible.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS OF OUR CLIENTS

Since we want to facilitate our clients' inclusion in society, their social situation is of utmost importance for us:

- ✎ Uncertain background caused by long-term unemployment or drug addiction of their parents;
- ✎ Missing parent or parents;
- ✎ Family poverty demonstrated particularly by critical indebtedness, usury threat, overpopulated living quarters, low quality of housing, permanent threat of eviction from the flat;
- ✎ Limited opportunities to spend leisure time in a safe environment;
- ✎ Lack of financial means to participate in leisure time activities, limited offer of such activities in the neighbourhood;

3/ Unfavourable social situation (for the purposes of Act No. 108/2006 Col. On Social Services: weakening or loss of ability caused by age, unfavourable health conditions, critical social situations, life habits and ways of life leading to conflicts with society, socially unfavourable environments, threats to the rights and interests due to other person's criminal activity or other serious reasons requiring a solution that supports social inclusion and protection from social exclusion.

4/ See "Research of low-threshold clubs", Czech Streetwork Association, 2011.

And the related

- ✎ Limited opportunities for the development of competencies required for the success in majority population institutions;
- ✎ Problems at school – performance problems caused by insufficient code of majority population institutions (e.g. language), missed lessons, truancy caused by bad economic situation of the family or unfavourable climate at school, premature end of school attendance;
- ✎ Problems with peers – social isolation, conflicts, bullying, aggressive behaviour, fear of rejection by the peer group;
- ✎ Running away from home;
- ✎ Experiments with addictive substances;
- ✎ Premature sexual activity;
- ✎ Experience of discrimination;
- ✎ Lack of knowledge of majority society institutions, of one's own possibilities, rights and their application.

We work with clients who spend practically all their childhood in socially excluded neighbourhoods and who get to meet their peers and majority society institutions only in adolescence when they start setting out from home. Up to the age of 12 they meet most often only their peers and adults who have lived for several generations in the conditions of social exclusion. That means the clients are 'socialised' (brought up) in the **poverty culture**⁵ adapting the local population to the life in social exclusion conditions while many aspects of behaviour accepted by the poverty culture defy values honoured by the majority population (Lewis, 1996).

The problem is that from a certain age our clients must begin to interact with the wider environment in order to continue in their education, find jobs and become independent of their primary families; that is to gain economic independence and find their own housing. Full integration into the Czech society requires them to learn to understand not only the formal norms governing social behaviour (legislation) but also informal and implicit norms of conduct such as customs or traditions and manners (Výrost, Slaměník, 2008).

Our clients first come into contact with an institution representing informal social behaviour at the age six when they start compulsory school attendance. Most of them attend one of three elementary schools located close to the socially excluded neighbourhood (see Map 1). These schools are currently teaching children mostly from the socially excluded neighbourhood, as middle class parents do not send their children there because of prejudices and fears that the schools do not offer a quality education.

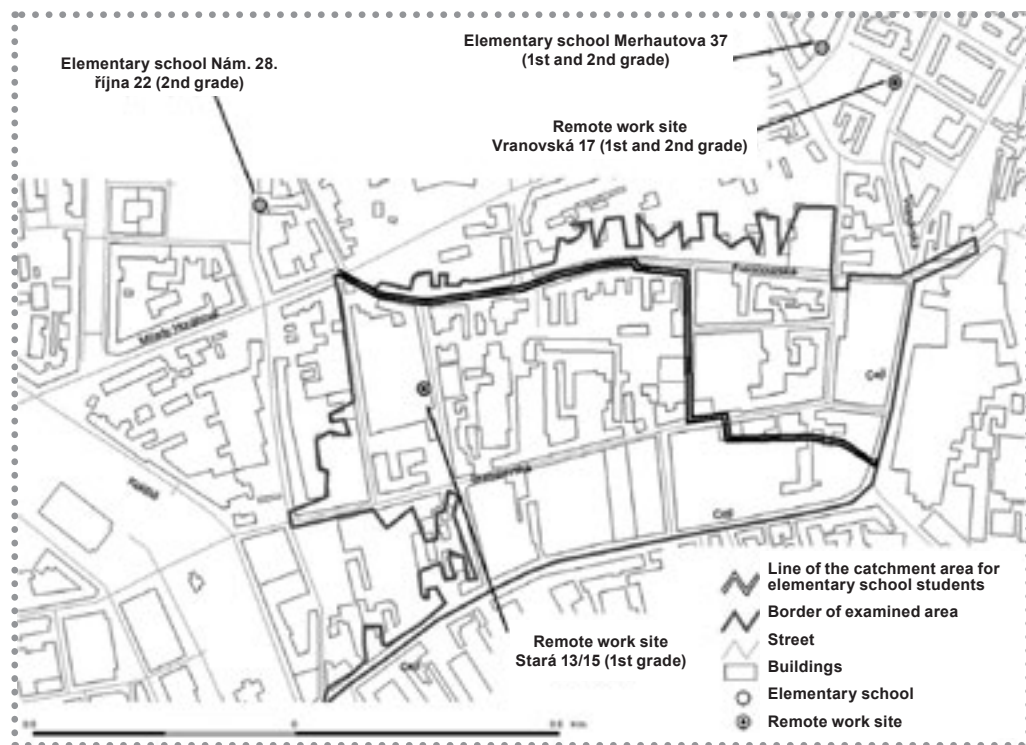
From the very beginning of their educational process our clients do not achieve even average results, as they don't usually live in inspiring environments and often did not attend any pre-school facility (Matějů, Straková, Veselý, 2010) which affects not only the volume of their knowledge but also their level of socialisation. The elementary school is a new social environment with new requirements, expecting that the children have mastered minimum social and hygiene habits, that they have accepted their role as pupils and recognised the authority of the teachers. Our clients thus experience overnight a change of what is expected from them, they are sanctioned by the teachers for their behaviour even though among their classmates they still follow the social norms. This is the source of conflicts between the pupils and the teachers that causes sour relations on both sides (Výrost, Slaměník, 2008). This experience is naturally repeated in contacts with other institutions and the older our clients are the less tolerated is their insufficient ability to adapt to various social situations, which then leads to social exclusion in many dimensions (spatially, economically, politically, symbolically). Frequent social conflicts drive our clients back to (for them) the safe and accepting environment of socially excluded neighbourhoods where the values and norms are familiar to them.

Example: A client leaves secondary vocational school (subject: hairdressing) since she cannot communicate with the teachers and the other students. She feels the demands are too high and she lacks positive feedback. The situation at school is so psychologically stressful for her that she decides to leave, even though she likes the profession and intellectually she would manage the course without considerable problems.

Those who do not act in compliance with socially accepted rules are then labelled as 'ill-mannered', 'problematic' or 'non-adaptive'. The dominant social class also explain unfavourable economic situations as a result of personal insufficiency and inferiority of a person (Lewis, 1966).

5/ Poverty culture is a model used by American anthropologist Oscar Lewis who points out common patterns in the behaviour of groups that live in poverty disregarding their ethnicity.

Map 1. Catchment areas for socially excluded locality Cejl



Source: long-term monitoring of Roma communities – Moravian locations, 2008

SOCIALISATION APPROACH

We understand the term socialisation as a synonym for social inclusion as it is a process that encourages each and every individual to act and behave within certain boundaries, according to the socially accepted norms and values related to individually-modified social roles (Havlík, Koťa, 2002). Thus we focused our interest on supporting clients in the process of socialisation and on building up their self-confidence, which can be undermined by frequent failures thus preventing them in further attempts to become integrated into society.

We know that the success of social inclusion depends mainly on the clients, as the current climate in society is not very favourable. At the same time we believe that if we succeed in 'enabling' the client to cope with the requirements of society, their successful inclusion is possible. We have therefore defined five **prerequisites of successful socialisation (PUS)** to focus on from the first contact with our clients in the context of the socialisation approach.

They are:

1. Self-confidence
2. Sense of purpose
3. Work with information
4. Active approach
5. Interaction (with the world outside the excluded neighbourhood)

The socialisation approach became a principle reflected in our organisational culture as well as in the individual methods of our work with clients. The principle utilizes everyday contact work with clients and respects

the possibilities of social service, which means that we do not try to supplement other institutions (particularly school, family). Rather, we use the chief advantages of NZDM, i.e. favourable conditions for learning social skills when clients are exposed to PUS during common activities – during games, interaction with peers, etc. in the presence of a social worker who can use the common situations to 'extract' the educational and instructional situations to teach the clients indirectly⁶. With regard to the life situation of the clients, the social worker classifies and divides the individual impulses, organizes them in the context, regulates their intensity, frequency and order of occurrence and creates relations between them (Lebeer, 2006). The social worker also mediates for the client in certain situations by placing himself/herself between the outside environmental impulses and the client, and thus radically changes the conditions and form of the client's interaction with the outside world. In this way he/she creates educational situations according to what he/she considers important, what he/she wants to emphasise, repeat, etc. (Málková, 2009). In practice it means the social worker can use the same situation in different ways, depending on his/her educational objectives. Our educational activity in the contact with clients concentrates on acquiring the prerequisites for successful socialisation.

PRACTICAL UTILISATION OF INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL WORK METHODS IN THE NZDM ENVIRONMENT

As we have already said, the socialisation approach became the principle of all our work and as such is reflected in our approach to clients, in contracting cooperation, individual planning, terms and conditions of using the service and in the system of sanctions in case of their breach. Therefore we do not develop the prerequisites of successful socialisation 'secretly', we openly inform the clients what we want to teach them and why, and this happens not only in the course of the game. The ways of developing and strengthening PUS can be divided in the following way:

- ✎ Situational intervention
- ✎ Spontaneous activities
- ✎ Organised activities
- ✎ Activities outside the club.

Situational interventions may last just few seconds and their goal is to pass on values and norms and also to clarify the role of a social worker.

Example 1: A client finds a poster with a football player in the club and asks if he can take it home. Since we do not need the poster we decide to give it to him, but we want to teach our clients purposeful behaviour, so we agree with him what he can do to deserve it: *"We want to teach you that if you want something, you usually have to earn it. If you learn this, it will be easier for you to do things that may be boring but must be done anyway. I will give you the poster if you help with something in the club. Can you think of anything you could do?"* Client: *"I do not know, you tell me..."* The worker: *"There are cups on the draining board. If you dry them and put them away, you can keep the poster."* Client: *"OK."* – The worker uses the situation to explain her role and the position of the social service.

Spontaneous activities are games and leisure time activities for which the clients come to the club. They are proposed by the clients themselves while the social worker intervenes or they are initiated according to the situation by the social worker who involves the clients in them.

Example 2: A client comes to the workers and asks her to play Ludo. The worker agrees and asks the client about the rules of the game with the objective of developing his skills of expression: *"How do you play it?"* The last time boys argued because each of them knew slightly different rules. So we should agree beforehand which rules we will apply." The client starts talking about the rules: *"You select your colour, throw the dice and then you go like this."* The worker asks for an exact explanation and points out that what the client said is not quite clear: *"So I throw the dice and go? Even though the dice says two? How did you mean it?!"* The client specifies: *"No, first you have to throw a six – you can throw it three times – and if you get a six, you go here and then you throw once more..."* etc. – The social worker draws upon the client's motivation to play the board game to develop his abilities of expression and at the same time teaches him that people can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts if they communicate about the rules.

6/ Indirect or mediated teaching follows the concept of modern Israeli psychologist Reuven Feuerstein.

Example 3: Two clients come to the club with their dolls in prams. The social worker uses the situation to present to them social values and norms: *“You do have beautiful dolls! Shall we play that you are mums? We can build rooms and you can pretend to be visiting each other.”* – The worker enters into their play steering its direction and setting the limits. She creates a model situation, in which the clients experience the social system of values and the way of bringing up children.

Organized activities are less frequent and more time consuming events connected thematically with various months of the year. They are prepared by social workers for a selected group of clients according to their ages, interests, etc. During these events no other activities are held and the club is temporarily reserved for the limited number of clients. In this case too we work with topics close to our clients (fashion, football, popular personalities...) so that they are willing to put more energy into learning.

Activities outside the club are organised by social workers to mediate contact with the environment and institutions of the majority society. The social workers enable the clients to get to know the expected patterns of behaviour in various social situations from rides on public transport to visits to the cinema.

Example 4: A client on a trip wants to buy chips at a stall. The worker discusses with her how she should do it: *“When your turn comes, say good afternoon and then tell the vendor what you want to buy. And do not forget to thank him politely.”* – The social worker helps the client to manage the interaction with the vendor. She makes it clear it is important for her that the client fulfils the social expectations of the situation.

HOW CAN OUR CLIENTS BENEFIT FROM OUR WORK?

We have come to the conclusion we can best help children from socially excluded neighbourhoods if we support them in the socialisation process by providing them with new knowledge, skills and experience in compliance with socially recognised values, norms and expected roles. We believe that it is a natural method acceptable for both parties that improves their social functioning. We do not claim the socialisation approach is a universally effective method and we do not even claim it is a method effective in our conditions, because we have not been applying it long enough. Yet it is a method of social work with children and youth in socially excluded localities based on possibilities and advantages of NZDM social service, which follows our knowledge of the life context and the needs of the clients.

OUTPUTS OBSERVED

Following one year of successful application of the socialisation approach in the work with our clients we can assess the results. We continue applying all the above mentioned work through which we develop in our clients the prerequisites for successful socialisation, i.e. situational intervention, spontaneous activities, organised activities and activities outside the club.

The positive effect of the application of socialisation approach methods is most obvious in the case of younger clients of approximately 6 -12 years of age. They are more willing to learn and to be corrected in their behaviour during situational interventions and spontaneous activities, as well as to participate in the organised programme devised by the workers in our NZDM. The older clients are generally more sensitive to interventions in their integrity, to the external influence and less willing to allow the interventions of our social workers.

The most distinct results we have observed were outputs from organised activities and from activities outside the club. In these cases we could follow the development of the clients' competencies along the way, the new theoretical as well as practical knowledge learnt during the organised activities or new skill and experience gained during overnight trips. In particular the clients aged between 6 and 12 got used to regular organised activities and some of them even kept track of them and tried to participate as often as possible. The clients of all ages prefer various dynamic activities like exercises, dance, situational drama, tasting of food and drinks. Among the least favourite activities are those connected with reading and writing as well as those aiming at the development of self-assessment and assessment of others (they often have problems

with positive assessment of themselves and others). The clients who regularly participate in the organised activities show the following beneficial results:

- ✎ Improved ability to concentrate on the ongoing activity,
- ✎ Improved ability to solve repeated types of tasks,
- ✎ General knowledge of and orientation in the surrounding world.

Overnight stays and trips are of specific importance, constituting a welcome change for our clients. Trips to new environments, that many of our clients have never been to before, allows them to develop their abilities and new skills in an enjoyable way. The benefit of trips outside the socially excluded neighbourhood are manifest. On their first trip to the country some of our clients, however unbelievable it may seem, had problems recognising a forest – they thought it was the first group of trees they saw. They also had problems walking up and down hills and did not know that meat and eggs “did not grow in the supermarket” but were the products of real animals. With some clients these drawbacks can be corrected during the trips and overnight stays. Their participation in these activities thus clearly develops the range of their skills and their knowledge and view of the surrounding world. During the overnight stays we often struggle with clients who have difficulties managing the separation from their familiar home environments. This homesickness does not just affect younger clients, though with them it is most apparent. The overnight stays thus help us to build the clients' independence.

Through the socialisation approach the clients are guided to achieve the five prerequisites of successful socialisation that is self-confidence, sense of purpose, work with information, active approach and interaction with the world outside the socially excluded neighbourhood. As the above paragraphs indicate, we try to mediate the clients' the interaction with the outside world through trips and overnight stays, which are undoubtedly beneficial for their development. The only problem is that these activities are attended by only a small group of clients, regular visitors to our facility.

The effect of the above described methods of work can be observed in the achievement of practically all prerequisites of successful socialisation, yet their impact on the development of individual clients differs. From the workers' point of view the most visible is the development of an active approach and of work with information manifested, for example, by the clients' active interest in the NZDM programme and their potential participation in its organisation. The progress in the development of the clients' self-confidence can be observed in ordinary everyday situations. They are for example able to communicate with shop assistants or address a stranger in the street to ask for directions. The developing sense of purpose can be observed especially in the clients' work on their individual plans. Some of them have for example progressed from short term plans that take one week to long term plans.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SOCIALISATION APPROACH

If you consider introducing a similar method of work in your low-threshold club, we can assure you that the socialisation approach in the work with clients is easily transferable to any work team. In the last year our NZDM team has gone through considerable personnel changes. Two thirds of our members left within a short period of time and yet the new workers have not had any serious problems with accepting this approach. The new members of our team accept the socialisation approach as a natural method of work with children and young people growing up in socially excluded localities, quickly grasp the principles and after a short time they can successfully apply it.

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STREETWORK ONLINE

...

Jiří Kocourek

HOW DID WE FIND OUT ABOUT ALL THIS? IS THE INTERNET A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH?

The history of social work is full of examples where the street workers have followed their clients to the places where the clients were easy to find. Generally speaking, one can state that social work evolves together with the people it helps. It evolves just like the problems and changes in the lifestyle of our society. Our current time, i.e. the start of 21st century, is typified by a number of new issues and lifestyle changes. Let's mention the changes of the contemporary family as an example. Another phenomenon that one cannot fail to notice is the omnipresence of information technologies, so called 'new media' that literally penetrate our lives in the form of a virtual network. Internet and social networks are now an integral part of our everyday activities, especially when it comes to teenagers and young people. We sacrifice more and more time to the altar of our new Gods. **Hence it is very legitimate to ask ourselves a question: Is the Internet becoming (or has it already become) a natural environment for young people, with all it has on offer?** Are we not witnessing the birth of a new youth subculture that is characterized by spending most of its leisure time on the Internet? Is it not time to start looking for our potential clients in this new environment – the environment of the Internet, various social networks or community and hobby Internet sites?

So how is it? Facebook is the single most popular social network not only in the Czech Republic, but all



around the world. This service has more than 1.2 billion active users worldwide. An active user is a person that logs into his Facebook account at least once a month. According to socialbakers.com (2013) there are 4.3 million active users registered in the Czech Republic, out of which 11% are in the 13-17 age group. It should be noted that in line with Facebook terms of use a Facebook user should be at least 13 years of age. However, Czech children start using Facebook at the age of 10 or 11. If these children create a Facebook account, they must knowingly provide false data in the registration process, thus acting in contradiction to the terms of use.

Furthermore, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, ask.fm and Badoo are very popular multinational social networks among Czech youngsters. However, these services report a significantly lower number of users compared to the predominant Facebook. As far as purely Czech social network service providers are concerned, the Lide.cz website operated by Seznam.cz is one of the most popular social services, often better known as a chat and dating service.

There have been numerous child behavioural surveys conducted, with the one carried out by TNS AISA for the 'Our Children Foundation' being well worth mentioning. A total of 319 families with children from 10–15 years of age participated in the survey. The survey indicated that children spend on average 1.5 hours surfing the internet during weekdays, while spending 2.5 hours doing the same thing at the weekend. Approximately one half of the children have a PC with an internet connection in their room so they can surf the virtual world with no adult supervision. According to the latest major research, 92.29% of Czech children are familiar with Facebook, 62.83% with Lidé.cz, 57.14% with Google+, 54.80% with Spolužáci.cz and 51.80% with Twitter. 81.53% of children have a Facebook account, 30.54% of children have a Google+ account, while 37.00% of children surveyed have a Lidé.cz account and 27.89% of children surveyed have a Spolužáci.cz account. Furthermore, Czech children also have accounts at YouTube (58.17%), Rajče.net (11.18%) and Alik.cz (11.74%).²

Internet and social networks are widely available practically everywhere. For example, up to 65% of students in the Czech Republic make use of an internet connection on their mobile phones. These facts stem from a survey by the Studentfone virtual mobile operator. Students use mobile internet to search for information, surf social networks or check emails. A total of 69% of surveyed university students own a smartphone. The smartphone ownership percentage among high school students is 75%.³

These data clearly show that children and teenagers feel at home with social networks. Since this trend is not something that has taken one or two years to build, but has lasted for a decade already, we can boldly state that social networks constitute a natural environment for teenagers.

This opinion started to appear gradually within the world of low-threshold social services at the start of the second decade of the new millennium, and it is widely discussed at various occasions and expert meetings in particular right now. The discussions are based on the premise that the internet is a public place not yet penetrated by Czech social street workers, but it is where our potential clients can be reached. Some organisations focusing on work with children and teenagers first started to offer on-line counselling through Facebook or chat applications. However, real street work on the internet is not taking place in the Czech Republic yet. Many social service users are unavailable to the street workers during the winter. Of course, one must understand that the services were unavailable throughout the year for those of our potential clients with no low-threshold social service available at the place of their residence or study. Internet street work is still in its infancy in other European countries. We are only aware of two organisations that use this method – the Finnish Pro-tukipiste and the Dutch non-profit organisation The Correlation Network.

Therefore, the Czech streetwork association initiated the birth of the Streetwork-Online project. The goal of this project is to create methodology for street worker's work on the internet. This street form of low-threshold social service – a virtual low-threshold club – is now in operation at www.jdidoklubu.cz. Children can visit the website, register (or not), read any article, write an article, chat with experts about his/her concerns and basically make use of everything we offer: a safe place, prevention, contact, attractive activities or activation. Furthermore, the children can make use of counselling and expert advice in difficult moments related to growing up, whilst in a safe internet environment.

WHO DO WE HELP?

Our project focuses on children and teenagers subject to the risk of social exclusion who are going through, or are in the risk of going through, hazardous life situations due to their lifestyle or way of spending leisure time. They are also not able or not willing to use other forms of specialised help. This target group is jeopardized by isolation from the rest of society and by spending their lives in the virtual world only. Children and teenagers of this kind lose their ability for intensive face to face contact. They spend their leisure time typically using the computer, checking the social networks in particular. There might be various reasons for this: they are outsiders, socially disadvantaged or with health issues, they are not interested in out of school activities or they simply cannot afford such activities. The aforementioned **children are subject to a much higher risk of being confronted with drug experiments, bullying, crime, sexual services or the new phenomenon of cyber bullying. 'Children of the internet', children from smaller cities or villages, but also disabled children** do not have the chance to use low-threshold social services (these are available in larger cities only), they do not have the opportunity to get in touch with field workers hence cannot access any help while facing difficult situations in life. These risks do not influence only the young people, but have effects on entire families and the community as a whole.

WHO ARE THE 'CHILDREN OF THE INTERNET'?

Primarily, we focus on children and teenagers from 10-18 years of age that get into a **conflicting social situation** such as; pre-offending behaviour and committing criminal offences, aggression, violence, bullying (cyber bullying) and abuse (including racial intolerance and discrimination of certain groups), use of drugs (including alcohol and smoking), sexually hazardous behaviour or test the boundaries of the authorities. Furthermore, these children might be going through **complicated life situations** such as: family break-up, parents having new partners, frequent moving, premature sexual maturity, frequent changes of sexual partners, truancy, conflicts in school classes, suicide attempts. Or they may live in **limiting living conditions** such as: inability of social adaptation, establishing relationships, absence of one of the parents, non-stimulating and insensitive family environment, death of one of the parents, abuse, lack of interests, pathology of the parents (addictions, psychiatric disorders, etc.), health related disability, isolation from society and life in the virtual world or the inability of intensive face to face contact. **In summary, the target group is also defined by the fact that it spends most of its leisure time in a non-organised manner using the computer until late at night.**

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED SO FAR?

As of today, i.e. in 2014, we can say that **a new and functioning form of the service came into being out of nothing but a thought.** Having generated a few initial ideas we moved to website design. The website is now fully functional. We have the methodology for work and the code of ethics. We have produced dozens of preventive articles since the pilot stage of the project (in June 2012). Our community website jdidoklubu.cz now has **350 non-anonymous users** and more than **120 unique visitors a day. A total of 61 371 unique visitors viewed our website during the 12 month pilot period.** The number of **advisory chats** over the same period of time reached **335.** Furthermore, it is interesting to see the division of chats by topic. 25% of all chats were test chats. This means chats without any reaction from the clients. In other words, the client entered the chat room, but did nothing else and left the room after a short while. Therefore, however it may seem, this is not a chat where nothing is going on and nothing is resolved. No such chat can be considered a test chat. 5% of chats can be considered chats in which there are signs of abuse of this tool. The visitors do not follow the rules, are abusive, etc. A large part of the chats are chats we can refer to as information chats focusing on the website itself. The clients request technical support, ask about the function and features of individual parts of the website or the website as a whole, or try to find out more information about who operates it. These chats represent 20% of all chats. The largest group of chats, representing 45% of all chats, are so called crisis chats. Questions, discussions and interventions concerning relationships, drugs, sexual abuse, bullying, etc. Finally, 5% of all chats consist of questions and chats on the topic of internet security.

1/ OUR CHILD FOUNDATION, Texts at www.nasedite.cz, 2013
2/ PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY IN OLOMOUC, Texts at www.upol.cz, 2013
3/ MOBILE.NET, Texts at www.mobilenet.cz, 2013

WHAT EXACTLY DO WE DO AND OFFER WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR PROJECT?

The website has operated on a purely voluntary basis since the autumn of 2013 due to lack of funding, with its activities being limited to expert chats with the clients. Thanks to financial support from Bohemia Energy and Karel Janeček's Help Endowment Fund we are functioning more than ever and we have developed a number of basic activities.

Prevention (Library)

Our community website www.jdidoklubu.cz contains at least one **preventive article** in the Library section focusing on topics of importance for children and teenagers (relationships, drugs, sex, risks related to growing up, future, work, subcultures, cyber bullying, etc.). The website works according to the principle of **collecting points** that allow the clients to gradually extend their authorities within the website – to write articles, establish new columns, etc. The children mainly get these points by giving correct answers to questions that follow the aforementioned preventive articles. This is how we make sure the articles are read. Only registered users can collect points. However, the articles are accessible to all website visitors. The goal of this activity is to make sure that the primary target group gets as little exposure to difficult situations connected to growing up as possible, while making sure that children and teenagers are aware of potential risks related to their teenage years. We make sure all of the aforementioned things are provided according to streetwork principles and social work ethics. We protect teenagers from isolation, drug experimentation, bullying, cyber bullying, forays into crime and sexual exploitation, we also help them with relationship and other problems. Furthermore, we prepare our clients for active participation in the design of jdidoklubu.cz.

Expected activity OUTPUT over one year (from September 2014 until August 2015): 55 preventive articles per year (written by ČAS); 150 non-anonymous users a day (on average) and 300–500 unique visitors a day (on average); 500 registered users in total.

Company (Chat)

The Chat section of www.jdidoklubu.cz will be supported for at least 6 hours a day by one of our **experts** (online streetworker). Chat can be used by users to communicate a specific topic to our staff member (be it relationships, drugs, school, conflicts with the law, etc.). We will fulfil one of the main missions of the website and our project following the principle of contact work: to provide counselling and information service. Our chat is **protected** and allows for **safe contact** on the basis of a low-threshold chat room for children and young people. Chat can be used by both registered and anonymous users. The website includes a system for registering chat contacts, allowing for the generation of statistics for individual cases, the storing of often repeated answers, monitoring development of individual cases, etc. The goal of this activity is to allow the primary target group to maintain contact with experts who will safely guide them through the perils of growing up and help them integrate into society, while supporting them to complete their education and enter the labour market.

Expected activity OUTPUT over one year: 2 000 consultancy chats and maximum working hours coverage – 6 hours a day (including having more experts on line at peak hours) 5 days a week (i.e. 40 hours per week).

Acquisition (Editor)

Any registered user can become an integral part of jdidoklubu.cz and **has the opportunity to be one of the co-authors**. We provide users with the opportunity to develop their creativity in a safe environment. We provide them with the opportunity to materialize their ambitions, spend their time on the internet in a meaningful manner as opposed to playing games, reading web sites with nonsense contents, etc. We also have a comments section under individual articles, which are regularly checked by project staff to make sure no

offensive or defamatory comments appear. Staff members can invite the client into the chat room if he/she breaches the rules and explain everything. Furthermore, we would like to publish **interviews and live chats with interesting personalities** while producing our own articles on topical issues. We plan to **dedicate individual months to a specific issue** (for example family violence, cyber bullying, etc.) as well as to special interest areas such as extremism, racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and homophobia, corruption, equal opportunity, reduction of sexual harassment, violence against woman and human trafficking. Each and every topic shall be initiated by a chat with an expert. Furthermore, the website shall be attractive and playful in its appearance. It is also important to motivate the clients to be active on the web site through various competitions and appeals which they can get involved with. All of the aforementioned will constitute the main target of the editor's work. A professional editor from among our staff members will be asked to support our website users and promote their own abilities and contributions to the website development. The best and most active **client editors** will be chosen at the end to follow up in the work of professional editors and will continue to develop the website further on their own. The goal of this activity is to activate this unreachable group of children and teenagers, support their creative abilities and PC skills while moving their development in a meaningful direction.

Expected activity OUTPUT: 10 client editors who will stay after the completion of a one-year-long cycle; 170 articles (by clients); 20 new columns a year (by clients) and 80 original articles a year (by staff members) + 10 chats with personalities on important topics.

Client mini projects (What irritates you?)

We would like to promote the **target group interest in what is going on in the place of their residence or school**. Therefore, we want to start a section entitled 'What irritates you?', at www.jdidoklubu.cz in which the users will have the opportunity to write about what irritates them in their neighbourhood and what they would like to change. The users will even be able to post a picture or video documenting their concern. We would like to **motivate our clients to their own activities** leading to the resolution of such issues with the help of website staff members and other clients. We are ready to offer them a starting 'mini grant' that will help them to come up with their own project, for example. The editors and street workers will provide us with information about who will be provided with a mini camera in order to document the problems in their neighbourhood. We plan to monitor these activities while recording them with our own camera. At the end of the project we plan to edit the material and produce a short **documentary entitled 'What irritates you?'** The selection of the mini projects to get our support will be carried out in part by our website users and in part by our staff members. Once the project is selected the client, together with our staff member, will come up with the project description including a budget that will be binding. The goal of this activity is to make sure our clients are active in the places they live.

Expected activity OUTPUT: There will be 5 client community mini projects – projects following the concerns of our clients. We'd like to document this activity through a time lapse documentary. Hence the result of this activity will consist of 1 documentary film.

We have 11 basic activities prepared in total. As well as the aforementioned activities, the other activities are focused on evaluation, promotion and awareness raising, education, website and staff development as well as the connection of our services to other services provided. The last activity concerns the project management itself.

CONCLUSION IN A NUTSHELL

We are developing a unique form of help for children in danger through the internet. This is a unique form of additional street work that is following children on the internet. This allows us to address and reach a group of children who are unreachable through other means, but it still tackles the same issues and problems we need to protect them against and help them with. We have named our project 'Streetwork Online'.

This street form of a low-threshold social service – i.e. a sort of a virtual low-threshold club – is now up and running at www.jdidoklubu.cz. Children can visit the website, register (or not), read any article, write an

article, chat with our experts about his/her troubles and use everything we have on offer: a safe place, prevention, contact, attractive activities, activity building and use of consultancy and expert help in difficult situations related to growing up, in the safe environment of a controlled web project.

Contact: Streetwork online, Česká asociace streetwork o.s., www.streetwork.cz, www.jdidoklubu.cz

PARTICIPATION AS A NOVEL MODEL OF WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVAKIA

...

Lenka Lacová

For some time now I have been aware of the changing face of low-threshold programmes for children and young people in Slovakia and abroad. Research visits to our foreign partners' facilities gradually introduced me to a new trend of services. The community of graffiti painters and rappers has been receding. The cultish underground is being replaced by a young generation using modern technologies and communicating on social networks.

I want to describe the practical impact of these changes on the basis of our experience from a key organisation in Slovakia working with this particular community.

KASPIAN has been active since 1997 in the form of low-threshold – easily accessible programmes for children and young people provided in clubs and through outreach social work. We are based in Petržalka, in the heart of the biggest housing estate in Slovakia and annually we meet more than 500 young people in the locality. The KASPIAN mission is to fulfil the needs of children and young people who spend their free time on the streets of Petržalka and to help them improve the quality of their lives by social work methods.

The team of the KASPIAN organisation applies participation, which I consider to be a specific method that adds new dimensions to low-threshold services, as one of the key methods in its direct work with young people. The long term success of the programme and increasing activity of young people prove that KASPIAN has become a leader in participation activities of low-threshold facilities in Slovakia.

Learning is a lifelong and ever-present process, which is also true about the services provided in the course of low-threshold programmes. As the founder of Uncollege project Dale Stephans said *"We need not be geniuses to take over the responsibility for our education. All we need is curiosity, decision and a little courage."*

The attractiveness of low-threshold programmes and closeness to young people is a great advantage and at the same time a challenge to present young people as active resources for the life in local communities. To give them the opportunity to have a say and to listen to their voices from the streets through activities they themselves choose and organise. They thus become the architects of their leisure time, they get an instrument to change the face of their community for the better.

HAVE YOU EVER MET A PERSON WHO WOULD NOT BE INTERESTED IN ANYTHING AT ALL?

"The young generation do not know how to work! Where will they be in 50 years' time? Very little chance of finding a job, the young ones spend time sitting at their computers". ...Rather discouraging headlines of articles describing our young people as a lost generation, but is it really true?

The target group that KASPIAN workers have been regularly meeting since 2004 in the course of their outreach services are young people between 10 and 23 years of age. We speak about estate youth gathering in Petržalka Skate Park for decades. Since 2005 this facility has been administered by KASPIAN and the outreach workers – outreach workers visit it three times a week.

One group to be found here are children and young people involved in sport activities in the skate park (BMX, MTB, freestyle scooters, skateboarding...). This group is rather stable and it consists of local riders who live in the neighbourhood and who are enthusiastic athletes. There are also so called seasonal riders who come to Bratislava on vacation or who ride only for one season and then give it up.



Concrete Jungle Jam 2014

The second group consists of the riders' fans and friends. The frequency of their visits to the skate park depends on their relationship to the other members of the group. They usually stop frequenting the skate park as a result of changed relationships with the riders. Some of them are partners of the riders, others are riders' friends who come here to meet them. The outreach workers lose contact with them as a result of children's quarrels, termination of friendships, etc.

The last group consists of children and young people who come to the skate park to find a gang they could belong to or who want to build their position on the streets. They have links with the other groups' members but they are not exactly their friends (they are e.g. classmates, neighbours, former friends, etc.). They belong to the dominant and rather distinct group in the estate and they often get in conflict with others. Yet if they satisfy their needs, change the school or move elsewhere, they naturally leave the skate park premises. If they do not achieve the desired position, interest or if they are transferred to a diagnostic or crisis centre, they lose contact with social workers. There have been cases of clients returning from prison or special facilities who have also come back again to the skate park looking for the old gang and old rituals.

These groups are not stable, their members move from one to another (a partner becomes a rider, a rider assumes the role of a friend who does not ride ...).

1. We have found a way to communicate with the target group, we have built relationships and recorded the needs and interests of the young people.

The reconstruction of the skate park area in cooperation with young riders became the first greater participation activity of KASPIAN. We started building the relationships and the participation model on the basis of the immediate needs and concerns of the young people – the sport in the skate park. Together with our workers they were trying to solve the problem of deteriorating ramps and obstacles and the related pressure of the city council to close the facility which in their opinion was not utilized. Following two years of intensive work by our team members and the young representatives of the riders on skates, bikes and skateboards we

succeeded in winning the cooperation of the council, finding the resources and together reconstructing the park. This project was followed by other smaller ones which have helped to organise the maintenance of the park and to add new ramps and obstacles.

The first lesson the young people learnt was that a group of 30 people with different needs did not have a chance to come to an agreement and to communicate in a constructive manner. They realised that if they were too many they broke into groups lobbying for their plans. Then they decided it would be better to select representatives of their groups (Rollerbladers, Bikers, and Skateboarders).



Skate park reconstruction, 2009

The whole process from setting up contacts to the decision to organise a joint activity may take several months or even years. That was the case with the original idea to organise a competition for BMX and MTB riders in Petržalka. Concrete Jungle Jam this year celebrates its 5th anniversary. Yet the beginnings were not easy.

The local riders had already been toying with the idea of a community event for some time: a meeting of the riders from Slovakia to show the tricks and quality of the Slovak riding scene. Such events were missing in Slovakia at that time. A small group of riders would travel abroad.

During one of the outreach-workers service shifts the turning point came and the youngsters decided to establish a working group or the organisation team. The youth from Petržalka thus started designing their own leisure time and the style of informal education – the practical school of life.

2. We have used the fun of riding as a low-threshold starting point to develop leadership skills, to build friendship, trust and social capital among the young people.

The key factor was the decision made by the young people, their motivation and at the same time the support provided by the social workers who offered the riders cooperation and did not leave them to work alone. It was also very important to assess the extent of the event or activity. On the basis of this information it was then necessary to select a team of people, assign the roles and decide about the intensity of cooperation. The organisation of the Concrete Jungle Jam takes the team of five stable young organisers almost half a year.

FIRST WORKING MEETING

One of the most important first steps is to define the rules and discuss the expectations. The youngsters cannot always imagine the future reality and what they should expect. It is up to the social workers to "direct" the organisers and explain to them what is going to happen in the coming months. The regular team meeting will be of strategic importance for them, which may be critical for some members of the team who have prob-

lems attending meetings regularly at a certain time. Whatever the reasons for unreliability (work load, school obligations or momentary unwillingness) it may eliminate them from the organisation team. It is good to take this into account and prepare yourselves and the team for the above mentioned situations. You should also find out what are the real abilities and capacity of the team (planned vacations, summer camps, training sessions and other activities...) that might threaten the organisation. The meetings are held usually once a week at the premises of the KASPIAN club. With the date of the event drawing near, the intensity of the meetings increases according to the youngsters' needs.



Planning of the competition – organisational team and brainstorming

In KASPIAN we often use a flipchart and brainstorming technique during the first meeting. The working team can thus express their thoughts and ideas on the paper and share them with the others. Relying on the visual record of the whirls of ideas we then select the realistic ones that we can manage from the capacity and organisational point of view.

It is also important that all the young members of the team are present at the first meeting. The dynamics of the group are gradually set up, the ice is breaking and we are getting to know each other. It is advisable to allow the meeting to flow naturally at the pace the youngsters choose. We must not forget our target group are children and young people who cannot fully concentrate for long periods, even though they are motivated. Besides hard work we also accept discussions and activities unrelated to our topic as these give our work with youngsters new dimensions and create fertile ground for our work. We make breaks if a meeting lasts for more than an hour – smokers get a cigarette break, we play table football or ping pong. We should always remember that the result of the meeting is not as important as the process of learning and socialisation.

After the first meeting the motivation increases. We have created the concept of the competition, the foundations to build on and defined the basic competencies. For communication the team use telephones and e-mail but also social networks, particularly Facebook where a working group has been set up and ideas can be shared and problems solved. We can thus remind each other about our competencies and the dates of meetings (ideally one day ahead).

SECOND WORKING MEETING

The youngsters begin to discuss what could and should be done. They gradually develop the ability to cooperate effectively with others on a common task, take decisions that respect the needs and suggestions of others and contribute to the consensus. In our case it means determining the date and venue of the

competition, mapping the situation to make sure the event doesn't overlap with another competition, vacations, holidays or school lessons. It also means mapping resources among the youngsters' circles (friends, families, acquaintances...). The members of the team learn to negotiate to achieve win-win solutions. The presence of all members of the team is a must.

THIRD AND FOURTH WORKING MEETINGS

Besides the official meetings the communication proceeds continuously among the members of the online group or with the outreach workers during their service shifts in the skate park. During the third/ fourth meeting (the sequence of meetings and the topics may differ in dependence on the maturity and experience of the team members) everybody really works hard on his/her task. The meetings are smaller, one of the main tasks currently being the draft of the project. In this phase the outreach worker takes on the role of a coach to help to define the project idea, goals and budget. The financial dimension of the project must be considered with the team.

While the projects are being drafted, another member of the team works on the official text for the potential sponsors. In the case of the Concrete Jungle Jam competition they are sponsors supporting adrenaline sports. The youngsters contact them mainly by e-mail or telephone. Yet prior to the real contact they practise the communication by means of simulated phone calls. They negotiate the terms and conditions of partnership, explain what we expect (most often material prizes for riders and financial support) and what we can offer (promotional space – web site, outputs in media, banners at the competition venue, stalls...).



Meeting with the representatives of Bratislava-Petržalka City Council

The members of the team also visit the donors personally and they present the new project ideas to the Petržalka councillors or to the representatives of Bratislava City Council. In the meantime the graphic artists turn the information into visual form – they design the poster and invitation to the event with the detailed information. The other team members work on their individual tasks (reconstruction and redistribution of the ramps and obstacles, booking of paramedical staff, catering, competition activities programme...).

We leave it up to the youngsters whether the event will finally take place (accepting the risk that we would have to return the funds invested in the projects). The young people know that if they let the things slide, no one will do it for them. This experience is new and valuable for them. It keeps them going even in situations where they begin to realise how demanding some tasks are. The workers must persevere and refrain from finishing the tasks for them but at the same time they must keep encouraging them in their work and emphasising the importance of every one of them for the success of the whole event.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Besides the meetings the project organisational team also plan special activities. One of them is the painting of the skate park usually 1 to 2 weeks before the event. They will meet at the skate park premises to apply fresh paint to the ramps and obstacles and to improve the surface of the track before the competition. The local community of riders as well as non-riders is also involved in the activity together with the organisational team members.

One to two days before the event the general clean-up of the skate park takes place. The surface must be clear of glass and other undesirable trash. Everything is getting ready for the big day. The atmosphere is full of excitement and questions.

The meetings get more intensive a few days before the competition, everything that has not been done in the past 6 months must be taken care of at the last moment. The members of the organisational team who had mostly ignored the organisation or did not have enough time now join in. The proposals for volunteers and jurors are discussed. The media contacts are collected and the press release drafted.



Painting the skate park

The schedule of the competition day is planned including the distribution of roles. Weather is an important factor when it comes to a competition like Concrete Jungle Jam. The team collects information about the forecast a few days prior to the event – they contact the Slovak Hydro-Meteorological Institute and consult internet resources and other contacts. In case of an unfavourable weather forecast the event is postponed for a day or even a week. In such a case the riders must contact all the sponsors, partners, volunteers as well as all the riders who have registered for the competition and inform them about the change of date.

THE COURSE OF THE EVENT

The team follow the planned schedule for the day. KASPIAN social workers together with the organisers respond to and work on the solutions to unplanned situations. They complement and support each other as equal partners. The social workers provide security and support in successful solutions as well as failures. Critical decisions such as programme changes are taken by the team as a whole.

The event involves on average some 60 to 80 competing riders in park and street categories from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The project involves not only the riders but also the local community of Petržalka estate as on average one hundred local inhabitants experience the atmosphere of adrenaline sports.

All team members will stay on the competition site until everything has been packed up and cleaned. A smaller group together with a photographer will then go to complete and send off the press release for media and partners.



Final version of the poster Concrete Jungle Jam 2014

Thanks to events like this one, we may describe the riders' community as a big family in which everybody knows everybody and they all drive themselves mutually to perform better and better.

FINAL ASSESSMENT MEETING

One of the most important elements of the project is the final meeting of the organisational team. It is an opportunity for the process of self-reflection and mutual feedback. In KASPIAN the members of the team meet to assess the process of the competition. They prepare together the SWAT analysis (analysis of strengths and weaknesses) of the competition organisation, the opportunities and challenges for the future. However, we do not always succeed in organising the final meeting. Ideally, it should be held at the latest within two weeks after the event.

The working group of the Concrete Jungle Jam organisational team became a positive model for Petržalka's younger generation which contributed to the establishment of a new working group of riders on freestyle scooters Scoot Jam and of a girls team AGCrew who are now planning their own activities.

WHY DO WE ENJOY PARTICIPATION?

It does not involve testing, marks and hours spent at a school desk. A teacher who is the group leader and the policeman in one person does not forbid and does not punish. It offers the possibility to focus on topics and areas that are enjoyable. Model of participation in low-threshold facilities unites youngsters with different learning abilities on one level: whether they are high achievers or pupils struggling with the school system (dyslexia, ADHD...), they all function as members of one team. They are united by the same

needs and interests – adrenaline sports. Participation is a chance for youngsters who were excluded from the system.

3. It is a quite good risk without a failure. Everybody gains something positive. For young people participation is a synonym of independent thinking and freedom of expression.



Registration of competing riders at Concrete Jungle Jam

WHAT IS THE KEY TO ALL THIS?

The group dynamic, which is one of the most important concepts of the programme. The youngsters do not do the activity just for themselves but for the whole team, and the pressure of their peers makes them persevere and stick to their obligations. If you leave the project you are also leaving your colleagues and friends, which makes you feel much worse than if you fail your test at school".

The programme depends on team cooperation as well as on people "prodding" themselves mutually into constructive criticism, on support, successful searches for resources, on creative thinking and on the skill to ask the right questions.

And if such a process can be applied by low-threshold programmes, can you imagine the strength of the participation model if applied to the educational system?

This article is not intended as a manual and methodology for low-threshold programmes in general, as it has been devised as a specific programme for KASPIAN and its target group of young people. Yet I see it as a positive inspiration and an example of best practice in Slovakia.

Thanks to my colleague Mgr. Zuzana Milatová for her cooperation in writing this article.

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PACKAGE INSERTS AND QUESTIONNAIRES AS TOOLS FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION IN THE FIELD

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Roman Kunc

Outreach workers are continuously coming up with various strategies to provide information in an interesting way whilst making sure there are also methods available to get to information about service users (hereinafter referred to as the SU).

Within the context of street work the intervention tools are related to the following topics:

- ✎ Limited time for contact with the SU;
- ✎ Unprotected space for smooth contact (risk of the surrounding environment entering the interaction);
- ✎ Absence of topics for contact;
- ✎ Lack of information from the SU and so on.

We started to think about a field service working on the edge of target groups of drug users and young adults or teenagers in o.s. Prostor Kolín, when we started to witness a long-term increase in the average age of the SU. We started to face questions such as: Where are the younger people (approximately 17-25 years of age) who are going through their first drug experience or are using drugs on a regular basis? What circumstances contribute to the fact they refuse to use the street program services or our contact centre? Is it possible to attract them to use our services?

A number of topics arose within the framework of our Street work experiment project (hereinafter referred to as S.ex) that came to light in June 2012 and focused on **adolescent and young adults who either experiment or regularly use non-intravenously a wide range of legal or illegal drugs** for a period of 18 months: How to approach and engage young people who live relatively trouble-free lives? What information shall we offer? In what form? How to make use of the initial contact not only to introduce the service, but to intervene at the same time?

Furthermore, it is possible to ask the question: Why should we come up with yet another street service when we have both NZDM (NZDM = low-threshold facility for children and youth) street work and addict street work programs that should primarily include this target group (hereinafter the CS) in their activities?

Social work that primarily focuses on the circumstances of use of cannabis, alcohol, meth and other substances has always been a burning issue in the area of NZDM and other non-specific street work programmes. NZDM staff members focus on this topic while doing contact work with the SU in a minimum number of cases. The reasons may vary: programme rules, personal set up of staff members, internally experienced lack of qualification of the staff member, etc. I hereby take the liberty of providing my opinion following my personal experience from contact with NZDM staff members within the framework of various education activities as well as from being assured of this opinion after participating in a workshop entitled "Clients on the border of NZDM and addiction services" which we prepared together with Bc. Tomáš Žák for the conference of street and low-threshold programs in 2013.

Having used model situations on the participants, we came across the majority attitude of street workers and NZDM staff members (of whom approximately 80 were NZDM staff members and approximately 10 were addiction services staff members), which clearly indicated that the topic of drug use/experimenting and contact with people under the influence of drugs or using drugs (while communicating with staff members)

is really difficult for many of the staff members. The staff members explained their attitudes by clear rules regarding interaction with clients under the influence of drugs and harmful substances, hence their attitude to the situational drug users.

Other figures who have the opportunity to approach young experimenters are staff members of addiction services, they could possibly include this CS into their activities due to the nature of their work. We still witness the activities of various drug services that are capable and willing to agree on a one-off event on the occasion of let's say a music festival (such as Sananim z.ú., Podané ruce o.p.s. in the past, etc.). Last, but not least, other consultancy services are also trying to approach young experimenters as well.

I had the opportunity to ask Monika Dvořáková DiS. manager of drug services for Prostor Plus Kolín, about their approach to this target group. Due to the primary focus of the programme "...on individuals endangered or directly damaged by regular use of addictive, intoxicating and psychotropic substances of amphetamine type by means of addiction, injection or health and social damage..." there is an opportunity to work with this target group in an intensive manner, although it is defined as a secondary target group due to the capacity of the service as well as the possibilities of this service, which is not very attractive to the respective user group and hence has not much to offer.

Indeed, it is not possible to generalise the situation in the entire country based on information from one region. However, I am of the opinion that thanks to long-standing experience in the area of drug services and personal contacts with staff members from other addiction services, these programs are very much determined by their capacity and target group definition in terms of their possibilities of active contact work with the respective target group.

It may seem that some (definitely not all!) NZDM programs are not interested in the target group of experimenters/regular drug users, or approach them in a negative way (sanctions, etc.). The drug services do not have the necessary capacity nor sometimes the funding necessary.

Therefore, we decided to 'fill the gap in the market' and launched our awareness campaign for those who might never walk through the door of NZDM or a contact centre. Last but not least, we decided to refer or recommend drug services to the users of non-alcoholic drugs in particular.

The staff members of S.ex found the answer to the question of which information might potentially be attractive to this particular group of people, when they asked the same questions themselves. What would be of benefit to us if we put ourselves into the shoes of alcohol, cannabis and other drug users? There is relatively a lot of information on the effects and risks of individual substances available from various sources, and the users receive this information while growing up (family, school, primary prevention programs, etc.). We found that the most important thing was the possibility to get information on how to have a good time while experimenting or using drugs while being exposed to minimal risk or possible losses. This is the same principle that is applied in drug services within the framework of so called tertiary prevention (harm reduction) or risk reduction. For more information see: <http://www.adiktologie.cz/cz/articles/detail/90/200/>.

In this case it is clear that the risks related to intermittent and harmful use of alcohol and cannabis as well as other drugs must be clearly emphasised. In this particular case the S.ex staff members came up with the idea of producing a package insert for the most commonly used drugs, which would clearly describe what the user should be careful about while using the drug, as well as tips and tricks for greater safety.

This information material was written in a way that would be easily understood by young people while providing clear and concise information. Furthermore, the inserts were divided into three time periods – BEFORE, DURING and AFTER. In other words, the inserts included information about how the user should get ready, how to be safe while using the drug and what to do after the effect of the drug is gone. At first sight this material might look like a user's manual encouraging the use of drugs. However, the role of the street worker who is in direct touch with the SU is of utmost importance since he/she knows the experience of individuals with drugs and their personal attitude towards drug use.

It is not a rule that everyone who has experience with alcohol use will get a package insert. The experience of a fifteen-year-old teenager who tasted alcohol at a family party will be significantly different to that of his/her peer who got extremely drunk with his friends a number of times over the past few months. The question is whether to provide information in both the cases mentioned above, or whether to wait for signs of drug abuse or not. However, this is not the subject matter of this contribution. As far as the package inserts are concerned, we produced them for THC and alcohol.

These package inserts have proven really successful as our clients reacted very well while being surprised by the form of communication (we often opted for a humorous approach). Furthermore, the young

people were also surprised by the fact we did not directly discourage them from taking drugs and appreciated the fact we were trying to perceive them the way they really are. The best feedback we got was the fact that the SU approached us repeatedly in the field and asked us for additional information while sharing information about S.ex activities with their friends and acquaintances.

Furthermore, we have used the tests determining the range of nicotine addiction, information flyers produced by the Podané ruce association (extc.cz), materials of the National institute of Health regarding infectious diseases and, last but not least, we also used materials for THC users explaining that the drug makes their lives more complicated rather than easier. The 'Dope Smoker's Guide' built on a very inspiring document published by the NMS entitled 'Efficient Regulation of Marijuana Use' that describes the activities of Australian Addiction Counselling services working with long-term THC users.

Furthermore, we have successfully used the IN-COME entry questionnaire for a number of years. This questionnaire helps the staff members identify the current situation of a particular SU and offers adequate change tools or tools that will prevent the current situation from deteriorating. This questionnaire also offers room for information related to other topics that usually arise in connection to the questions asked.

Hence we consider the questionnaire the other useful tool that can uncover many interesting facts from the lives of teenagers and young adults. At the same time, it can be used as an intervention tool since it provides staff members with a clear picture of the additions of a particular SU thanks to his answers, which makes it possible for them to offer targeted services, information or further interventions. Due to this approach, the SU return to their own experiences that they had not yet had a chance to reflect on. This idea was brought along by Bc Tomáš Žák, simply because there is no procedure for identification of use standards for young people in the Czech Republic. The extensive ESPAD study monitors predominantly the experiences, but not the use standards.

While designing the questionnaire, we discussed what sort of information value the answers would have. Furthermore, it was necessary to take into consideration the intervention function of the questionnaire tool. Twenty-three questions were transferred into electronic format to allow for quicker processing and corrections, and we used an internet-based application. The street workers then used their tablets which are easy to carry and control. However, the functionality is very much dependent on mobile internet availability and quality.

It usually took 15–30 minutes to fill in the form, which proved to be a complication, but more to the street workers who expected the target group to refuse co-operation while filling in the form. The motivation of street workers proved to be of critical importance in this stage, since their attitude significantly influences the percentage of successfully filled in forms. It is necessary to know how to 'sell' the intention connected with the questionnaire to the service user, and to explain what sort of benefits it can generate for him/her. In this respect we dared to take a step that might be hard to swallow for some mentors of the low-threshold approach. We decided to give away either a one-off alcohol tester or an extra pack of condoms to the respondents. What's even more interesting is the fact that until today approximately 1/2 of all respondents opted for a free gift. There were 25 questionnaires filled in by the end of the project.

Regarding the staff members experience with filling in the questionnaire and with repeated contacts with the SU, we again obtained very good feedback. Most of the young people voluntarily got back in touch with us and we had a fairly good picture of how the respective individuals spend their leisure time using drugs, which allowed us to work on topics generated by the SU or by our staff members.

Filling in the questionnaire was sometimes connected with perils such as: we have to skip a question; it is not possible leave a question unanswered in order to successfully complete the questionnaire, etc. Hence we strongly recommend using on-line questionnaires with more options compared to free versions. However, these might be rather slower while in the field. Furthermore, it is up to the skills of staff members to maintain contact with a group while one member of the group is busy answering questions and the remaining part of the group gets bored. An ideal situation for all street workers would be to meet an individual or a pair and fill in the questionnaire together since the on-line questionnaire also works on smartphones. What really worked for the staff members when filling in the questionnaire was the Socrates style of interview. In other words, they acted like they did not have a clue, but they were interested. This led to the respondents sharing their experience and attitudes towards certain topics.

When filling in the questionnaire, the SU themselves realised the risks related to their drug use standards thanks to the question that introduced a wide range of risk situations forcing the individuals to take a 'look back'. This always generated room for possible interventions from the inquirer's side. All this in a very relaxed atmosphere.

Considering the need to meet the project indicators, the questionnaire slipped through the cracks over time and we offered it to all SU through Facebook prior to the completion of the project (those who subscribed to our account and used Facebook chat). However, this way of questionnaire utilisation did not offer any possibility of intervention and was considered rather as a research tool. The single most inspiring fact was the use of a wide range of risk situations that could also be used independently in the future. We received a clear picture about SU standards related to risky behaviour while using drugs. The service users were often surprised themselves by what they recalled.

In the course of the establishment of the programme, we fine-tuned ways to use various interventions in the first approach throughout the first few months. And we succeeded with the aforementioned package inserts on the topic of 'safer fun'. Considering the high project requirements (18 months = 3,500 contacts) we did not want to settle for mere questioning and box ticking. The staff members were happy to use the 'partner' low-threshold approach along the lines of: "...we are not your parents and teachers. You will hear neither persuasion, nor bans. We respect your choices and you can share a lot with us..." We succeeded in intervening with at least 50 % of our service users within the initial approach in the last 12 months of the projects, while having repeated contacts with regular users of cannabis and alcohol. In order to meet the indicators, it proved efficient to search for young people near high schools, vocational schools and in the vicinity of bus and train stations or transfer points. Some of these spots, referred to as 'dope smoking spots', became regular stops on the routes of our street workers.

Within the framework of final assessment of S.ex program we agreed with the managers of drug services as well as with the expert director of our organisation that the level of interventions, information provisioning within drug use was satisfactory, although it was rather focused on drugs that are primarily not in the viewfinder of drug services Harm Reduction thus the expectation of contacting primarily young users of meth and get them use the drug services was not met. The S.ex program presented itself into the NZDM target group, mainly within the framework of case work that covered social topics in more than 90 % of cases (family and partnership relations). Within the framework of information provisioning the "package inserts" were clearly dominating since we repeatedly came into contact with people who have already heard of this service from their friends who even showed them our practical leaflets and asked for a copy of their own.

Contact: Prostor Plus, o.p.s., www.prostor-plus.cz

LONG TERM MOTIVATION – THE CORNERSTONE FOR SUCCESSFUL WORK WITH CHILDREN

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Filip Hajna, Martin Kovalčík

*Increasing motivation of children is one of the most important goals
in all facilities operated by People in Need.*

People in Need operated five low-threshold facilities for children and youth in 2014. More than 500 children passed through the doors of these facilities dedicated to children coming from non-inspiring or culturally and socially unsuitable environments. We support the children visiting our facility in acquiring knowledge suitable for their future lives. One of the cities in which People in Need operate their low-threshold facility is the city of Bílina. The ENC facility has been in operation since 2006 and is located in the Teplické suburb – a place which is considered as a locality endangered by social exclusion. The facility is intended for children from 6 to 14 years of age. We do not avoid topics such as relationships, family, health, work and financial management in our work. Children have the possibility to share their worries and our staff members either help them resolve the issues or advise them as to where they can find suitable help. Even though the main purpose of these clubs is to offer children meaningful activities for their leisure time, we do not forget about school and learning too.

One of the main obstacles we came across while operating the club was how to direct the children towards long-term or long-lasting activities. The children had problems with attending regular activities. For example, catch-up classes were taught once or twice, but then the child would not come again. We have observed a similar pattern in most of the individual plans. The children were keen to start and work on one or two occasions, but then the motivation faded away. Hence it was necessary to consider a change in the system of our work. We had originally used a model in which the child received a reward provided he/she completed the task successfully. This system was not bad, but over time the children learnt to behave in a calculated way. In other words, if I complete the task, I get a reward. It was necessary to develop the abilities of the children in such a way that they would not behave in a calculated manner, and manage to learn how to satisfy this need later on. Therefore, we considered a system that would allow the children to get a reward over a longer period of time, while making sure the youngsters did not lose their motivation.

The new system was set up to not only make it attractive to the children, but also to help them in their long-term personality development. Our ultimate goal is to achieve a situation in which the children will be able to match their contemporaries who live in a stimulating environment and thus improve their quality of life.

Importantly, our new system is based on a graphical representation comprising a number of elements. The main part consists of a board game placed on one of the club's walls in a way that it constitutes the dominant part of the club room. Children get points for completing partial activities and use the points to move forward on the board game. We only count plus points, so the children can only gain something for completing the activity and do not lose. There is a reward for every 5 points collected. The reward can be in the form of having the possibility to use the computer or alternatively to borrow more expensive sports equipment. Having achieved the goal, or once the time dedicated to one round of the game (approx. 6 months) has passed, we organise a grand rewards party for the children in NZDM (NZDM = low-threshold facility for children and youth) and they all receive rewards for their work.

Another part of the game consists of a large notice board on which every child has their own space where his/her progress, achievements and individual plans are displayed. It also summarises the child's successes and work in progress. Having completed a part of the plan the child has the option of colouring (filling in) the frame corresponding to the task completed. He/she can then continue to fulfil partial tasks of his/her individual plan, clearly knowing how much work he/she has completed and what still needs to be done.

GAME ADMISSION AKA HOW CAN I PLAY THE GAME?

It is necessary to explain how children make use of NZDM services in order to understand how we get children involved in our game. An individual interested in accessing social services comes to our club and passes through what we call the initial contact. He/she is introduced to the operation of the club, the scope of activities as well as with the goals and principles of the club including the rules, glossary of terms, opening hours and rights and obligations. Initial introduction to all the aforementioned information differs in time and is mainly dependant on the age of the child. Only then do we conclude an oral co-operation agreement with the child. The child then gets extended possibilities to make use of the club – he/she can attend the workshops. A workshop means a specific and time-defined controlled activity. This would include for example a board game workshop, computer workshop, cooking workshop amongst others. Interested individuals are invited to join a motivation game. He/she can choose from already prepared programs or we motivate him/her to come up with an activity of their own. Those individuals showing interest are consulted on regular basis and offered available activities or the possibility to come up with his/her own idea for an activity.

Once the child either comes up with his/her own idea or selects an activity on offer, he/she becomes a user of a social service. Social service users in NZDM always fulfil his/her own individual plan on which he/she co-operates with a social worker. Once the user completes his/her individual plan, he/she turns into a social service seeker and looks for another project to get involved in.

The user enters the game by participating in the club and by planning. There are always two options to choose from. The first option is called selection choice. We came across a situation in which a younger elementary school child of approximately 10 years of age, found it very difficult to understand the choice on offer. Hence it was necessary to create a sample selection of activities on the basis of which children can make their choice. This led to the development of a group of model activities that reflected the most frequent needs of children monitored since 2011. Yet another important aspect was the integration of a complex approach to individuals in the course of which we looked for a tool that would allow us to continually monitor a child's development.

TYPES OF INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES OF CHOICE

Selection of choice is divided into two basic groups. The first group comprises basic skills every child in the age range of 6 – 10 years should master without fail, these include; days of the week, months of the year, seasons of the year, colours and telling the time. Unfortunately, the majority of children – 60 – 70% by means of a simple estimate – did not have the aforementioned skills even at 12 years of age. We created an individual plan for each and every basic skill and worked on its completion. Children would get 1 point for successful consultation when working on completion of individual plans and 5 points following the completion of an individual plan. We also came across the fact that some children already possessed the skill. Therefore, we introduced the option of being examined with respect to the particular skill, with the award of 5 points for completing the examination. The child would mark that particular skill on the notice board as mastered. No individual plan was compiled in the case of the exams. We only recorded the points awarded to the respective child.

The second group of selection of choices comprises additional skills. These include more complicated or more complex individual plans. The plans are drawn up and cease to exist following the impetus given by individual users. Individual plans that are not sought by the children are withdrawn from the selection of choice. Catch-up classes are the single most frequently chosen plan, their goal is to ensure the long-term development of children in a specific subject. The other frequently chosen plans are reading skills, writing

skills and mathematics. We try to teach the older children from the age group of 12 – 14 years how to learn 'to learn correctly'. When drawing up the individual plan, it is absolutely necessary to make sure the goals are SMART. In other words, we try to define the goal together with our client in such a way as to make it; Specific, Measurable, Adequate, Realistic and Timed. The evaluation is either based on clearly measurable progress (school marks, for example) or on improvement assessments made by the staff member and the user in course of their joint goal completion assessment.

JOURNALIST, DANCER, MUSICIAN...

We decided to call the other frequently used additional individual plans simply journalist, computers, dancer, musician, etc. The ultimate goal of the 'journalist' individual plan is to improve the skills of children in reading texts, searching articles on the internet as well as their writing skills. Children learn how to proof-read, how to identify and use style and they also learn to master the computer. The article is then publicly posted on the club's notice board. The 'musician' individual plan focuses on teaching the children how to better communicate and present themselves in public. The fundamental task of this plan is to search the internet for information on their favourite band or singer. The other part of the plans asks the children to prepare a short performance for the other children during which he/she can inform the others about the results of his/her research. Then the child selects a song, which he/she rehearses with the staff member and presents in public at the end. The goal of this individual plan is not to teach the child how to sing, but rather to learn how to read a text, memorise the most important information and be able to communicate in public. We have also introduced a link between the individual plans and individual workshops. This can be demonstrated by the example of an individual plan focused on computer skills. Children attending the computer workshops ought to have an individual plan related to these particular workshops. The main advantage of this approach lies in the possibility of long-term work with the child, which in turn leads to partial specialisation of specific individual plans.

The second option is the possibility of implementing a program that the children have come up with by themselves. The system of personal programs contributes to the development of children in particular areas while teaching them to realise that they can really achieve some tangible results. Therefore, the goal is not to make the child work on a closed system of programs, but rather to teach him/her to plan and create his/her own plans that he/she would like to work on. This category includes any program that is rewarded by points, the number of which is dependent on the difficulty of the program. Points awarded are usually similar to points awarded for ready-made programs, i.e. one point for work and 5 points for completion of the task. In case of a more complicated task more points can be awarded following mutual agreement.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN IN NZDM

Positive assessment of children means that they get rewards for points. The most sought after reward is the possibility to use the internet, followed by trips, excursions, experience events, etc. Children with higher scores or those who are co-operating well are preferred when choosing participants for the aforementioned events. Our thinking is that the more a child works on himself/herself the more advantages he/she can gain, which in turn leads to motivation for participation in other activities.

Neither has the negative assessment system been included into the system nor the behaviour assessment system, which is an integral part of activities in the club. Good behaviour need not be scored with the help of points, but is rather praised. Negative behaviour is subject to an interview or ban, provided the behaviour is related to breach of club rules. No type of behaviour whatsoever leads to points deductions, for fear that it could lead to lack of motivation for children and seriously disrupt future co-operation. We work on the assumption that children growing up in socially excluded areas usually get far less positive assessment and need to find a way to realize their potential and achieve results. Their embedded behavioural patterns could possibly disrupt their progress at work. We teach children to work, fulfil their duties and think about the way they behave. However, behaviour or personal manifestations are standards everyone has to respect, hence there is no reason to deduct points.

THE YOUNGER THE CHILD, THE SHORTER THE PLAN

Our motivation program underwent a trial period between February and March 2014. We worked with a total of 74 users of social services, and repeatedly drew up individual plans with all the children. The plans always concerned personal development aimed at the further development of the child. A total of 84 individual plans have been fulfilled. We had 98 social service users in the previous year out of which only 22 had an individual development plan. Other users were looking to make their choice or got involved in one-off activities only.

Data gathered indicate that the number of clients decreased by 24, this decrease is caused by the change in the service methodology. Only those individuals working on the fulfilment of an individual plans are considered to be social service users. Individuals not fulfilling their individual plan are not social service users, but registered only as a social service seeker in the process of identifying a program. The results mentioned have been collected from all social service users visiting NZDM NC. Data gathered will be further compared with data obtained in the period from February to June 2013. Necessary information has been copied from individual plans. We have used People in Need, o.p.s. AURUM client database for statistical purposes.

A total of 33 individual plans have been fulfilled during the monitored period, whilst 18 individual plans have not been fulfilled. The remaining individual plans are still in progress. The success rate of individual plans is 65%, with the most frequent reasons for non-fulfilment being loss of motivation to work on a long-term plan or early success at school which leads to the feeling that the child can handle the problem on his/her own. The other reasons for non-fulfilment include an inability to follow the mode of operation, non-fulfilment of tasks or the inability to fulfil the goals for example due to frequent bans on attendance imposed by the parents, etc. We regularly came across an inability to complete the plans, in one particular case we had a 10-year-old boy who managed non-fulfilment of 4 individual plans.

The most frequent reason for termination of an individual plan is that the user stops visiting the club half way through its fulfilment and does not show up again for a long period of time. Furthermore, the users often do not have the need to complete the full individual plan. The future goal of our work lies in the adaptation of the plans to make them attractive for children throughout the entire period of time it makes sense to work on the plan with the child. Most of the fulfilled individual plans terminate after approximately 3 or 6 weeks. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on short-term and intensive individual plans and spend less time on plans covering a period in excess of 2 months. The general rule can be summarised as the younger the user, the shorter the individual plan.

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Section 2

WORK WITH DRUG USERS

LOW-THRESHOLD EMPLOYMENT

...

Aleš Herzog

Work contracts can be an inspiration for the development of low-threshold services (outreach work, contact centres, low-threshold day centres, drop-in youth clubs). The labour market in the Czech Republic is not in good shape. It does not create many job opportunities for groups of citizens such as those with criminal records, members of the Roma minority, unskilled people and those without completed education, people younger than 18 and those without work experience. They are all clients of low-threshold programmes. If these programmes undertake to employ persons from their target groups, a range of possibilities opens to employ their clients. For example, adolescents could earn their first legal money in the low-threshold clubs, if they have not yet succeeded in the open labour market. The low-threshold clubs will thus cooperate more actively with their clients on the beginning of their way to gain jobs.

What are the advantages and drawbacks of combining a social and work contract with the clients?

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF LOW-THRESHOLD EMPLOYMENT

There are many types of low-threshold services in the field of employment. First of all we have to clarify the terminology, as we often use different terms to express the same meaning. The activities related to the successful placement of low-threshold services clients (IV drug users, children and young people threatened by socially undesirable phenomena, persons from socially excluded localities, homeless people) in the labour market can be divided in following way:

- ✎ **Individual counselling aiming for placement in the labour market.** Involves mapping of the client's possibilities, outlining the process of finding a job, supporting the client in taking the necessary steps e.g. writing a CV, contacting employers, practising interview skills, considering retraining, considering the pros and cons of an illegal job, etc.
- ✎ **Providing information important for finding a job** (publishing information about job vacancies and retraining courses).
- ✎ **Education focusing on improving opportunities in the labour market** (coaching the skills of writing a CV, contacting employers, practising interview skills, providing information about labour legislation, etc.).
- ✎ **Assistance in finding a temporary job or a job** (selection and recommendation of clients for a specific employer with whom the services cooperate).
- ✎ **Support and counselling for sustaining a job** (psychological and social support of the clients with the objective to sustain a job, and not be taken advantage of).
- ✎ **Employment of clients without the obligation to fulfil the social contract.** The client is found a temporary job or a job with either an organisation providing a social service or with an organisation employing socially disadvantaged persons. The contract does not include requirement of social stabilisation or inclusion (it only stipulates the compliance with the contract terms and conditions). The organisation may, but does not have to, offer this service.
- ✎ **Employment of clients in combination with the social contract.** The client is found a temporary

job or a job with the organisation providing him/her with the social service. The contract requires social stabilisation or inclusion.

- ✎ **Incentive approach employment.** The client is remunerated specifically for the activities leading to the improvement of his/her unfavourable social situation.

Below we describe the last three options, i.e. situations where the social services are employers at the same time.

EMPLOYMENT OF CLIENTS WITHOUT THE CONDITION TO FULFIL THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Employment without the social contract can be described as follows: The social services client in an unfavourable social situation will be offered a job or a temporary job in order to acquire working skills, they will be positively motivated to succeed on the labour market or/and to earn some money. According to his/her work contract the role will be mainly that of an employee. The contract does not stipulate the client's obligation to fulfil other tasks such as e.g.; an individual plan or how to dispose of his/her income. Social work may be offered to and provided for the client, the decision of whether to accept it and to what extent is left up to the individual depending on their needs. The support is not typically provided by the social workers responsible for the employment of the client (to avoid the double role of "the superior and the social worker"). In my opinion perhaps the most prevalent model of the work contract are street newspapers. The homeless people sell the magazine, they keep 50% of the price and it is up to them how they use it. In the Czech Republic the magazine is Nový prostor (New Space), in Slovakia Nota Bene, in many countries it is The Big Issue and there are many others. The web site <http://www.street-papers.org/our-street-papers/> says there are 123 such magazines published in 41 countries.

What are the advantages of employment with the social contract?

- ✎ The employment may be very similar to regular work experience. The client can acquire practical working skills, experience success, a meaningful place in the labour market and a reward.
- ✎ There is no conflict of roles and therefore no **conflict of interests**. For example: The client is falling asleep at work because the night before he lost his/her place in a squat due to a police raid and spent the night on the street. As an employer I do not have to show the client how dissatisfied I am with his/her low performance and at the same time as a social worker demonstrate my understanding of how difficult for him/her it is to lose the only position he/she has got.
- ✎ We are freer in terminating the cooperation or in penalizing the client for low working performance. For example, the client turns up repeatedly for work under the influence of alcohol to such an extent that he/she cannot perform. Yet he/she needs the money to keep his/her place in the lodging house or to pick up his/her beloved dog from the shelter. As his/her employer I can say I am sorry for his/her difficult situation, but I have to terminate the cooperation. I can recommend him/her to make sure to discuss the situation with the social worker.

What are the drawbacks of employment without the social contract?

- ✎ The clients do not have to use the income to improve their social situation, they might even use it to repeat their destructive behaviour patterns. The social workers have very little chance to influence the "clients' method of disposing of their income". For example, the worker has to observe the client on the pay day to see if he/she is restless, eager to get the money which he/she then spends on drugs or loses in a gaming machine and finally might get injured or lose his/her personal documents because of intoxication or as a result of a conflict.

EXAMPLE OF EMPLOYMENT WITHOUT THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Jolana is a 50 year old woman addicted to alcohol who has been homeless for some time. She has now managed to find a place in shelter lodgings with her friend who is addicted to pervitin (methamphetamine). They were both offered a temporary job with an organisation that offers homeless people a chance to make

some money by producing and selling ceramics in the open air markets. Jolana is perceived as an employee and the organisation gradually commissions her with more competences and thus strengthens her responsibility. On Tuesday the sales are good and Jolana and her friend leave the market with a one thousand crown banknote, enough money to buy alcohol as well as pervitin (methamphetamine) for the friend. Unfortunately, the celebration ends with a quarrel in the shelter lodgings and the pair lose their temporary accommodation.

COMBINATION OF THE SOCIAL AND WORK CONTRACT WITH CLIENTS

The social service offer clients in unfavourable social situations a job or a temporary job to acquire working skills, to get motivation to apply for a regular job in the labour market or to earn some additional money. **The client will sign two interconnected contracts** stipulating his/her obligations and incentives in the double role of an employee as well as a client. In the client's role he will be obliged to fulfil a number of tasks following his/her individual plan. The contract may also stipulate how the client should dispose of his/her income. The social work in this case is obligatory and the client must use the service to be able to make money. The service provider and the social workers have a double role here: they are the client's employers (his/her "bosses") and at the same time his/her social workers, striving for his/her benefit.

Advantages:

- ✎ The possibility to support the client in his/her motivation to improve his/her social situation. The clients understand the approach of "give and take" very well. The regular confrontation of mechanisms applied by the persons in unfavourable social situations to dispose of money.
- ✎ Partial prevention of critical situations the client may get into by "ineffectively spending" their salary. We can negotiate with the client about how he/she should dispose of the money earned.

Disadvantages:

- ✎ Frequent conflicts of interests resulting from the double roles of employer and social worker. Should I tolerate the client's insufficient performance because as a social worker I understand that the client does not have working habits? Should I let him leave without earnings because he did not fulfil the agreed social task?

EXAMPLE OF A COMBINED CONTRACT

The outreach worker met a regular client Jirka who is 40 and lives in a squat. Jirka applies IV subutex to the value of approx. CZK 100 a day. When asked how he was, Jirka answered he was not doing well because he had lost all his personal documents and he could not see a way out. Jirka did not want to quit the drugs, but he did want to live "sort of usefully, without conflicts with people and the law". The outreach worker invited the client to join the low-threshold work programme. Jirka arrived on time and the worker spoke to him in detail about his life and signed the work and social contract¹ with him. Since Jirka was unwashed and his clothes were dirty, the worker organised a shower for him, gave him clean clothes and arranged for him to wash his dirty ones. Jirka could attend the programme every Wednesday and earn CZK 100 by preparing material for outreach programmes. He would pack filters, cut plasters and aluminium foil and he was made responsible for cleaning the premises. In order to be remunerated, he had to fulfil two conditions. Firstly, he had to go through training in the course of which the social workers inform the clients about harm reduction, sharing, etc. and at the same time they try to learn something about the clients' life style. The second condition was related to Jirka's social contract.

In the contract we agreed with Jirka that his goal was to arrange his personal documents. After the first meeting we sent an application for his birth certificate to his domicile along with the hundred crown banknote he earned with us. He posted the letter himself. He then had to obtain the certificate about the loss of his documents, apply for his ID card and medical insurance card. Fulfilling the tasks enabled him to gain another hundred crown banknote. When Jirka came after a week but had not applied for the medical card, he was allowed to go on working and earn CZK 100, but was given only CZK 50 in cash, the other fifty crowns he had to

1/ Contract about work execution

leave with us as a deposit. He would get it only after fulfilling the task (he could have collected it immediately but that would have meant a month's interruption of the programme). After two months of cooperation Jirka has got all his personal documents and he looks better. He is considering interferon treatment.

INCENTIVES APPROACH (CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT) EMPLOYMENT

We mean the following situation: The social services client in an unfavourable social situation gets a chance to be remunerated for the steps he/she takes to improve his/her situation and to do something for his/her inclusion. It is an **incentives therapy** approach. In English language literature it is called Contingency Management (CM), in the Czech Republic it sometimes called 'incentives therapy'². It is a behavioural method of behaviour control for problematic substance abusers and drug addicts that utilizes positive strengthening (rewarding) of desirable behaviour. The potential reward in this model depends completely on the fulfilment of an individual plan. The plan also stipulates the way the client will dispose of his income. The social work and client's involvement are subject to contract. The social worker also rewards the client for the success in social stabilisation according to the contract.

This approach also includes inspiration in the form of various incentives in kind (non-financial). For example, food vouchers if the client agrees to testing, telephone or rent allowances, fees in the form of rent or foodstuffs. Or the chance for the client to earn money in a relatively easy way (through simple work) to buy something useful, e.g. a cooker, spectacles, a gas ring. I believe that even substitution therapy may take the form of incentives. The client can get substitution of opiates if his toxicology tests are negative and he does not take any pervitin (methamphetamine).

Since the toxicological approach is not well known in the Czech Republic, I will try to describe it. It is known as incentives or motivation therapy. In 2011 XTP Sananim tested the incentives therapy in their work with pregnant drug abusers. In foreign literature³ this term is used in connection with social work and therapy. I have personally found references about its application to two target groups (both in the USA) – war veterans and drug abusers but also other persons in specific situations, e.g. prisoners and pregnant women.

Motivation therapy prior to the commencement of work is a programme providing war veterans with work experience⁴ in the USA. It is intended specifically for persons with grave mental illnesses and/or physical disabilities. Every participant of the IT programme has individual treatment, an individual plan, his/her own supervisor and support team. Every success in the programme is rewarded by incentives in the form of financial allowances. The veterans get a limited chance to work and receive income in defined areas, to learn to develop and improve the skills necessary for acquiring a job. The programme supports good working habits, attendance, reliability, punctuality, productivity and personal responsibility. Another example is the study devoted to the outpatients' treatment of methamphetamine addiction. The participants were rewarded for every day of abstinence, they could even draw vouchers of different values from the wheel of fortune. The results proved⁵ that the methamphetamine abusers attending outpatients' incentives therapy abstained significantly more than those attending standard therapy. The value of incentives sufficient to improve the therapy results was \$2.42 a day.

The advantages of this concept are as follows:

- ✎ The client's motivation to achieve the goals of cooperation increases. The same is true about the chances that the client will eliminate his/her unfavourable social situation.
- ✎ The client's total capacity is free for the fulfilment of the tasks related to the goals of cooperation. For example, a drug abusing woman becomes pregnant, does not have any source of income and loses her personal documents as well as her home. She doesn't have the capacity to work. The remuneration for the work on the improvement of her own situation might be an effective option with regard to the time pressure.

The disadvantages of this concept are:

- ✎ It means accepting an extremely pragmatic approach. Is it ethical to pay a client for helping him/herself?
- ✎ The clients may start to believe they should obtain 'incentives' for anything they do for themselves and they will start requiring them.

EXAMPLE OF THE INCENTIVES APPROACH

We have applied this approach to two pregnant clients (more about the programme below). I will describe the case of one of them. Diana is 25, she takes pervitin (methamphetamine), heroin and braun (*trans-lator's note: Czech drug, containing codeine, used as a substitute for heroin*). She says she needs to take pervitin (methamphetamine) every morning "to be able to function". Every day she takes drugs to the value of CZK 500. We had wanted to terminate our cooperation with this woman because she was not fulfilling her work obligations, when she told us that she was pregnant, a fact she had kept secret for some time. Later we found out that she had been at the beginning of the 6th month of pregnancy, approximately the 20th week.

She had not been examined by a gynaecologist even though she had known during the summer, the opium season, that she was probably already pregnant. She did not have a medical insurance card and about a month before that she had lost her ID card. Her tenancy was terminated as of the beginning of November. Diana said her partner did not care and she could not count on him. She also said she did not have a plan for what to do and that she "*did not want to undergo treatment, she wanted to take drugs*".

We discussed what to do and it was one of the most heated debates I have experienced since joining the programme. The emotions were really stormy. We asked questions like: "*What will happen if we terminate cooperation with Diana?*" We came to the conclusion that if Diana continued taking drugs, she would end up on the street. "*Can we continue in cooperation with Diana? Should she go on changing IV sets in our programme?*" Here we agreed that from our value point of view such cooperation with a pregnant drug addict was unacceptable. Then we asked: "*Would Diana do something for herself and her child without regular external motivation? Would she stay in contact with our programme if we offered her only social contact and she did not get any money?*" We agreed that in her situation she would probably attend the programme very irregularly. And it also seemed improbable she would start attending another programme. Our next question was: "*What can we do so that Diana manages her pregnancy in the most responsible manner with regard to herself and the child?*" And this question brought us to the idea of incentive therapy. At that moment we believed that Diana did not have the capacity for visits to doctors, the authorities, or for arranging housing without being externally motivated. And for Diana money had been a form of motivation for a long time.

Hence we offered Diana an incentives contract. She would not be paid, as in the past, for collected syringes but for tasks performed for the benefit of the child and herself. She would be able to earn about CZK 800 a week as before. The condition was that the contract would be as short as possible until Diana solved the basic problems. We planned that later on she could possibly prepare our materials for HR programmes, e.g. pack filters, cut plasters, pack cellulose or capsules.

We offered Diana this possibility and said we would terminate the current form of cooperation. She should decide whether to terminate the work contract and continue in the adapted form. She decided to continue. We said we changed the "*external contract to a stabilisation one*". So now we were not interested in needles and contacts in the drug scene, even though Diana could have passed them to us. For a temporary period, approximately one month, we would be looking with Diana at tasks of which it was in her and the child's interest to fulfil, and for which she would be paid. The justification was that our cooperation was no longer only about her, but about the child that we were also ethically responsible for. We agreed with the management of SANANIM organisation to secure financial resources for this purpose from the organisation's income.

We agreed on the tasks for Diana for a given week and we assigned them a value which she would obtain by fulfilling them. For example, for a visit to a gynaecologist she would get CZK 150, for organising a new ID card CZK 100, for registration with the labour office CZK 150. Diana had great problems with punctuality and so we agreed she would get CZK 200 for attending the meetings with us and informing us about the tasks she had fulfilled. If she came late, she would lose some or all of the money.

The cooperation goal (the individual plan goal) was therefore set: **Diana would manage her pregnan-**

2/ Incentive therapy (Contingency Management, Outline of recommended procedures, 1st working draft, Kalina, Kamil (2013)
 3/ Voucher-based incentives, A substance abuse treatment innovation, Stephen T. Higgins, a, b, c, Sheila M. Alessia, Robert L. Danton, Addictive Behaviors 27 (2002)
www.pittsburgh.va.gov/Vocational/Incentive.asp
 4/ www.pittsburg.va.gov/Vocational/Incentive.asp
 5/ www.pittsburgh.va.gov/Vocational/Incentive.asp

cy as well as possible. She would take care of her health and social security for herself as well as for her child.

Cooperation with Diana in the form of incentives (financial incentives) evoked at that time a number of ethical and moral questions and considerations. What if Diana did not follow the cooperation plan? Should we terminate the cooperation? If we did so, what would be the outcome of Diana's pregnancy? We remembered another client of ours whom we used to meet during outreach work in the open drug scene. She had not been examined throughout her pregnancy and had given birth on the toilet not knowing what was going on. We experienced ethical dilemmas characterised by Marian Matisonn as the "client's right to self-determination versus other people's interests" and the "Right to self-determination versus the client's best interest. (Matisonn, 2006). In the end we agreed that we would not try to maintain contact at any cost. We were not responsible and it was her decision. We informed her that if she did not comply with the contract terms and conditions in a way that threatened the child, we would terminate the contract. We felt it was necessary to define limits beyond which we would not go, because we did not want to participate in "something wrong". At the same time it was clear that Diana had to manage many things in a short time and it was not realistic to offer her the originally planned manual work. So we continued in the incentives regime and used this method to accompany Diana during her pregnancy. Diana managed the following: regular visits to the gynaecologist, organisation of her personal documents, registration with the Labour Office, application for the social allowance in material need, reduction of the amount of drugs and applying them in a safer manner, finding a place in a lodging house, and last but not least she decided she did not want her dog but her child.

As for the application of the non-traditional method: The financial incentives for Diana for those four months were approx. CZK 7500, prepaid phone cards CZK 1500, coming to a total of CZK 9000 which was paid from SANANIM o.s. own resources. Diana thus received approx. CZK 2250 a month which is not a big sum especially if we compare it the social allowance in material need. Our experience with a number of clients is that as soon as they collect their allowance they spend it on drugs within a few days. The money we paid was clearly invested in the improvement of our client's social situation and in the starting position of her child. I believe that in this respect the application of the non-standard method can be justified. The funds were paid out legally on the basis of the work agreement. I speak on the basis of our experience from SANANIM outreach programmes where we already had more than 10 clients who spent their pregnancy in the open drug scene and did very little for their children.

XTP SANANIM PROGRAMME

The XTP SANANIM low-threshold work programme has been in operation since 1994 and thus it is one of the oldest in the Czech Republic. During those years we have tested a number of various approaches.

In developed countries a high number of outreach workers are covered by **peers, it is the concept of so called peer work**. The Czech approach to health education and social support of IV drug users is typical for a high percentage of professional social workers who do not have personal experience with drug addiction. Also, there is no users' forum in the Czech Republic. And yet, the involvement of drug users is of the utmost importance if we want to influence the attitudes and behaviour of drug addicts towards safer application. The XTP SANANIM outreach programme is the biggest "peer project" in the Czech Republic which keeps extending and intensifying.

External outreach workers are clients interested in helping their peers, working for the benefit of public health and cultivating the drug scene. External workers collect used material and exchange it in the closed or open drug scene in places when and where the professional outreach workers are not present.

XTP operates in flats and in localities in the territory of the capital of Prague and its environs. Since Czech legislation does not enable a better form of remunerating self-help activities, the external workers are rewarded in the form of Work Agreements. As well as this, the external outreach workers may use the programme premises to wash their clothes, charge their mobile phones, get food allowances, etc. We try to keep 10 workers in the programme standing group. These people will exchange some 140,000 injection sets a year.

We operate the programme from premises in the vicinity of I.P.Pavlova underground station on Sokolská 26. The premises are called "Centre of the work with stabilisation of drug abusers" and its main objectives are:

- ✎ Utilisation of peer potential of active drug consumers for outreach work with the aim of improving the protection of public health
- ✎ Education and training in HR and safe conduct among IV drug abusers
- ✎ Stabilisation and training in basic health and social habits.

Each of the clients sign **two contracts** with us. One **work contract (Work Agreement)** and one **social contract** that empowers the social workers to perform a kind of social control and work with motivation aiming at social stabilisation of the clients. We want the external outreach workers to follow their individual social stabilisation plans, i.e. in order to support their housing plans, we are willing to provide them with credit to buy cookers, to give them opportunity to earn additional money to buy spectacles, etc.

Our external outreach workers recruit from squatters, homeless people, people suffering from various social, health and other problems – the expected performance must be adjusted to the real possibilities and capacities of each and every individual.

We are both teachers and students, i.e. our approach is that of "curiosity", we are interested in their interpretation of reality, we try not to act as experts but try to consult with clients about the information on the effects of drugs that we learn from expert publications. We could call this approach "we learn, we teach you".

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Low-threshold work programmes in the Czech Republic are a novelty in the field of work with people on the margins of society. These programmes may take different forms and offer various possibilities. This paper suggests three possible types of contracts with clients. We offer topics to discuss and consider:

- ✎ Should low-threshold services become the clients' employers? Could it be seen as an unacceptable conflict of interests?
- ✎ How to handle the power the low-threshold programmes have in their role as an employer?
- ✎ What is the goal and what is the instrument of low-threshold employment?
- ✎ Do you think that the incentives approach may be destructive for the clients' motivation? I.e. will the clients subsequently expect to be rewarded for anything they do for themselves?
- ✎ What if we are addressed with a request for a Work Agreement by somebody who draws social benefits? Should we perceive it as a contraindication for employment?
- ✎ How often should the clients in low-threshold programmes be paid their wages?
- ✎ What if a client spends the money earned on something inappropriate, e.g. marijuana and other drugs, gaming machines, etc.? How should we respond?

The programme is financed from RVKPP (Government Council for the Coordination of Drug Policy), MHMP (Capital City of Prague Municipality), MPSV ČR (Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), and MZ ČR (Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs) subsidies. The programme operates from the premises leased by Prague 2 district.

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HOW AND WHY TO WORK WITH CANNABIS DRUG USERS IN THE FIELD

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Kamil Podzimek, Martin Zajíček

Cannabis users are a group of people you can come across in street work very easily. We can do two things. The first option is not to deal with this group of users. However, the other option is to meet this group, stop for a moment and find a common language. Our practical experience and way of thinking brought us to the latter option.

Approximately 27.9% of inhabitants of the Czech Republic have tried cannabis based substances while 9.2% of individuals admit regular use, which translates to approximately 560 – 760 thousand inhabitants¹. We performed a questionnaire survey in 2013 at high schools (in Prachatic and Strakonice) with the ultimate aim to identify the experience of students with the use of addictive substances. The results of our questionnaire survey almost correlate with the studies of the National monitoring centre for drugs and drug addictions. However, the surprising fact was that 43% of the students are in contact with an individual or individuals using addictive substances (including marijuana) a number of times a week. The street workers are also aware of excessive use of cannabis by young people and come across this phenomenon directly in the field. The Action plan for implementation of the National strategy for anti-drug policy for the period 2013 – 2015 states the following priority – **To reduce the rate of excessive alcohol drinking and the rate of (intensive) use of cannabis by young people**, which can be translated as the introduction of specific interventions for a target group of intensive cannabis users². In our opinion, these measures shall be implemented primarily by means of outreach programs. Taking into consideration the case files of our outreach program clients, the first experience with the use of illegal addictive substance comes at 13 – 15 years of age on average. However, the addicts start to use our expert services much later, usually between 18 – 21 years of age. Furthermore, there are also interesting indications clearly showing that cannabis users are distinctively connected with meth users, especially in smaller cities. The work with cannabis users can also lead to a decreased threshold of service availability due to the potential threat to meth users. And it is for exactly for this reason that it is extremely important to address and get in touch with the individuals that are at the very start of their addictive substances use period, and are experimenting with narcotics. In simple terms, we ought not to wait for the people to use the expert services following a number of years of addictive substances use, but to reach out to them and get in touch with them at the time they are fascinated by the world of narcotics and they are still at the very start of their addiction career.

CANNABIS-BASED DRUG USER'S SCENE

The Czech narcotic scene completed its transformation process in 1997 – 2000 and in simple terms, the classical commercial sale of marijuana came into existence in most of the larger cities in the Czech Republic. The development over the past 5 years clearly indicates that the volume of indoor produced cannabis is on the rise. This cannabis has a high content of THC, which in turn signifi-

1/ Mravčík, V. et al. Výroční zpráva o stavu ve věcech drog v České republice v roce 2012 (Annual Report on Drug Related Issues in the Czech Republic in 2012. Prague: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2013, page 22.

2/ National strategy for anti-drug policy for the period 2013 – 2015 Action Plan, page 9.

cantly influences the level of intoxication. In real life this means that most of the cannabis users buy on the black market, resulting in a significant financial burden for the users and major social risks³. Cannabis-based users (hereinafter referred to as the 'UK') is an individual who is in various stages of drug use. (This includes a person that is experimenting with cannabis-based drugs, recreational users as well as every-day cannabis users).

We have two main goals when working with cannabis users:

- A) To establish and build contacts with cannabis users.
- B) To provide cannabis users with suitable information leading to the reduction or elimination of risks connected with the use of cannabis-based substances.

We fulfil the aforementioned goals within the framework of the following three steps:

- 1) Establishment of contact.
- 2) User situation mapping.
- 3) Selection of suitable intervention.

The second and thirds steps continuously overlap.

1) ESTABLISHMENT OF CONTACT

This step is used to introduce the service and get the user involved in the contact. Within our activities, we establish our contact with the UK in the following way:

- a) Personal approach;
- b) Approach through a third party (service user; a person already in touch with us);
- c) Through other services (by NZDm staff member...);
- d) User finds the service on his own.

Cannabis-based drug users were not members of our target group in previous years, hence we did not come into contact with them too often. Later on, when we started to actively address young people and the potential users of drugs, we were surprised by a really high number of UK, as well as by the number of people experimenting with various other substances among those using cannabis. We started to actively seek contact with cannabis users and found out that mainly the young UKs are open to contact with us.

We have always approached the UKs and still approach them clearly indicating that work with cannabis drugs users is an integral part of our work. Their first reactions often times went along the lines of: *"I just smoke dope, I am not on meth."* Nevertheless, even though the people we approached did not feel like suitable candidates for our services, they were very positive about our presence. Our explanation is that we came to them from the "other bank of the narcotics world" while offering to the share information on cannabis that we had available. (In this respect, the following sources have helped significantly: 'Efficient regulation of marijuana', NMS, 2010; Miovský at al., 'Cannabis and Cannabis-Based Drugs', Grada, 2008; internet sites of services provided to addicts). We have produced an information leaflet drawing information from all the aforementioned sources, which we now distribute to all our clients.

We were soon able to recognise and identify a number of very basic myths the users often considered to be true. And apart from a wide range of information, we also offered the very first harm reduction material for UKs. The UKs we worked with had access to special cigarette filters they tested. Unfortunately, we had to withdraw these filters from our offer since they proved not to be suitable for our users. Therefore, we found inspiration in a different outreach service (Bridge to Hope) and offered Rolls filters for tests, which are intended for safer smoking of herbal mixes. This step helped us to get significantly closer to the UKs and turned out to be a very efficient contact method. The UKs started to perceive us more as experts in the 'world of narcotics' interested in work with cannabis users, with necessary information about cannabis and even materials for the drug users. We are of the opinion that the combination of our interest in cooperation with the users, knowledge of cannabis and the ability to offer specific harm reduction material, is a key to contact establishment.

3/ MIOVSKÝ, M. at al. *Konopí a konopné drogy (Cannabis and Cannabis-Based Drugs)*. Prague: GRADA Publishing 2008, page 152.

Specific harm reduction material – a good contact method a.k.a filters are not alike

Back in 2012 a company selling filters for smoking herbal mixes entered the Czech market. Some cannabis users started to use these filters. In 2013 the same company was awarded with the best product award at the Cannafest 2013. Low-threshold services started to use these filters as a means of establishing contact with UKs.

Advantages

The particularity and focus of the filters are very interesting to UKs mainly because of the fact that this product is dedicated to them and hence they have a higher level of trust in this product. This filter became very 'cool' mainly among the young users. The filter itself eliminates all mechanical impurities and captures more harmful substances than ordinary filters used, provided it is used correctly. The cooler produced with the help of laser technology also allows for reduction of the smoke temperature. When introducing this filter to the users, we can include many other harm reduction information into our communication while making it easier to map the individual habits of the respective cannabis user.

Disadvantages

The filter has not been subject to regular laboratory research, hence we are missing independent information on the impact of smoking cannabis substances on the health of cannabis users. Some cannabis users with extensive experience and careers in substance use refuse to use this material since it significantly disturbs their routine use ritual. Furthermore, this material is not subject to any subsidies whatsoever. It is also necessary to create a methodology stipulating who, when and under what circumstances should a person be eligible to receive and use this filter. There might be some discussions and controversy as to whether or not to provide 14-years-old cannabis with this filter. It is well worth considering whether or not to distribute this filter or contact UKs near schools where cannabis consumption is very frequent and common.

1a) Address

The street worker initiates the contact. This is by far the most common way of establishing a contact.

The street worker approaches an individual or a group and introduces himself and the service he provides. In this respect we make use of our experience from previous years when we actively approached all young people and our service users in all areas we develop our activities in. Thanks to previous contacts and approaches, we are very well known to a certain extent. It is much easier to establish contact with the people who are aware of what we do. These contacts might be either isolated or repeated. We come across those we have already approached, especially in smaller cities, which makes it possible for us to go back to our previous contacts without the individuals approached before seeking contact with us actively. When we approach the individuals, we also present information about the service (who we are, what we can offer, who we work with, what are the rules and what our working hours are). Provided the street worker establishes the contact while approaching the individual or group of users, he/she continues to map the situation.

Approaching an individual versus approaching a group

Approaching a group makes it easier to transfer information in a swift manner to a large number of individuals. Thanks to a certain level of anonymity in the group it is easier for some individuals to listen to our offer as opposed to approaching them on an individual basis. Often we come across situations where only a part of the group communicates. However, this does not mean that those who are not communicating are not listening.

While approaching the users and especially in case of repeated approaches, it works very well to 'make the approached individuals experts in their own city' and discuss the situation in the city with them directly (talking about the narcotics problems, entertainment, culture, sports, schools, etc.). This is nothing else but mapping the situation not with an individual, but with a group.

In case we manage to approach an intoxicated group it is advisable to have certain limits as to when to stop the approach attempt and whether or not to continue with the approach.

In comparison, approaching an individual is more suitable for clearer focus on the approached individual while providing the street workers with an opportunity to establish contact without the usual 'group hustle'.

1b) Approach through a third party

Existing service users or an individual approached in the past are usually the third parties we refer to. The newcomer gets more information on the service offered by the street worker, while the street worker starts to map the client's situation.

1c) Through other services

The procedure is identical to the one described in the previous point. Moreover, the street worker discusses the circumstances under which the client comes in within the framework of the approach.

1d) User finds the service on his own

This situation usually occurs mainly due to our advertisements on the Internet (web site, Facebook) or following participation at one of our debates attended by one of our street workers.

2) USER SITUATION MAPPING

In this stage the street worker maps the UK's situation while trying to find out more about his personal attitude towards cannabis and his user habits, which is essential in the choice of efficient intervention (tailor made information or help with resolving any potential problems) while involving the user in contact in such a way that the information provided by the street worker are not in the form of a 'tyrannical monologue'.

The co-operation with the user in the client sense of the word does not have to be established in the course of mapping. It may be just a one-off contact from which the user will get the information regarding the service or information pertaining to possible prevention of risks related to the use of cannabis-based drugs. In real life we come across situations that a number of repeated meetings (approaches) must take place before the UK starts to use the service. When mapping the situation it is necessary to ask questions in a sensitive way. Often we experience situations in which the users are very much inclined to establish contact with the field worker, but they still need some time to 'check him out' first. Yet we have found that it is not a problem for a UK to talk about his use of cannabis. This may be due to the fact that they do not perceive cannabis to be of high risk. Furthermore, the other reason for their attitude towards cannabis may be influenced by the fact that people consider cannabis use as widespread and something people do not have to hide or conceal.

The room for building mutual trust and space between a UK and the street worker is determined by the interest of the street worker in the client, together with respect towards his individuality as well as with a guarantee of a high quality expert service. It is not possible to truly map the UK's situation without this mutual trust.

Mapped areas:

- ✎ Information regarding the use of cannabis-based substances;
- ✎ Information regarding the area in which the client lives;
- ✎ Mapping experiences and encounters with other intoxicating and psychotropic substances;
- ✎ Physical and mental health;
- ✎ User's social links
- ✎ Family
- ✎ School/work
- ✎ Others

Myths and legends pertaining to cannabis-based substances use

As already mentioned, we come across various myths and half-truths in the course of initial approaches with drug users. These 'theses' became a really good tool for establishing contact between the street worker and drug users.

We simply ask about the myths on purpose, while mapping the client's or group's situation. (For example: "Do you think that...?"; "Have you heard that...?"). The main goal is to get to the main risks related to cannabis use. Furthermore, we want to inform the users that not everything one hears from friends is true. By doing this, the street worker reinforces and anchors his role as an expert.

Below you will find some of the wide-spread myths:

- ✎ Smoking cannabis is healthy. Cannabis is a medicine after all.
- ✎ One cannot become addicted to THC.
- ✎ Marijuana is less harmful for the lungs than tobacco.
- ✎ It is legal to be in possession of marijuana for one's own personal use and it is also legal to grow up to five plants.
- ✎ It is necessary to hold the smoke in your lungs for a long time when smoking marijuana. The longer, the better.

3) SELECTION OF SUITABLE INTERVENTION

We have already established contact with a UK by this stage, and thanks to mapping his situation we have gradually identify individual risks. The client also determines himself what risk is of an acute threat to him. This risk becomes a topic for the street worker and the UK, with the street worker trying to identify the way to decrease or eliminate the risk jointly with the client.

In case the street worker and the UK discuss a particular risk situation and the UK did not come across such situation he/she can get an information about such a risk, which is also a threat. Any topic not perceived as an imminent threat by the user can become a topic during future contacts (meetings). The risk of cannabis-based drugs can be divided into two areas.

3a) Somatic risks, psychological and psychiatric risks

- ✎ **Risks related to acute intoxication** – deterioration of conscious control of movement apparatus (risk of fall, road accident, etc.); change of perception caused by consumption of cannabis (attention, concentration, memory or time-perception disorders, 'bad trip', etc.); increased chance of depression or psychosis (in case of predisposed individuals).
- ✎ **Long-term use risks**
 - Related mainly to inhalation of marijuana smoke – cannabis smoking causes or complicates issues related to airways (such as chronic bronchial tube inflammation and tumour diseases); heart and vascular structure risks (heart beat rate rises significantly while intoxicated by cannabis).
 - Psychotic states, neurotic disorders (anxiety, panic, phobia), cognitive deficit (inability to learn), increased risk of suicide, temper disorders.

3b) Social risks

These appear much sooner than the health-related risks and thus are easy to identify. These are often accompanied by changes in behaviour and the way the user acts. The situation is very similar to usage of other drugs in this respect.

Social risks and impacts include the following:

- ✎ Use of cannabis is not entirely controlled by the user.
- ✎ Risk of committing a criminal offence.
- ✎ Financial demandingness and issues.

- ✎ Change in quality of partnerships, friendships and family relationships.
- ✎ Problems at work or school.⁴

Don't be afraid to ask

Street workers use simple questions to identify the client's situation. They ask from the position of an individual who possesses information about cannabis and offers this information for further use. The street workers does not judge the client nor does he try to taunt or outsmart him.

The street worker maps individual risks, and following the agreement on a common topic with the UK, offers a suitable intervention. Most of the questions cover a number of risk areas. This allows the user to choose the actual risk that most bothers or concerns him/her. The street worker can also identify risks the user can't identify himself. There may be hundreds of questions, but each endeavours to identify the specific risk situations of a particular individual.

Below you can find a sample question that opens room for discussing all fields of risks. The question can be asked in a number of ways, but it always follows the same target. *"What do you smoke? Outdoor stuff (cannabis grown outdoors with lower content of THC, usually weaker effect), skunk or something else?"* *"Do you use more outdoor or skunk?"* *"Do you smoke outdoor or skunk?"* This question opens up room for additional work. Following the answer by the UK, the street worker continues to map the risks. Potential follow up questions will most likely be focused on daily consumption by the UK, financial demandingness of addiction, level of intoxication, setting, etc. ... (I.e. on mapping both social and health risks).

Examples of other questions: *"Have you ever experienced a bad trip on cannabis?"*, *"How much do you spend on dope every month?"* *"Do your parents/work colleagues/teachers at school know you smoke?"*

Possible interventions

- ✎ Tailor made information (information service – harm reduction, health related information, social/legal information, literature, etc.);
- ✎ Offer to help resolve troubles (reference to other services available, through our own services).

Example: Having been asked whether he uses outdoor or skunk, the UK answers "skunk". The street worker now knows that the user is using cannabis with higher THC potential and assumes that the UK has to purchase the drug. Asking additional questions, the street worker finds out that the UK spends approximately 1000 CZK on dope, which is no threat to him as he has a very good salary. Thus, he does not feel in danger. The use of cannabis is easy and trouble free. The only problem is the fact that the smoke burns in his throat and that hurts. The UK does not intend to stop using cannabis. The suitable intervention in this case might be to provide information on safer use of cannabis, on health issues and last but not least reference to other health services available.

CONCLUSION

Cannabis users are a group of users no outreach service has ever systemically worked with before. Activities and interventions directed towards this particular user group have been witnessed only during the past year or so. Our experience shows that provided we start targeted work with cannabis users, we will get new opportunities for co-operation with this omitted addictive substances user group. This may help us to better fulfil our basic target, which happens to be the harm reduction. In other words, we want to limit and eliminate the consequences of drug use and to work with cannabis drug users individually towards a change leading to reduction of excessive cannabis use, regulation of cannabis use or total abstinence.

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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF OUTREACH PROGRAMMES IN SMALL TOWNS

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Katarína Debnáriková, Magdaléna Halássová

This paper summarizes briefly the experience that the STORM Association gained from its work with active drug users in their natural environment of the town of Sered' through the programmes KROK VPRED (STEP FORWARD) AND ZÓNA (ZONE)

THE SITUATION IN SLOVAKIA

In Slovakia attention is paid mainly to primary prevention and re-socialisation. The level that we perceive as a bridge between prevention and treatment is in our opinion still insufficiently, and even alarmingly, neglected. We believe that such a bridge is the work with active drug users who currently do not want to/cannot/ do not know how to change their risky way of life.

The work applying low-threshold philosophy and Harm Reduction tries to fill in this deficit or gap. The niche in the service providers' market particularly affects the third sector. At the moment there are only four organisations in Slovakia working with active drug users.

- ✎ OZ Odyseus (Civic Association Ulysses) works with clients in Bratislava,
- ✎ OZ Pomocná ruka (CA Helping Hand) works with clients in Košice,
- ✎ OZ PRIMA (CA PRIMA) works with clients in Bratislava,
- ✎ Združenie STORM (STORM Association) works with clients in Nitra, Sered' and in Trnava.

Our experience indicates that the clients – active drug users are in some cases also involved in street sex work and/or they are homeless. That means that they belong to more target groups of social work and they could draw upon the system of social services targeted at other target groups.

Just for illustration, in 2007 there were ten organisations active in outreach social work with drug users. This substantial reduction has been, in our opinion, the result of inflexible financing systems and unclear legislation rather than insufficient demand on the side of the drug addicts. The problems the clients are struggling with are still here, they are accumulating and their situation is not dealt with or it is dealt with only marginally or in cases of crisis.

LEGISLATION STIPULATING OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

The work of outreach programmes in Slovakia is defined in the Social Services Act – Act no. 448/2008 Col. which says that outreach social services are to be provided to physical persons in their natural social environment or in their homes. They can be also provided through outreach programmes aimed at prevention of social exclusion of physical persons, families and communities whose social situation is unfavourable. In our work we also rely on EU Drug Strategy for 2013 – 2020 that amongst other things aims at the reduction of the drug demand and supply in EU as well as at the reduction of health and social risks and harm caused by drugs. The EU strategic approach supports and complements national policies, provides a framework for coordinated

and common activities and creates foundations and a framework for the EU external cooperation in this field. All this should be achieved by an integrated, balanced approach based on facts. The National Drug Strategy of the Slovak Republic for 2013 – 2020 indicates the drop of IV application of drugs. Yet it acknowledges the continuing considerable occurrence of blood transmitted diseases, particularly of the hepatitis C virus and continuing potential threats of new HIV transmissions and of other infectious diseases caused by risky behaviour of IV drug users. Hence one of the objectives defined by the Strategy is the improved quality, extent and diversification of services aimed at the reduction of drug demand (prevention, treatment, re-socialisation and harm reduction) on the platform of single standards of services provided.

STORM ASSOCIATION

STORM Association was founded in 2002 as a low-threshold facility focused on the prevention of risky behaviour of various target groups. In our work we apply the principles of Harm Reduction philosophy. The mission and goals of our civic association are the following:

- ✎ To contribute to the solution of, especially, drug addiction and risky behaviour in the area of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. To emphasize the establishment and implementation of the first contact institute.
- ✎ To associate persons interested in preventive (contact, social, outreach) work.
- ✎ To draft and distribute materials dealing with prevention of addiction and risky behaviour of target group members.
- ✎ To cooperate with healthcare, leisure, youth, civic and other associations, with charity, public, and state administrations and self-government in Slovakia and abroad with the objective to create optimum conditions for the practical application of the association programmes.

Currently (2014) the association operates 5 regular programmes:

STEREO (STEREO) – Primary prevention of risky behaviour in the form of group work in primary and secondary schools in the Nitra and Trnava regions.

CIRKUS (CIRCUS) – Primary prevention with informal groups of children and young people in the form of club and outreach social work in the city of Nitra.

KROK VPRED (STEP FORWARD) – Secondary prevention of drug addiction in the form of outreach work among drug users and persons involved in sex-work in the towns of Nitra, Trnava, Sered' and along the road towards the town of Zlaté Moravce.

ZÓNA (ZONE) – Contact centre for drug users, persons active in the sex-trade and their relatives in the town of Sered'.

ECHO (ECHO) – Preventive and educational activities for the general public.

STEP FORWARD PROGRAMME OF STORM ASSOCIATION

STORM Association has been operating the STEP FORWARD programme since 2003 in three towns; Nitra, Trnava, Sered' and along the road towards Zlaté Moravce.

The clients using the programme services in Nitra are typified by the misuse of IV medical drugs either legally or illegally (Suboxone, Subutex) and pervitin (crystal meth). It may be interesting to note that the medical drugs (Suboxone, Subutex) were for many clients the first substance they started using intravenously. 262 clients have used the services in Nitra at least once. In 2013 75 clients used the services regularly, 61 of them were men. Currently the outreach work in Nitra is offered for two hours a week. 209 clients have used the services at least once, 30% of them are regular consumers. Almost 80% of female clients work in the street sex-trade. We register misuse of medical drugs (e.g. Tramal) and consumption of pervitin and to a lesser extent heroin. Our workers provide their services at specified addresses during defined hours in Trnava twice a week for 2.5 hours.

The clients along the road to Zlaté Moravce are persons working in the sex-trade and they claim they do not use IV drugs. The outreach work there has been suspended because of the lack of funds.

In Sered' STORM Association serves the highest number of clients (447). It is interesting that while in the

Bratislava region and in Europe in general pervitin seems to be the favourite drug, the situation in Sered' is different. The clients living in this town use heroin or drugs sold by the dealers as heroin. Some use a combination of heroin and pervitin in one dose which seems to be attractive for drug addicts from other locations. The outreach work is limited to two hours once a week. The contact centre (ZONE programme) also operated by STORM in Sered' is open 3 days a week for 4 hours. Thus the clients in this locality may use the services four days a week.

Non-systematic and inflexible financing forces us into permanent changes and limits that are restricting not only for the clients but also for the social workers.

The work in smaller as well as bigger towns requires the establishment of contacts within the drug users' community. We have had good experience with preliminary mapping of the situation, free distribution of medical material sets and information material for the drug users in pharmacies, with the avalanche method in the dissemination of information about the services provided as well as with positive experience of the clients with social workers reported to the drug users' community.

It also proved beneficial to inform (at least once a year) the local and state police about our activities and to cooperate with them by organising the collection and disposal of used syringes and by offering education on the topic of addictions.

As for the local general public it proved beneficial to inform them sensitively but also truthfully and pragmatically about risky behaviour and about our services through events attractive for them (e.g. the organisation of quizzes in local pubs, organisation of a candle march on the HIV/AIDS international day, etc.).

STORM ASSOCIATION AND THE TOWN OF SEREĎ

The town of Sered' has had a bad reputation for its drug scene since the revolution in 1989. It is located in the south western part of Slovakia, the Galanta district in the Trnava region. According to the latest accessible data (31st December, 2012) the population of the town is 16712, comprising 8113 men and 8599 women. From the point of infrastructure the town is favourably located just next to the motorway connecting it with the capital of Bratislava as well as with nearby Nitra and Trnava, a fact obviously appreciated by the drug users. Our clients are not only Sered' inhabitants but also drug users who come to the town for various reasons (e.g. to work in the street sex trade, to buy drugs, to visit family or friends, etc.) but they permanently live and associate in the neighbouring towns (Trnava, Galanta, Šaštín-Stráže, Bratislava, Prievidza, Banská Bystrica) or villages (Váhovce, Šintava and others).

The media quite often cover police activities related to the town drug scene. The town representatives are aware of the presence of drugs and the Sered' Community Plan of social services for 2014 – 2018 mentions as one of the problems the considerable occurrence of socio-pathological phenomena (alcoholism, drugs, social parasitism) in the local community. The problem is reflected also by the town inhabitants. Those who are not indifferent to the situation express their opinions on various forums and web sites. It is understandable that most of them view it negatively and they would like to get rid of the "drug problem" quickly and sometimes even with the help of extreme methods applied by themselves or with the help of the police force. Here we see the opportunity for our work in the form of information provided to the general public. We organise the collection of needles and syringes discarded in public spaces, the open doors day in our contact centre, visits to restaurants and pubs with quizzes, and we have launched a telephone counselling line. We have been active as a civic association in the town of Sered' since July 1st, 2003 when we introduced the first outreach service through the STEP FORWARD outreach programme. After almost ten years' endeavour we managed to open the second contact centre in Slovakia on September 1st, 2012 that works (through the ZONE programme) not only with the drug consumers and persons involved in sex-work, but also with their families and friends, and it also provides social counselling for Sered' inhabitants concerning drug consumption and addiction.

In our work we reflect the needs of our clients. For example, several indicators pointed out the need to open a contact centre.

Here are just a few of them:

- ✎ High number of clients who repeatedly used STEP FORWARD programme services,
- ✎ High number of returned syringes,
- ✎ Client's interest in the counselling services,

- ✎ Clients' interest in the increased frequency of outreach services,
- ✎ Lack of space and time for more intensive individual work with clients, individual counselling and work with clients' motivation,
- ✎ Missing contacts with the users' families,
- ✎ Contact centres for drug consumers had always been lacking in Slovakia (the only contact centre used to be in Bratislava) (Halášová, Valentíny, 2013).

For the establishment of our ZONE contact centre we drew inspiration from the already functioning centres of Czech organisations (Drop In, SANANIM civic association in Prague, Helping Hands /Podané ruce/ charitable trust in Brno) and from the Slovak PRIMA Civic Association in Bratislava. We gathered information about procedural, personnel and operational standards which we then adapted to our own conditions.

When offering the services of the newly established contact centre we addressed the STEP FORWARD programme clients for whom it was a possibility to use similar services more often. The ZONE contact centre employees were recruited from among social workers who had previously worked in the outreach programme. We are convinced that this was one of the reasons why our clients started quite naturally to also use the stationary form of services. We have also had a good experience with sending the contact centre workers to the outreach service shifts during which they could themselves address the clients and introduce their services to them. During the first few months it became apparent that the stationary form of service provision can be accepted even by clients who had not so far used any of the association programmes (they claimed the problems was a well-known red van that could identify them with this type of services). The selection of the location on the outskirts of the town and yet close to a bus stop proved of key importance for contacting new clients.

The establishment of the stationary service gave us the possibility of reflection and of the targeting of selected projects on the specific needs of our clients. In the contact centre we began to focus more on the areas our clients were interested in. For example in 2013 in Sereď we launched a project of labour counselling aimed at the improvement of the clients' labour market skills (looking for vacancies, writing CVs and motivation letters), training for job interviews, contacting agencies, and other skills.

At the time when we had sufficient financial funds we operated an outreach programme called Experts in Streets – legal and health counselling in the field run by experts – lawyers and nurses. The project was first launched in 2005 and it was based on a regular schedule. The experts were in the field once a month each. The first Friday of a month the social workers were accompanied by a nurse, the last Friday of a month by a lawyer. The clients could consult with them about their health and legal issues, discuss some of them in detail and they had the possibility to solve them or to take steps to improve the situation. The legal and health related counselling was most often provided in the form of interviews with clients (Olšanská, 2012). We have been trying to get financial funds to be able to provide this service not only in the outreach form but also in the contact centre as the clients have been repeatedly requesting it.

One of the traditional services for the clients is the distribution of the STORMie magazine produced by the STORM Association workers themselves. It focuses on health, drug or legal issues but also on entertainment. The clients can contribute to the content by poetry, drawings or articles, and they can participate in the selection of topics for future magazine issues or take part in the surveys. The magazine is published once a month in 150 copies for all the clients of the STEP FORWARD and ZONE programmes.

For the next year we are planning to focus on the selected needs of homeless people who are at the same time active drug users.

We must not forget that in the town of Sereď the clients can also use the services intended for the homeless, for people in social and material need, those in critical situations or dependent on the help of others and provided by the Help Centre for People. In case they are interested in treatment, they can also turn to Restart, a re-socialisation centre for men founded by a not for profit organisation Teen Challenge Slovakia. In the town of Sereď we cooperate with the above mentioned organisations as well as with selected pharmacies and one GP.

WORKERS PROVIDING SERVICES IN SEREĎ

All the workers have been inoculated against type A and B hepatitis and they are specifically trained for this type of work. The organisation organises regular meetings, training on topical issues and supervision (STORM Association Manual, 2010). At the moment the STEP FORWARD programme is operated

by 11 workers, 7 workers take care of the outreach work in Sereď. Three workers involved in the STEP FORWARD programme are at the same time active in the ZONE programme. The team has been gaining multidisciplinary character – among the workers we have social workers but also a nurse and graduates in other disciplines such as psychology, cultural sciences, etc.

New workers are recruited according to our needs, most often every two years as it is very difficult to find financial funds to remunerate the (full or part time) employees. For the first six months the newcomers work in pairs with experienced workers to allow the newcomers to adjust to the outreach work and enable them to learn and to gain practical skills. The theoretical training usually consists of two to three weekend sessions dedicated to various topics from the area of risky behaviour indispensable for outreach work (e.g. low-threshold philosophy, Harm Reduction, legislation, ethics, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.). The future workers preparing for work in the STORM Association must first take part in two observation service shifts in the field. On the basis of their own initiative the workers take part in accredited training courses and events. The Association organises annual training events on topics of practical relevance. Once a month, or in case of need more often, we organise supervision which is in our opinion an important factor for the continuous improvement of knowledge and skills necessary for social services work. Our practical experience also proved the benefit of intervision which follows every service shift. Professional working meetings are organised to inform the workers about important changes in the Association, financial issues, projects accepted and it is when the potential improvements of the quality of services provided to our clients are discussed (Ščasný, Halášová, 2012).

SERVICES PROVIDED TO CLIENTS IN THE TOWN OF SEREĎ

The table below lists the activities run in the town of Sereď. We do not describe the activities in detail as we believe their titles are sufficiently self-explanatory.

Tab 1 Services provided to STORM Association clients in STEP FORWARD and ZONE programmes

Services provided in STEP FORWARD programme	Services provided in ZONE programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange and distribution of material necessary for safer application of drugs and elimination of risky behaviour • Contact work • Consultancy (face to face) in social, health and legal issues • Motivation talks • Crisis and situational intervention • Social assistance • Basic (non-invasive) medical treatment • Information service • Distribution of information and educational material • Food service (instant soup, biscuits, tea, water) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange and distribution of material necessary for safer application of drugs and elimination of risky behaviour • Contact work • Consultancy (personal, telephone, e-mail) in social, health and legal issues • Contact with other experts (lawyers, nurses, psychiatrists, etc.) • Social assistance • Motivation talks • Crisis and situational intervention • Assistance in the administration of documents, applications and papers • Safekeeping of important documents, papers • Use of telephone or computer to deal with immediate critical social or health situations • Delivery of a client's mail and use of the contact centre's mailing address • Distribution of information and educational material • Food service (instant soup, biscuits, tea, water)

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE STORM ASSOCIATION SERVICES DISTRIBUTION IN THE TOWN OF SEREĎ

The table contains selected attributes of services provided in Sereď.

Tab 2 *SWOT analysis – services provided by STORM Association in the town of Sereď*

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of services free of charge • Accessibility of services in the locality • Satisfaction of client's needs and trust • Continuous growth of clients in both programmes • Satisfaction of the town needs • Establishment services supported by the town • Good cooperation with Trnava region administration • Opportunity to learn about the local community • For clients: Interconnection of services and possibility to use services of both programmes (STEP FORWARD, ZONE); potentially possibility to select preferred service • For clients: Possibility to draw upon the otherwise inaccessible services of medical, legal, psychological experts • Source of information about job vacancies, treatment possibilities, medical facilities in contact centre premises • Arrangement of professional examination, addiction treatment • Monitoring of the town of Sereď drug scene and contact with the hidden population of drug users • Permanent team of social workers • Cooperation with other organisations providing services in the town • Flexible response to the clients' needs • More personal relations (e.g. on the level of discussions with the municipality – less bureaucracy, faster access to competent persons) • Rapid circulation of information among the clients and general population of the town • Tradition • Encouragement of service innovation • Optimization of funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles and prejudices towards the drug users among the town population • Misunderstanding of Harm reduction philosophy perceived as encouragement of drug consumption • Repression • Lack of funds resulting in permanent restrictions (i.e. volume of material issued, loss of qualified social workers, shorter time in the field, etc.)
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building up good relations with the municipality • Involvement of the wider community in our activities • Opportunity for university students from UKF Nitra, TU Trnava (volunteer activities, fellowships and professional practical training) • Extending and improving cooperation with organisations active in the town of Sereď 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal changes in the municipal and regional council and subsequent sudden change of political climate • Absence of regular financing policy • Mobilisation of the inhabitants against STORM Association activities • Repressive behaviour of the police • High turnover of social workers • Restriction of the provision of outreach services on selected positions (STEP FORWARD programme) and eviction from premises (ZONE programme)

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on specific features of the work performed by STORM Association for and with drug consumers in the town of Sereď. As well as general information about the association it presents two programmes – STEP FORWARD (outreach programme) and ZONE (contact centre). It describes their establishment and interconnection, characteristic features of the clients in the given localities, various aspects of work in the programmes and it also provides statistical data. The paper also outlines the legislative framework of outreach programmes and describes briefly the current situation of services provided for drug consumers in outreach programmes in Slovakia. Finally, there is a table with SWOT analysis of services provided by the STORM Association.

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Contact: Združenie STORM, www.zdruzeniestorm.sk

WORKING WITH ROMA DRUG USERS IN EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES

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Vladimír Pechek, Olga Baťková

Outreach Contact Assistant, a project of The Bridge to Hope, provides outreach social services in the clients' natural environment. The outreach services focus on the detection of abusers of illegal drugs. The main objective of the project is to mitigate the health and social consequences of drug consumption not only for the clients, and to increase the clients' motivation to change their lifestyles. The Bridge to Hope outreach workers work in several socially excluded neighbourhoods that differ in size, location, composition of population and as such in also differ in terms of client requirements.

The main localities are Chanov housing estate in the city of Most and the Janov district of Litvínov city. In both locations the percentage of Roma population is above average, both locations are somewhat isolated, located on the outskirts of the cities and thus difficult to access. These are some of the reasons why the rate of socially pathological phenomena, including drug abuse, are higher than elsewhere.

The Chanov neighbourhood differs in size – it is a housing estate comprising some ten prefabricated apartment houses. The estate is relatively isolated as there is no pedestrian passage to the city itself. There is a public transport connection, but for financial reasons many local inhabitants will walk to the city along the road. Most of them are Roma who know each other very well. The estate does not offer any common services except for a basic school and a convenience store. A number of organisations are active here. Due to the difficult accessibility the illegal drugs users more or less do not use the K-Centrum (Contact Centre for drug addicts) services and most of the services are provided by outreach workers. The outreach programme in Chanov was introduced in 2006.

Another locality we are active in is Janov housing estate, a district of Litvínov. This neighbourhood is considerably larger, it is interconnected with the rest of the city yet still somewhat isolated. The district has standard facilities, not all the tenants are threatened with social exclusion and the population is not as ethnically homogenous as the Chanov population. There are more "problematic" portions of the estate (some houses inhabited mostly by Romas) with a higher concentration of persons dependent on social benefits, committing petty crime, addicted to drugs, etc. Most of the drug addicts in Litvínov depend on the services provided by outreach workers and only a few of them attend the K-Centre in the neighbouring city of Most - usually for the urine tests (drugs) since our programme does not provide this type of service. The field programme was introduced in Janov in 2009.

Other excluded localities we are active in are some districts or neighbourhoods in the inner cities or towns. They are not clearly defined or isolated (some of them are located almost in the city centres) and they are typical for a higher occurrence of social pathological phenomena. These places too are inhabited by a higher number of Roma community members, but the local drug consumers do not stick to their neighbourhood, most of them also cooperate with the local K-Centre and the outreach workers meet them in the places connected with their drug consumption rather than in their domicile. In these localities the outreach workers do not cooperate with the whole community like in the previous two cases, but with individual clients and thus our work there is more or less standard.

In each locality our approach differs depending on the specific situation and setup. It applies particularly at the beginning when we try to get to know the given community. The successful establishment of cooperation with local clients required long-term and regular visits of the locality which was most important and most

complicated, and at first we failed in some neighbourhoods. The potential clients did not respond very positively, simplified their problems or pointed at their neighbours and vice versa. We always learnt quite quickly about the high occurrence of drug consumption but nobody wanted to admit to it. So how did we penetrate the neighbourhoods?

WE VISITED THE NEIGHBOURHOODS REGULARLY AND FREQUENTLY

We concentrated at first on monitoring the neighbourhood and on the collection of discarded infectious material. The service of the collection of infectious material is appreciated in these localities especially because of the children and it contributed to setting up the contacts with local inhabitants. It proved more practical to wait until the clients addressed us themselves even though at first it seemed to be more time consuming. As such we regularly spent a longer time there frequenting the places where we could meet potential clients and talking to all who seemed to be interested. The people got used to our presence in the locality, got curious, started asking questions and we thus had a chance to inform them about the programme and the services we could provide. In case of clearly "Roma localities" it was easier to draw the attention of the locals as our appearance did not fit the community. On one hand it incited questions, on the other hand they got closed and distrustful and it took some time to persuade them we had not come for example to take away their children, to take their photographs or to film them. It proved helpful to talk to all who expressed interest – drug users as well as those who did not take drugs, young people, senior inhabitants, children – and to answer their questions and advise them or refer them somewhere else if we were not qualified to deal with their specific problem. Thus the valid information about who we were and what we were doing there got disseminated in the community and the drug users started addressing us as well. With their positive experience their numbers grew.

WE WERE OFFERING CONDOMS AND FILTERS

Contacts were easier to establish also because the outreach workers were distributing condoms to prevent venereal diseases and filters for marihuana smokers as a part of HR (harm reduction). These tangible services were attractive for the potential clients and yet not as stigmatising as the exchange of syringes and so they often first resorted to this service to sort of test us. The distribution of condoms and medical material for intravenous drug users also served the drug users as a pretext to seek our help, as some of the neighbourhoods are small and it is not always possible to organise anonymous exchange of material in privacy.

WE HAVE USED THE HELP OF INDIGENOUS OUTREACH WORKERS

Wherever it was possible we have used the help of indigenous outreach workers who are members of the clients' target group and whose main objective is to help the outreach workers to penetrate the group; they get the material from the outreach workers, distribute it in the closed group and encourage potential clients to cooperate with the outreach workers. This cooperation has never worked for a long period of time. These local collaborators often proved to be unreliable and tried to build, shielded by our name, a kind of false position which they then misused against the other clients or came up with various rumours about our programme. We have also discovered that the clients who exchanged larger volumes of syringes would then sell the clean material to other users. Despite that, the possibility of cooperation with local collaborators at the beginning of penetrating very isolated communities was more than welcome.

WE RESPECTED THE LOCAL "BOSSSES"

Getting to know the given community, we also found it helpful to learn, who are the so called 'most important' community members – that is people who hold prominent positions and who are respected by the others. We gave these people special treatment (we favoured them when providing medical material – ointments, vitamins, condoms) and respected their position. Our good relations with them had a positive impact on our

penetration of the target group. Yet the most important of all was patience, whether in our regular visits to the locality or continuous explanations about who we were and what we were providing. It was of crucial importance that people got to know us and knew what we were offering to them.

HOW WE BEHAVE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOODS TODAY

At the moment we manage in this way to penetrate closed communities, at least when the community members agree to what we are offering to them, and we leave it up to the clients to address us. This applies even to our first contacts with them. The clients themselves decide whether to address us, when they will use the programme services, how often they will use them or for how long they will interrupt the contact with us. We can thus avoid addressing the clients at an inconvenient moment as it often happened that a long-term client would pretend he did not know us because a family member or someone else who he did not want to know about his/her contact with us was nearby. In these communities where sometimes all the members know each other and their relations are interlinked, it may be difficult to find a safe place for contact.

In these case the HR services are provided in several flats we visit and where the drug users will exchange a larger volume of material which they will then distribute to those who for some reason cannot or do not want to use our services personally. We also provide them with hazardous waste containers and with bins for safe waste collection. In the past these clients used to be rewarded for their services by a larger amount of medical material (vitamins, ointments, dressings, etc.) but nowadays, due to financial reasons, we provide the medical material only in limited amounts and in urgent cases. However, these willing clients still continue in their activity.

The selection of the two workers visiting the localities was also crucial for the success of our mission. It is greatly beneficial to have a fixed pair of workers for a long period of time for the community to get used to. A male and female pair proved to be most successful. With some clients two women did not enjoy the clients' sufficient professional respect as - usually with Roma clients – a female outreach worker is not considered an equal partner. Two male workers in these localities were addressed by the inhabitants themselves less frequently, which applied particularly to women. In our project the members of these communities most often first addressed the female workers, who commanded less respect and the clients would thus dare to contact them. On the other hand, the information and recommendations are more respected if they come from men. The female clients subconsciously tend to address female workers. Thanks to this set up it is easier for the clients to solve also the problems concerning solely one or the other gender.

In Roma communities we also found out that the attention paid to the age of outreach workers was more important than in other localities. Compared to other localities where it seemed better if the workers were more or less the same age as the clients who would accept them more naturally, in Roma localities the clients responded more positively to older outreach workers (approximately 35 years) who were more respected by the younger drug users, who would address them spontaneously more frequently and responded less often with mockery and provocations. With older clients it was even more noticeable as they tended to look down on a visibly younger outreach worker and the contact was then limited only to what they critically needed in a given moment.

The general conduct of the outreach workers is most probably even more important than anywhere else. It is important to maintain confidentiality (particularly difficult thanks to the interwoven relations in the community), to be receptive and sensitive to external expressions – tone of one's voice, non-verbal communication, to behave naturally, to set the limits and clear work procedures. Since we work with clients who are at the least suspicious of institutionalized services or have already had negative experiences with them, it is advisable to familiarize to a certain extent with clients (by using slang, informal clothes, etc.). The proper behaviour and manners of the workers is also important because if we make a mistake, the whole community would immediately learn about it which could harm the reputation of the workers and thus destroy the whole process of cooperation with the community.

Our services in these localities comprise most often the exchange of syringes and distribution of HR material. In socially excluded communities, especially those with a higher percentage of Romas, drug abuse is the most typical pathological phenomenon and it is not uncommon to find whole families of drug users. Most often they use pervitin and diluents. Hence the reason the clients are most interested in the exchange of syringes. They need them and they have the possibility to get them quite quickly which seems to be a decisive factor

with this type of client. The problem we have been facing for a long time is the return of used material, a phenomenon typical mainly for Roma drug addicts. We learnt it was better not to insist absolutely on the exchange of a piece for a piece to make sure the client had at least one clean syringe and did not have to borrow one or use one he/she might find. It gave him/her a possibility to come to us and we could speak to him/her and motivate him/her to come again and cooperate with us. At the same time we could prevent him/her getting into the vicious circle of cajoling clean syringes from the outreach workers for various often unbelievable reasons. We have set up a system which we describe and explain to our clients (who, when and how many times you may get a clean syringe without turning in the used one) and we try to adhere to it with very few individual exceptions. We also proceed in the same way with other services to prevent the complaint that someone got more than the others.

In the course of syringe exchange or distribution of condoms and medical material we have a chance to discuss with clients their problems and provide them with information. In providing information we try not to overwhelm the clients, to speak comprehensibly, to avoid unnecessarily complicated or unusual terms (in our experience it is important that they know what we mean and that we do not have to stick to exact terms) and in general to accommodate the needs of individual clients.

More and more often the Roma drug addicts particularly in these excluded localities are prone to fall in for various rumours and absurdities usually concerning medical issues or information about drug consumption. We are making a long term effort to disprove them and we repeat some things for years and years. We are careful to be patient whether providing information, negotiating the date and time of the contact or in adjusting to a slower process of individual planning, aversion to filling in forms, etc. On the other hand, in the course of our work we almost never provide information concerning social benefits. When it comes to the benefits our clients are quite knowledgeable and unlike other clients they generally do not use the assistance services because compared to the others they usually have at least partially functioning family relations that means family members or friends who are versed in benefits and who can support our clients in negotiations with these institutions.

WHAT WE FOUND USEFUL

In the course of our work in socially excluded communities it is not only the situation on the drug scene that is continuously monitored, and this helps us to adjust the accessibility of our services. For example, the lifestyle of most inhabitants in socially excluded localities makes it almost useless to visit these areas in the morning hours. Most locals or at least those who are members of our target group are unemployed and so they often get up later in the afternoon. The ideal time for visits is thus late afternoon. It is also useful to adhere to a certain regularity, that is to adjust the time if possible but to visit the locality possibly on the same day/days. There is then a greater chance that the clients will be at home or somewhere in the neighbourhood.

It did not prove useful to be at a regular time at a specific place and we were more successful if we walked through the neighbourhood. The work in the drug user's homes was particularly effective as there was a chance of privacy, the drug users were in their own environment and thus often more open in communication with the outreach workers. It also gave us the possibility to discuss various potential clients' problems while the contact in the street usually involves only a fast exchange of syringes. In the flats we could also often meet not only their owners but also other drug users, either those who already in cooperation with us or new potential clients. And since we do not have any premises in these neighbourhoods, the homes/flats represent a possible place to perform e.g. tests for contagious venereal diseases.

In these localities we also have a monitored network of social services providers with all their contacts and in case of need we can refer our clients to these services or help them to contact the providers.

Contact: Asistent pro terénní kontakt Most; Most k naději o.s.; www.mostknadeji.eu

Section 3

COMMUNITY WORK

SYSTEM SUPPORTING HOUSING ALLOCATION IN ZENGROVKA A SOCIALLY EXCLUDED LOCALITY

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Martin Prokop

This paper will mention the introduction of housing self-administration and the new system of allocation of flats in the socially excluded locality of Zengrovka in the city of Kolín. Approximately 85% of the neighbourhood inhabitants are Romas who came to live here against their will or rather because they were not successful in applying for council flats in different city districts. The locality suffered from tensions among the inhabitants who were contentious towards one another as well as from aggression towards the city council. Social programmes of O.S. Prostor (Prostor Civil Association renamed as Prostor plus o.p.s. – Generally Beneficial Association Prostor) were selected to become mediators between Zengrovka inhabitants and the city of Kolín to placate the critical situation. The introduction of complex community work followed individual interventions in families responding to the complaints of tenants concerning the situation in the neighbourhood.

The introduction of housing self-administration and community work in Zengrova street and Havlíčkova street can serve as an example of best practice with positive results, which was appreciated in the course of exchange scholarships and which we are glad to share with other outreach social workers. We are aware of the lack of publications on the topic of community work and we support the mutual exchange of experience. We should add that the new system of flat allocations does not currently work due to the changes in the city council and the temporary suspension of flat allocations, but we thought it was right to share this proven method of council flat allocation.

Social programmes are field outreach programmes devised by Kolín not-for-profit organisation Prostor plus (formerly o.s. Prostor) active in the city of Kolín and the neighbourhood. The programmes focus particularly on the socially excluded locality Zengrovka in the area of Zengrova and Havlíčkova streets and on the local lodging houses that also demonstrate elements of social exclusion from the economic, symbolic and sometimes also spatial point of view. The target group are socially excluded persons or those threatened by social exclusion, particularly the Roma. The service consists of standard outreach work, social activation and Roma employment projects – particularly the employment of minors in the field of welfare. The service works in cooperation with the Czech Republic Labour Office. During the pilot stage of the project the first three workers were employed from September until November 2009. In the following years the number of workers employed in the form of welfare works would be ten to eighteen per season (usually from April until October or November).

The programme employed six workers (five job positions) and there were always two workers performing the community work (on rotation so that the individual workers take turns and all workers maintain contact with the locality). The community work which we introduced in November 2008 takes place every Monday in the evening, usually for two hours depending on the number of participants and the topics to be discussed. We adopted the method of community work as a completely new programme activity responding to the then critical situation in the neighbourhood.

At that time there was practically no communication between Zengrovka inhabitants and the city of Kolín. In the past the city, in common with many other cities in the Czech Republic, possessed a gradual concentration of Romas at possibly one locality designated for this purpose.

The majority of existing families were moved to other parts of Kolín and the empty flats were allocated to Roma families. They were settled – mostly against the will of new tenants – by several multi-generational

families with antagonistic relationships. This trend became a rule. The inhabitants were complaining about the unbearable situation caused in particular by the growing number of children who came to the locality with the new families, about the growing noise, mess, vandalism, petty theft, etc. We also realised the classic field work in the locality was insufficient and it was necessary to employ community work and to help the inhabitants to gradually open a dialogue with the city.

The Zengrovka neighbourhood comprises of three apartment houses with approximately 80 flats, owned by Kolín city council. About 85 percent of the tenants living in five sections of the houses are Roma. The majority of the tenants are threatened by social exclusion and only some are employed or self-employed. Several years of the continuing situation caused by the allocation of local flats to other large and often problematic families led in 2008 to a petition filed by the tenants of one of the sections against the decision to move in yet another family with a large number of children. The political reaction of the city council was the suspension of allocation of flats in Zengrovka.

At the initiative of several tenants, and with the help of Social programmes workers from O.S. Prostor (SP), housing self-administration was elected in the individual sections of the houses in January 2009. The subsequent meeting held at the premises of Prostor civic association was attended by all the elected caretakers, SP workers, Prostor technical director, regional Roma coordinator and the representatives of the city council, department of housing and non-housing premises and of the social affairs and health departments. The city council representatives mandated the caretakers with an advisory vote in the process of flat allocation. It was agreed that if a flat in the locality was vacated, the department of housing administration would provide the SP workers with the authorised list of housing applicants which would then be presented to the caretakers at one of the regular community meetings, in order to ensure consensus about the new tenants. The SP workers were commissioned to supervise the whole process and the signature of the SP director was to be a sufficient guarantee for the department of housing administration.

Upon the agreement with the caretakers, the Prostor o.s. workers established binding internal rules to ensure the transparency of the process, prevent concentration of power in the hands of individuals and to exclude potential corruption. In case the process was breached, the SP director would not sign the final decision.

The internal rules were as follows:

- ✎ At a community meeting the SP workers would present the list of applicants to the caretakers who would consider whether the new tenants would upset the fragile balance of local relations.
- ✎ The selected candidate would have to be elected by the simple majority of all caretakers (not only of those present), no SP worker had the right to vote.
- ✎ The proposed candidate would then be presented to all the tenants in the section of the housing complex where the vacated flat was located.
- ✎ If a simple majority of all the flats in the section (one flat, one vote) did not approve the proposed candidate, the process had to start again. Only when the proposed candidate had been approved by a simple majority of all the flats in the section would the SP director and the chief caretaker sign the document stating "there are no objections to the allocation of the flat to Mr. and Mrs. X".

In the course of the first year we realised it would be better to replace the signature list on which the voting tenants expressed their will with individual personal ballots to prevent tenants being positively or negatively influenced by their neighbours. Before that we had often been asked how this or that neighbour had voted and only then would the questioned person decide...

In order to speed up the whole process, at the beginning the caretakers also voted about the alternative applicant and the tenants in the given housing complex section voted about both candidates at the same time. However, we later learnt that we would have to change this procedure because many families, who were relatives of the alternative applicant, speculated that if they did not support the first applicant, the alternative applicant would take up his/her place. In the end we changed the rules and the elected caretakers voted only about one candidate, with the vote about the second candidate only taken if the first applicant was rejected by the tenants' vote.

Even though the process was rather lengthy and laborious, it was applied to allocate the flats in the locality to approximately thirty tenants or families and there were no more petitions or further protests. The above system was applied for some four years.

The Kolín city council abolished this support system of flat allocations in July 2013 and the allocation of flats was terminated. The current council strive to 'slim down' the locality, to improve the ethnic imbalance and thus prevent the establishment of a Roma ghetto.

We are convinced the above innovative system was clearly beneficial and our SP team would be willing to launch the support system of flat allocations again. The results were measurable, the locality has clearly stabilised. It is true that according to the local citizens the mess and noise situation has not greatly improved, but on the other hand it has certainly stopped worsening. The housing self-administration introduced regular cleaning of the houses as well as of the adjacent pavements and in the initial period it worked very well. However, after a certain time the quality and regularity of the cleaning activities went down, although the situation differed from one section to another. Yet, in our opinion, the uncontrolled growth of mess has stopped. The quality of cleaning activities and their regularity has been stabilised.

We have not always succeeded in selecting a family without problems, but these cases were rather exceptional. The SP workers tried to establish closer collaboration with problematic families on a voluntary basis, which meant they did not always succeed in stabilising the family.

The Social Programmes workers always instructed the newly selected tenant as to the lease agreement content and the neighbourhood principles (cleaning of premises, night time regime, need to stabilise socially excluded localities, maximum reduction of crime), the tenants usually understood the endeavour to stabilise the neighbourhood and naturally joined in. In case of the newly established system being breached, the individual problems were solved in the course of community work. The community meetings learnt about the breach of rules from the caretakers who detected them or from other tenants. In order to prevent the community meetings being taken over by complainers, the accused perpetrators were invited to join the meeting. SP workers acted as facilitators; the solution of the situation was thus up to the local inhabitants and the members of the elected self-administration.

After some time we may confirm, and we agree in our opinion with the tenants who regularly attend the community meetings, that the noise and mess have been minimised after some of the old problematic residents were moved out from the community - mostly because they had not been paying rent for a long time. After the city council terminated the lease contract and after the potential court decision to vacate the flat had come into force, some of the families moved to the neighbouring lodging houses, others moved to other communities and municipalities (e.g. Česká Lípa, Liberec). The SP workers learnt about the problems with rent payments usually too late, when it was no longer possible to do anything about the situation.

Currently the individual sections of the housing complex take care of regular cleaning and they also initiate community cleaning of the neighbouring areas or of the cellars. Not all of the tenants always participate, but the results are visible. Personal involvement of caretakers is crucial and therefore we recommend paying great attention to their selection. An ideal candidate is a tenant whom the neighbours accept as a natural authority, who himself has no problems with abiding with the rules and laws and who is not protective. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to find such a person in every section or a house. In our case we found a satisfactory solution in commissioning e.g. a person acting as a caretaker in the neighbouring section.

Having compared the situation before and after the introduction of housing self-administration and supporting system of flat allocations, we must emphasise the benefit of the establishment of communication channels between the city and the Zengrovka neighbourhood. The city officials started to perceive the housing self-administration representatives more like partners in the process of solving the neighbourhood problems. They learned to respond to the locality needs and to respect the caretakers for their abilities and possibilities to influence their close social surroundings.

A serious risk we discovered was the lack of new families applying for council housing. The list of these applicants sent to us by the council remained the same for a long time and after the non-problematic families were exhausted, there were no suitable candidates to choose from. In such a case, the caretakers had to resort to the 'least bad' option. If this trend lasted for a long time or for the entire course of the project, the supporting system of housing allocation would become just a formal instrument that could not solve anything at all. Another risk is the potential change of political set up in the city following the local elections that take place every four years. New political leaderships of the municipality usually follow their own strategy when it comes to socially excluded localities.

CONCLUSION

In our opinion the above detailed supporting system of housing allocation is a suitable instrument to use to launch communication between a socially excluded locality and the owner of the housing stock. The competences entrusted in the housing self-administration help to win basic trust in potential cooperation and its future development. The fact that the locality could be actively influenced by the members of housing self-administration evidently motivated the tenants to participate regularly and responsibly in community meetings. Once this possibility disappeared, their interest in cooperation gradually ebbed. As in all areas of human existence, here too the active cooperation of all the parties is indispensable. Once one leg breaks, the chair supporting the system breaks down as well.

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME INTERSECTION

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Jana Škodová, Ivana Štefková

Community Outreach Programme Intersection was launched as an independent social service in May 2012. With its activities it is a follow-up to Low-Threshold Club and Outreach Programme Autobus (Bus) and its establishment was accompanied by a number of passionate debates and long deliberations. The first thoughts about the introduction of such a programme appeared in 2009, but at that time they were not received positively. A frequent argument against the provision of similar services was that social work in our country was developing differently in the context of a new social services Act – it was focusing on professional work with clearly defined target groups and the work across these groups would be a step back – “back to the wild 1990s”. For us, the decisive impulse was foreign experience and the international trends of social work that clearly point out the inevitability of interconnecting individual and community based social work in localities which should complement police, medical and educational services (Executive 2006).

In autumn 2011 the Czech Streetwork Association published the Best Practices study which includes a summary of experience gathered by the low threshold social services' workers during their study trips to Belgium and The Netherlands. Our interest was captured by outreach social work performed by the Traject organisation in rural areas of the Maastricht region, based on the assumption that “young people in rural areas have limited access to all resources from the information data to material sources (Hanzlová & Zatloukalová, 2011, 95).” It reminded us of specific conditions in our locality – Prague peripheries that are often similar to rural areas by the types of housing as well as by the accessibility of services. Visitors to the locality, e.g. participants of public tenders, often ask with surprise: “Are we still in Prague? Can I use my Prague City transport pass here?”

However, the greatest source of inspiration for us was the work of Belgian outreach workers, the streetcornerworkers, in Antwerpen. They focus on community work, on setting up contacts and relations with target groups, they get to know what their situation and their problems are, they support them and help them to improve communication with their neighbourhood, their community. They work primarily for localities (neighbourhoods) and without exception they work with various people from various age groups and with different needs. They focus on those who urgently need them. The outreach workers concentrate on getting to know his/her neighbourhood and all the groups in need of social services (Kotová, Štorek, Vartanyan, 2011).

However, during the first year the programme faced a number of problems – the most critical one was the fact that the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (hereinafter MPSV) did not announce the subsidies contest for newly registered social service organisations. We were thus fully dependent on the financial support provided by individual municipalities. However, they covered the cost of only 1 part time worker (50%). So we began with what we already knew – we followed up on the outreach social work with juveniles and began working with young adults who ‘grew out’ of the outreach programme services provided by the low-threshold institution for children and youth – drop-in-club (hereinafter NZDM). Young adults were struggling particularly with searching for jobs, with family or partner relations and with newly experienced personal responsibility. Only in 2013 was the programme integrated into the network of supported social services.

At the moment the service is provided in three localities, in Prague 14 with a population 47 585, Prague 20 with a population 15 140 and Prague 21 with a population 17 964 (source: Czech Statistical Office, data from 31st Dec. 2013). The service is provided by 4 outreach workers (contract for 3.1 persons) and one

worker is therefore now responsible for an area inhabited by 26 000 people. To compare it with the situation in Antwerpen – 1 outreach worker is responsible for an area inhabited by 10 000 people (Kotová, Štorek, Vartanyan, 2011).

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

The mission of the Community Outreach Programme Intersection is to strive for social inclusion and positive change in the lifestyle of individuals in difficult social situations. We provide them with information, professional help and support. We reduce the impact of socially negative phenomena on the life of the neighbourhood. We look out for people threatened by social exclusion, motivate them to be proactive in solving their situation and to use follow-up services without delay. We identify risk situations in the neighbourhood and cooperate with all the partners on their solution.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH OUR CLIENTS?

- ✎ Clients have sufficient information and capabilities to solve stressful situations themselves. The clients have learnt several positive methods of managing stressful situations and keep improving their capabilities.
- ✎ Clients do not feel lonely, they are active and capable of seeking social support.
- ✎ Clients are well informed about accessible housing, they are able to arrange it for themselves.
- ✎ Clients understand their debts and have basic information about how to solve their indebtedness.
- ✎ Clients are well informed about vacancies on the labour market, they seek jobs actively and know how to keep their jobs.
- ✎ Clients are able to defend their interests in the neighbourhood, they are interested in the life there and participate in it.
- ✎ The clients and the community respect and tolerate themselves.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

We work with adult individuals who:

- ✎ Are older than 19 years;
- ✎ Live or spend their leisure time in Prague 14, Prague 20 and Prague 21;
- ✎ Have been struck by or are threatened by adverse social situations, most often in the form of:
 - acutely experienced stressful situations,
 - intensively experienced feelings of loneliness,
 - unemployment,
 - pending housing problems,
 - pending debt problems,
 - exclusion from the life of the neighbourhood,
 - insufficient abilities and skills to defend their legitimate interests.

WHO ARE OUR TYPICAL CLIENTS WHEN ENTERING OUR SERVICE?

- ✎ A homeless man about 40 years old, without shelter and a stable job. In his youth he spent time in an institution, as an adult in prison. Upon release from prison he found himself homeless. He is not able to find his place in society and due to his previous negative experience he avoids contact with institutions. He is addicted to alcohol which he consumes to overcome his psychological problems. He comes from a large family and does not have a steady partner. In the neighbourhood he frequents he looks most of all for security.
- ✎ A young adult man about 20 years old, without a stable job. He has problems completing his secondary education. An intensive marijuana smoker without a steady partner. He spends his leisure time in a passive manner, is incapable of perceiving the time perspective of future, he lives in the 'here and

now'. He has conflicts with the majority society. The most important factor in life for him is the peer group he associates with.

- ✎ A woman about 70 years old, her contact with her family is very limited, she feels lonely. She lacks intensive contacts with other people, is afraid of going out as she does not feel sufficiently self-reliant and she does not feel safe there. She is not able to adjust to the pace of modern society. She is trying to come to terms with the topics of the past but for her they are still alive.

WHAT OUTPUTS DO WE EXPECT FROM OUR TYPICAL CLIENTS WHEN THEY ARE LEAVING OUR SERVICE?

- ✎ The client has a stable and not just a seasonal job. He has suitable accommodation, a fixed income and he has his expenses under control. He is not afraid of contact with institutions and is able to cooperate with them for his own good. The client is able to admit to his alcohol addiction and he is ready to contact follow-up services. He is not involved in petty crime, does not burden legal authorities, healthcare and the social system. He is economically more effective – he pays taxes.
- ✎ The client has a stable job, he has accepted the responsibility that belongs to adulthood. He has become independent of his family. He does not have conflicts with society, he is not the source of aggression. He has begun to earn money and pay taxes or he continues with his education. He is capable of nurturing mature human relationships. He can control his marijuana problem. The client does not burden legal authorities, healthcare and the social system, he finds his place in society and acquires a job.
- ✎ The client gets involved in everyday social life, she is not afraid anymore of contact with the outside world, she is able to take care of her matters and in case of need, she can find social help. She is not concerned so much about the topics of the past. She does not burden the healthcare system. In case of need she can contact social services that enable her to receive help at home which saves public costs that would otherwise be incurred by her stay in hospital.

MUTUAL INTERACTION OF INDIVIDUAL TARGET GROUPS IN THE LOCALITY

The outreach social work in our environment follows the characteristic features of the locality:

- ✎ It is located on the outskirts of Prague where the individual neighbourhoods are more enclosed and distant from the city centre.
- ✎ Social services are more difficult to access for locals who do not want to travel far to contact them.
- ✎ These localities comprise of family houses and housing estates which determines the character of the local population. There are neighbourhoods typical for small towns and villages, calm and empty, but also neighbourhoods suffering from typical problems of the housing estates. The clients often move from one neighbourhood to another.
- ✎ The communities in small neighbourhoods such as Běchovice and Újezd nad Lesy are typically more interconnected, people often know each other but what is missing here is the element of mutual communication and cooperation.

We perceive locality or neighbourhood in its entirety with everything that is happening there and we try to participate in positive changes taking place. We cooperate with follow-up services – we maintain regular contact with the local social services agencies, with local social workers, curators and OSPOD personnel (Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children), we take part in the meetings of social committees and get actively involved in the activities of departmental working groups. Our vision is close cooperation between social workers and other assisting professionals in the close vicinity, so that the referrals to follow-up services are not mere transfers of contacts but real participation in the solutions of clients' difficult social situations.

Tab 1 Age structure in the individual localities (source: Czech Statistical Office, data valid on 31st Jan. 2013)

Praha, administra- tion district, city quarter	Total popula- tion	of which age groups								
		0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	
Prague	1,243,201	71,328	60,409	43,616	44,764	67,403	89,503	109,073	123,105	
AD Prague 14	47,585	2,681	2,438	2,168	2,478	3,215	3,569	3,978	4,864	
AD Prague 20	15,140	915	837	676	636	959	1,003	1,153	1,451	
AD Prague 21	17,964	1,176	1,271	967	720	876	1,049	1,475	1,865	
		40-44 years	45-49 years	50-54 years	60-64 years	65-69 years	70-74 years	75-79 years	80-84 years	85 years and older
Prague	1,243,201	94,074	81,926	72,624	77,932	80,922	53,060	34,800	30,631	25,629
AD Prague 14	47,585	4,134	3,467	3,012	2,926	2,319	1,332	898	745	455
AD Prague 20	15,140	1,193	1,149	958	1,019	870	512	369	287	183
AD Prague 21	17,964	1,517	1,231	1,013	1,100	1,035	636	350	328	218

The work with a wide range of target groups makes higher demands on the workers. We decided that every member of the team would focus on some of the target groups to ensure the professional standard of the services provided and not to overburden the individual social workers. Yet this does not mean that we would avoid contacts with other target groups. At regular meetings, interventions, externally chaired supervisions and in everyday contact between the workers, the team exchange information about the clients. If needed, the client's situation is dealt with in mutual cooperation.

In small neighbourhoods we work with mutual interaction among the individual target groups which is completely natural and from a certain point of view also inevitable. Fast dissemination of information is one of the reasons for intensive influence. Mutual interaction is often associated with mistrust and conflicts among the individual target groups, especially the conflicts amongst young adults and senior citizens, young adults and homeless people, homeless people and addictive substance users. Interconnection of target groups is also very pronounced amongst adolescents (13 – 18 years) and young adults (19 – 30 years). In this case we observed the risk of the transfer of negative phenomena from the older generation to the younger one but also a rather unsuccessful effort of the older generation to influence the younger one.

Among other tasks the outreach social workers should boost the clients' responsibility for their own behaviour, their ability to positively affect their own lives and to participate in the life of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood potential can also be utilized to support the change in the client's life. The support sources are there and the clients learn to look for them and utilize them themselves. In order to promote positive interaction among individual target groups, we have focused on managed interaction in the course of planned activities, and on the utilisation of natural situations we witnessed as assisting professionals. Thus we try to improve the social abilities and skills of the clients, to increase their self-assessment and widen their life opportunities. We also always strive to build their mutual respect and elimination of prejudices. If the worker is aware of the importance of interaction among the community target groups and if he knows how to utilise it positively, the community itself becomes his/her valuable assistant. It can be perceived as a source of inspiration and help.

YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults were the first target group – we launched the community outreach programme with them. What are they like and what do they need? They are usually young people who either do not have a stable job or they change jobs frequently. They have not completed their education or wish to change their profession. Economically they still depend on their parents without whose support they might be homeless. They have a strong bond with their peer group, with whose members they experience conflicts with society. They regularly use marijuana, some of them experiment from time to time with harder drugs. They spend their leisure time passively and do not view their own future realistically. They are beginning to deal with their debt

problems – they are most often indebted to transport companies. They have to learn to understand the labour market, find a job and maintain it. They must gradually become independent of their families, find their own housing, create their own vision of adult life and start fulfilling it. In our work team we began calling this group “professional teenagers”.

We help this target group to understand the labour market, we teach them how to look for a job and how to maintain it. We inform them about housing possibilities, encourage them in their search for a flat and support them in maintaining it. If they are threatened with homelessness, we refer them to follow-up services. We inform them about the potential consequences of risky behaviour, in case of the conflict with society we inform them about their rights and obligations. We hold motivation interviews with them on the topic of narcotic and psychotropic substance abuse, particularly of marijuana, to teach them that such consumption is their own decision, which they themselves should control when, how and why they indulge in the abuse. We improve their financial literacy and help them to deal with debt problems. We work intensively on assisting them in creating their own vision of their adult life and in fulfilling it.

HOMELESS PEOPLE

They are adult persons without stable housing or possibly with a makeshift accommodation (garden houses, makeshift cells, shelter with friends). Many of them have experience with prison sentences, petty crime, and alcohol addiction. There are conflicts within the group, with society and with the police. They make a living selling scrap metal, old paper, so called mining or by ad hoc seasonal work. They are not in contact with their families or other relatives, they lack a feeling of security. It is very difficult for them to access health care or legal protection. In some cases they also deal with debt problems – often because of alimony payments. More than a few of them also suffer from psychological problems. They need to feel more secure, come to terms with society and refrain from conflicts with it, to obtain access to health care, arrange the issue of identification and personal documents and to solve their debt problems. They need to stabilise their situation to prevent potential future jail sentences.

We help them to obtain personal and identification documents, inform them about basic social assistance (benefits, night shelters, social support in the application for a lodging house placement). We warn them about the legal consequences of their risky behaviour and raise their self-awareness in this respect. We also inform them about the potential assistance they may use to fight drug addiction. They obtain information about debt problems and about access to the necessary health care. We work very intensively on renewing their trust to the successive institutions and help them to re-establish contacts with them.

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

From the point of view of outreach social workers, families with children represent quite a demanding target group. Contrary to the previous two groups, it may not be obvious at first sight that the family really is struggling with a difficult social situation. The parents themselves may refuse such identification. When contacted with the service leaflet, they quite often refuse the service objecting “*it is not for us, we do not need it, we are not socially deprived*”. That is why we decided on a different approach for establishing contacts – we avoid the term unfavourable social situation and we rather say that any of us may get into a situation which is difficult for us to solve. At the first sight these families may seem completely content. The parents themselves are often afraid to use ‘official assistance’, i.e. to contact authorities. We work with families in different stages of development. The parents of small children are typical for their uncertainty resulting from their new role and lifestyle change, previously mentioned social isolation and the loss of original contacts, interests and bonds. The parents of adolescent children are typically tired, feeling “*there is no solution to this*”, resigned and worried about how the situation will develop. These clients need to consult a number of issues - rearing their children and family relations, returning to their jobs, financial and housing problems.

We help the children to gain confidence in their roles – we thus try to balance the pressure exerted by society which burdens them with high demands and at the same time does not support them sufficiently. “*There are no spoilt children, there are only spoilt parents*” (Lipovetsky, 1999, 185). We focus on supporting family relations, on mutual cooperation and communication. We encourage parents to gain trust in the institutions

that might help them to solve their situation by strengthening their awareness that a request for help is not an expression of weakness but of courage.

SENIOR CITIZENS

For our programme the work with senior citizens is undoubtedly the greatest challenge. They are traditionally considered as a target group for social care services and for social prevention programmes. While analysing the needs of individual target groups in the neighbourhood we found that there was quite a large group of senior citizens looking for contact with people in shops, pharmacies or waiting rooms. They were looking for someone who would listen to them, understand them and support them in their difficult situations. Senior citizens are typically worried about impotence, loss of self-sufficiency and control over their lives. They often feel lonely, they are isolated in society, they do not understand the world they live in anymore and they have given up contacting it. They are intensively aware of their own motoric and cognitive limitations and deteriorating health conditions. They are not afraid of death but of dying.

The beginning of our work with this target group was accompanied by an uncertainty concerning the establishment of contact with them. Quite early on we found out that attempts at contacts in the street were rather counter-productive, especially due to the senior citizens' experiences with daylight robberies. On the other hand, the cooperation with local authorities proved very useful. Here we discovered an interesting parallel – whereas in the drop-in clubs we learnt to justify street football's existence to gain contact with clients, in the case of outreach social work with seniors we learnt to use the institute of escorts (visits to doctors, authorities, successive services) that became the framework for establishing relationship, mapping the client's needs and determining possibilities of cooperation. In our work with this group mutual understanding is also important – we must realise mutual differences in pace of life, methods of communication, life experience, values, trust in the world and the people who inhabit it. In relation to (not only) senior citizens the outreach social workers are those who listen to the clients and together with them identify their needs and offer them their help. In our opinion the biggest difference between our services and the social care services is that our services decided to go forward and meet the clients and help them to identify their needs, while the social care services are addressed by those clients who have already identified their needs.

TWO PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

On the Day of Social Work, designed to celebrate social work as a fully-fledged profession and to remember its social importance on the institutional, regional and also national level, we organised the meeting of target groups we work with in the neighbourhoods. Thus the drop-in-club clients met with senior citizens and a homeless woman. The outreach workers managed to create an environment of mutual familiarisation and understanding. For the clients as well as the outreach workers, the meeting was the source of new topics we could pursue in the course of our future cooperation. We began pondering together how a person could end up on the street, what were the options such a person had and whether it was his/her fault. The adolescents could personally meet a homeless person and the myths that they were permanently drunk people who refused to work were destroyed. The homeless woman got to contact adolescents in another context – in the course of conversation, while in the past she was used to being verbally offended by the adolescents. The meeting with senior citizens proceeded in a similar spirit. The adolescents welcomed them proudly in the club - their personal premises – and demonstrated to the older ladies the facilities and described to them their free time activities. And then they listened with great interest to the old ladies' accounts of their lifetime experience, e.g. the time of the Second World War.

A blind client, Petr, needed someone who would help him with gardening works. Following a discussion amongst the outreach workers, they suggested to a young man called Petr from the young adults target group that he could perform the job. Petr junior could thus make use of his skills which he had problems with in everyday life. He himself described the event very positively, contemplated the importance of working with other people and the feeling he had working for another person. Later, without the assistance of our workers, both Petrs agreed on other cooperation – they joined forces to clean up a cellar and transport the junk to the scrapyard. For both clients the important moment was the element of mutual help within one community.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

We realise this is only the beginning of our work and we are already faced by a number of new challenges. In one of the localities we got in contact with an enclosed drug scene whose members are not as yet interested in medical or material assistance, but rather in support, information and mediation. We talk to them about what we can do for them, inform them about follow-up services and motivate them to accept their offers. At the same time we get more and more often in contact with people, young adults, the homeless or parents, who have psychiatric diagnoses. In these cases, too, they are not interested in health care or medication. They rather want to talk to us about the processes that take place in them and how they should understand them. We work together on reducing their distrust of follow-up services and of contacting them.

What we are attracted by are the foreign approaches e.g. to the training of new workers. In Belgium it is an exception that new workers are trained for up to 6 months, during the course of which they get to know the new neighbourhood and give the inhabitants the chance to get used to them. During this period they do not contact anyone in the locality (Kotová, Štorek, Vartanyan, 2011). However, due to the current emphasis on the reported number of minutes of work, we cannot afford to follow this inspiring approach. We are often forced to contact the clients very early on and then we are faced with their natural distrust caused by the fact we are newcomers in their neighbourhood and they did not have a chance to see us and get to know us.

Another big challenge we are facing is 'continuous work'. *"The workers work on their own and only after 10 p.m. do they ask for a colleague to join them. That means the working hours are very flexible. They should work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week but the beginning and the end may differ according to the needs of the target groups. The days may also change – e.g. Saturday instead of Friday if it is expected that many people from a target group would attend an event planned for Saturday"* (Kotová, Štorek, Vartanyan, 2011, 101). In this respect we are still in the mapping stage. We have agreed with the City Council of the capital of Prague that we would revise the working hours every quarter and throughout the year we would map the movement of target groups.

We are already trying to be flexible about the opening hours – we state the working hours when some of us are always on the streets and from time to time we even set out outside these hours – to get to know the neighbourhood and the related phenomena as well as possible.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The advantage of the community method of social work is the diversion from a one dimensional perception of the target group. We can focus more on the neighbourhood needs and the related phenomena. Our work is very diversified and often very enriching. It gives the workers greater freedom but necessarily also responsibility. We learn to think in the context of the whole community and cooperate closely with other social workers and assisting professionals. We can adjust our services more to the needs of our clients but also other inhabitants in the locality. We can use the interactions among the individual social groups as an instrument to help the clients as well as the locality itself. Working with a client we always consider his/her whole life context and the context of the locality he/she belongs to. In principle we do not learn to work with individual target groups but with individual phenomena taking place in the locality. For they determine the direction of our work – if there is a problem with gambling, that is what we primarily focus on, if it is freezing, our attention shifts to the homeless people...

Yet this necessarily means greater burden for our workers. This method of work is more demanding, the workers must be more independent, more knowledgeable, more 'multifunctional' and they must continue learning. They view clients in a more complex way, must have a sufficient volume of information for their work, they must be able to decide, to be flexible and open to new methods of work. At the same time the community method of work requires continuous explanation and to a certain extent also 'defence', because in our country this method of work is currently not common. We also keep learning from our mistakes, which we then incorporate in our methodology. The path we have taken is not predetermined and intrinsically correct, it is the community that teaches us how to proceed.

We feel a great responsibility for our work and often ask ourselves whether we do it well and how we can recognise it. In this respect we greatly value the support of our professional colleagues and also our donors, who not only provide funds to us but who are obviously very much interested in what we do and how we do it.

Thanks to the Czech Streetwork Association we could travel to The Netherlands and Belgium to learn from the best practice examples providing similar services. We were awarded the professional prize ČASovaná bota (Time-Shoe) in the category Jumper of the Year, that we perceive as recognition of the fact we have decided to pursue interesting and unexplored paths. And last but not least we should emphasize the external supervisions led by Michal Zahradník in the course of which we did not stop questioning our own work but at the same time confirmed for ourselves that our direction was interesting. We know the path ahead is still long and we have a lot still to learn. Yet we are not afraid of making mistakes because they are often the source of our new knowledge.

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CORPORATE DONOR? ABSOLUTELY NOT!

...

Martin Simon, Juraj Bobula

Many people, and enthusiasts in particular, begin new projects with vigour. They feel like doing some work, to help, to change the world and they know no obstacles. And that is probably right, but every initiative comes across a situation sooner or later in which the individuals give up on their enthusiasm and ideals while paying more attention to their own survival. After all, this is in correlation with long-term and systemic work with the clients (users of our services).

KASPIAN encountered just such a situation in 2007 when we lost our majority donor from the USA and were facing the question how to go forward. The lesson learned was unambiguous. To diversify resources right from the start and prevent the organisation from becoming solely dependent on one donor, while trying to achieve a mutual balance of individual resources or even more predict the share respectively. This was one of many reasons why KASPIAN started a partnership with a company that not only helped us to survive, but also to start a new era. We started to look for partners among the entities making profit and capable of providing the necessary resources. At the same time, the entire team started to actively present itself as a potential partner for other corporate entities.

The law firm Kinstellar (at that time active on the market under a different global brand) already had a functioning program for community investments within the framework of which it allocated financial resources for direct donations, as well as for development of voluntary and donor activities while having its own team to handle these matters. The clearly defined goal read "to help disadvantaged groups and young people in particular to achieve their full potential". The low-threshold club and street work project (KASPIAN) fitted well within this goal, although it took a little longer for the community investment team to grasp the principles and meaning of a low-threshold project while differentiating it from a typical leisure project for children and youngsters.

Representatives from the law firm had a very good experience with an event they organised for children and youngsters from a low-threshold centre: they were very much surprised by the prompt and flexible communication with social workers while organising the event. Furthermore, they appreciated the fact that the non-profit organisation was ready for the event and we were pleased by the very positive feedback and acknowledgement communicated to KASPIAN following the event. We started to build mutual trust and when KASPIAN announced the loss of its main donor six months later, while emphasising the need for temporary period financing necessary to gain independence, a part of the necessary funding came from the community investments team. Company lawyers also helped to prepare and analyse statutes and founding documents of an independent entity as well as with resolving the issues that arose in respect to separation from the original mother organisation. In other words, the non-profit partner tabled a problem and the company used to solving issues on an everyday basis provided not only its financial resources, but also its know-how, expert knowledge and staff.

Co-operation with a corporate partner not only brings benefits in the form of cash, services or products rendered free of charge by the non-profit organisation respectively, but one can expect other types of support from the corporate partner, such as:

Financial	- direct grants - tax assignation - financial gifts
Donations in kind	- e.g. products or discarded IT equipment/vehicles, office furniture, etc.
Volunteering	- manual (e.g. painting fence or decorating interiors, cleaning, etc.) - "skills-based" (help based on skills of individual employees: legal counselling pro bono, translation, help with PR, strategy, management, bookkeeping, IT, etc.)

A short remark by Martin: "I personally do not like to talk about donorship since the recipient looks to be inactive in this process, while the donor is the one who possess the possibilities and is expected to act in the benefit of the recipient in the ideal case. I prefer to use the notion of corporate partnership that entails a real co-operation, which is a key essence in this type of relationship. It is important for a non-profit initiative to clearly and well define its needs while the corporate partner needs to reflect on such needs, seek advice and intervene in an efficient way."

CORPORATE DONORSHIP MYTHS

- ✎ *Corporations helps the organisation*
The corporation can help your clients. Neither people in corporations, nor corporations themselves have any interest in subsidizing your operation (the efficiency of which is subject to their own and often very clear opinion), staff wages (albeit the general belief that people working in the non-profit sector 'live from their enthusiasm' and do not need money at all) or overheads. The ultimate goal of any corporation is to improve the lives of the target group one is working with.
- ✎ *It is enough to know how to sell yourselves*
It is not enough. Co-operation with corporations will not come out of the blue in a day, a week or even a year. Provided you decide to co-operate with a corporate partner and manage to successfully start your mutual communication, you are actively embarking on an adventure that will require plenty of your effort while trying to remain in control of such co-operation. You can rightfully get the feeling that your effort is in vain, especially at the very beginning.
- ✎ *Company is a donor, we are purely recipients*
Well, if you do not want to move an inch forward in your relationship, this would be your model of operation. In any other case it is about a mutual relationship of two parties – equal partners neither of which is a sole 'recipient' or 'provider' of help. It is very similar to social network communication. It does not cost you a penny at first, but when you decide to use it, you soon find out that the human resources, content and material you use in your communication is of a significant cost to you at the end. Furthermore, you will need staff, time and money for mutual communication and events with the corporate partner. Hence you first need to clarify your costs and only then decide whether or not to start building a partnership with a corporation. However, such a decision is certainly worth your while, especially when you meet a willing and respectable corporate partner with the same or at least a similar point of view.
- ✎ *Corporations are only waiting to hear from us*
Nothing is more untrue than this myth. Often you need to be very patient until you get to the right door. Moreover, corporations focus on their core business and if they already have a CSR program in place, then co-operation with the community is most likely already under way and the corporation follows its own track in terms of organisations it co-operates with and support systems used. Hence be prepared to spend plenty of time (the first couple of years) by patiently explaining to the corporation what it is you really do, why do you do it and why the way you do it is the most efficient way to achieve the desired goals.

I AM IN – HOW TO DO IT?

You'd better get ready for your first personal meeting with the designated corporate representative (initially you will most likely speak to the office manager, HR manager, marketing representative or someone from the much fancied internal communication department) the same way you get ready for a job interview. No need to repeat the old tricks about the importance of self-confident presentation, a smile on your face or clean shoes. Irrespective of who you talk to and what you talk about it is absolutely important to be perfectly familiar with the work of your organisation. Furthermore, you need to be able to describe your organisation and its goals in a short, clear and comprehensible manner while explaining the relevancy of your work to the surrounding world. And you need to explain all this to a person that has most likely never heard of a low-threshold, does not have problem children and does not have a clue about the benefits of such low-threshold work. If you remain enthusiastic in your presentation and add a few interesting, rational and innovative plans for the future supported by research, and highlight a number of ideas as to how the co-operation with that particular corporation could be beneficial for the corporation itself, you will get the desired attention. At least you will manage to change the opinion of an ordinary corporate employee about the people working in non-profit organisations (namely the opinion that non-profit people are lacking self-discipline, wear saggy sweaters, do not know exactly what they are doing and approach corporations only when they are in need of something – usually money.)

YOUR CREDIT

A non-profit organisation has its name, prestige and brand, just like any corporation. It builds its brand by the way it acts on the 'market', i.e. through its 'product', activities and communication style, its relationships with engaged members of the public and other non-profit organisations.

A good corporation will look for a good non-profit organisation. Often it is not about perfection or professionalism, but rather about common sense. When meeting a non-profit organisation, every corporation is trying to find out whether or not this particular non-profit organisation is a suitable partner / target group. Whether or not it fits within the framework of its social responsibility plan; whether or not the work the non-profit organisation is doing offers solutions to the entire target groups, whether it makes sense or not, whether it is rational and easy to navigate. When considering a possible partnership, the corporation will most probably consider the following questions: What would it be like if the public connected our corporate brand with this particular non-profit organisation? Would it increase our goodwill, our market value?

EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION

A few suggestions that might help you in communication with corporate partners:

- ✎ **Early communication prevents needles misunderstandings.** In other words, 'have it out' before one or the other party starts to feel there is a misunderstanding, incomplete understanding or even worst – hidden or open animosity or even hostility.
- ✎ **Adjust your communication according to the industry the corporation is doing business in.** If you communicate with lawyers, send them an email. If it's an advertising agency, maybe they can find more information in your Facebook profile, website or popular social networks that they use to communicate advertising campaigns to their own clients. Think: who is sitting at the other end of the table? What does he/she look like? How much time has he/she got? What are his/her interests? What are the problem he/she usually tackles at work? Attention! Corporate systems are often well protected by firewalls. This means some applications might not work on a corporate system in order to prevent staff from wasting their time on Facebook or watching videos on YouTube (not to mention the fact that the enormous data volumes downloaded by such applications can overload and slow down the corporate system). Therefore – as paradoxical as this may sound – communicate with the corporation about the most suitable communication channel for your co-operation.

- ✎ **Be direct, specific and transparent.** A corporate partner will more likely react to an email along the lines of *“although we have managed to build a club over the past 8 years that provides services to more than 500 young people we came across unexpected issues this year while... and we would like to resolve the issues described by... and we are looking for possibilities of how to get...”* rather than to an email stating *“our non-profit organisation is looking for financial support and help”*. Apart from the fact that the latter version of your email will almost certainly end up in the bin you lose a unique opportunity to approach the company and spark its interest. Corporations are used to information expressed in numbers, everyday problem resolution and challenges. Make use of it and be bold in your communication. Use tables, charts and information graphics. Invest your time and effort into communication - it will pay off.
- ✎ **Communicate with an authorised individual.** Google, ask directly, search. It is priceless to have a direct contact with the respective employee responsible for communication with the non-profit sector, CSR, CR, CI or external relations especially in large corporations. This will save you weeks of email ping-pong and the need to repeat the same thing at numerous meetings. If you run a low-threshold organisation, there is high probability that you will need to repeat the same things over and over again (maybe using different words) until the corporate partner understands everything. Use all the direct contacts your people might have in the respective corporation.

THE MOST IMPORTANT BIT

KASPIAN has learned a lot and gained significantly over the past seven years while focusing on intensive and purposeful communication with corporations and developing partner co-operation with corporations. KASPIAN's philosophy was always to pass on the know-how to others. Hence we offer the lessons we have learned within our education program entitled Low-threshold alphabet. Partnership has its benefits on the other side as well: Kinstellar gradually learned a lot about the missions of low-threshold organisations as well as about the new non-standard possibilities an efficient co-operation might generate. Furthermore, our partner has learned that a good co-operation can bring a reputation benefit in the form of multiple nominations and shortlist positions for the Via Bona Slovakia Philanthropic Award, awarded for support of innovative projects or long-term support for the community. Mutual contact and project work is no longer a one-way road both for Kinstellar and KASPIAN. We have managed to build a wide two-way information highway based on trust and positive experience. Although we did not build the highway in a year, and both partners had to put in a lot of effort, it was definitely worth it.

Contact: www.kaspian.sk

Part II

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM ABROAD

Foreign experience always provides a great source of inspiration to outreach and low threshold social services workers. Since outreach work, or street work, is regarded as a respected and established method of social work abroad, it is very interesting to discover the similarities and differences in our work and that of foreign outreach workers.

For the visits undertaken within this project, we selected countries that we had already visited in the past, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, but also more remote countries – Finland and the United Kingdom. For comparison, we also visited our southern neighbours in Austria.

In this part of the present volume, you can find reports from the internships in four countries. (The excursion to the United Kingdom will take place after the publication of this volume.) The participants of the internships were tasked to provide a good practice description, as well as their reflections on how the acquired experiences might be used in our situation. It is our hope that our readers will also find that the following texts serve as a source of inspiration or comparison with their own practice.

GOOD PRACTICE EXCURSION TO THE NETHERLANDS

...

Michaela Burdová

MAASTRICHT

Maastricht, the oldest Dutch city and the provincial capital of Limburg province is located in the southeast of the country between Belgium and Germany. It lies on both sides of the Meuse River. Both neighbouring countries – Belgium and Germany – are literally a stone's throw away: Belgium can be reached on foot in ten minutes from its outskirts, Germany is thirty kilometres away. It is no surprise that this beautiful historical city is a favourite destination of tourists, including those who seek the experience of an altered state of consciousness. Apart from that, the local university draws many talented young people and the city thus enjoys a rich cultural life.

Neat, well-kept apartment buildings and houses with happy-looking inhabitants, a historical centre full of restaurants, cafés, galleries, clubs, sweeping multimedia shows in the central square dominated by the impressive St. Servatius Basilica, old churches and spires, romantic waterfronts, alleys and vast green parks where people spend their free time playing sports and relaxing, thousands of bikes – the omnipresent means of transportation (although many elderly citizens use electric carts not unlike golf carts to travel around the city), public space art projects, stores with beautiful shop windows full of luxurious goods, tidiness, fresh air and a pleasant climate ... and of course coffee shops and street dealers of marijuana, after all we are in the Netherlands – this is how Maastricht with its 120 000 inhabitants appears to a visitor. A group of streetwise Czech social workers on excursion scan the scene with their trained eyes, looking for clients. At a first glance it seems that there aren't any of them around...

TRAJEKT ORGANIZATION

Trajekt is an organisation that provides social services for the residents of the city of Maastricht and its environs (i.e. Heuvelland); its task is to endeavour the pursuit of a full-fledged life for all residents of this region.

Legally speaking, the organisation is based on the Social Support Act that emphasizes the citizens' own responsibility. In compliance with this principle, Trajekt offers to Maastricht residents primarily counselling services and support in coping with difficult life-situations; apart from that it also organises various events and activities aimed at personal development, as well as fostering neighbourhood relations and solving the problems that arise in various neighbourhoods.

This is a very important premise – people with whom Trajekt cooperate are not passive objects of social support but, no matter what their social situation may be, are regarded as socially responsible beings with the potential not only to solve their own problems but also to contribute to their neighbourhood, to do something for others and to positively influence local communities and contribute to the development of their social environment. To further these goals, Trajekt provides counselling and support to the denizens of the Maastricht region.

The organisation itself regards this approach as innovative. As our guide Christina Mavridou explained, people in The Netherlands – a wealthy developed country with a high standard of living and sophisticated system of social services – are used to receiving support without being expected to take any action of their own. As such, the organisation offers services, rather than support that could be passively received. *“Obviously*

enough, a social worker also provides help, but he/she does not approach the client as an invalid, but rather looks for the client's abilities and strengths, surveying the existing options and assisting the client with solving his/her problem.", explains Christina.

Structure of the organisation

The supreme governing body of the Trajekt organisation is the supervisory board, which comprises of seven members. Some supervisory board members are appointed by the organisation board, one is appointed by the clients. The organisation is headed by the CEO together with other advisory bodies – the 'clients' board and the 'organisation board'. (The current CEO Anne Buskes has an educational background in both economics and social services. In the past she worked as the head of social services at the city council in Tilburg). On the next level there is the management department – support of the organisation management, research and innovations, financial management, HR department, and the department in charge of the organisation's business activities. Trajekt operates in five neighbourhoods through integrated teams comprising of approximately twenty specialists for each neighbourhood.

Henk Geelen, whom we met for an interview followed by lunch on the first day of our visit at Trajekt headquarters, is responsible for the Trajekt cooperation policy and in charge of the research and innovations department. As well as that he represents The Netherlands in the Dynamo International Street Workers Network. Henk, who is a psychologist by education, acts as the brains of the organisation, a source of new ideas and endless inspiration and innovative ideas. To put it shortly, he is an experienced expert, whose enormous insight and knowledge help to both present the organisation and its activities to the public and to the donors and to move forward its further development in reaction to new challenges.

Henk is neither a manager, nor does he work with the clients. He is a youth work consultant, fund-raiser and most importantly an innovator. He says that in any organisation some 20% of the staff are always opposed to changes. Henk works with the 5% of employees known as 'inventors'. While the rest of the employees do not have this potential, most of them get enthusiastic about the new ideas and follow them.

Funding of the organisation

The Netherlands is a decentralized state. The national government distributes finances to the regions, which manage their financial resources independently through local self-government. The system of financing is expected to change in 2015 when the financing will be transformed to municipalities.

Child work and youth work are in a very good position as the government wants to invest into the younger generation. A quarter of Dutch social workers work with children and youth.

Trajekt's annual budget is €9 million, which the organisation draws over four years. The multi-annual funding of the organisation enables long term planning. 90% of the budget is allocated by local government, 2-3% is drawn from various projects – these funds are allocated annually to cope with current issues and troubles. The remaining 7-8% is obtained through fund-raising, which is Henk Geelen's job. Naturally enough, the more funds come from independent sources, the more freedom the organisation gets.

History and Development of the Organisation

Trajekt is an organisation that has been providing professional social services to the denizens of Maastricht for 25 years. That is a long time and this fact is reflected in the perception of the Maastricht region's population and their view of the organisation which appears to be very positive. Trajekt is very well known in the city, almost all locals know what they do and on whose behalf they work and are aware of the location of the contact places in their neighbourhood. They also know 'their' community workers, the van used by the outreach worker to make errands around the neighbourhood, or the organisation's logo. The community is aware of and appreciates the useful work provided by the organisation.

Strengths and weaknesses of the organisation

Among the strengths of the organisation, I would include its continuity, professionalism, a well-developed sense of professional ethics, as well as sophisticated methodology, a strong network of follow-up services within the organisation's framework and functional cooperation with follow-up institutions. The key factors are the community-focused nature of the social work and the principle of empowerment. Trajekt doubtlessly enjoys a strong position within the region, as well as the trust of both donors and clients, including potential clients, i.e. ordinary inhabitants. The entire organisation resembles a well-oiled machine, in which each part is well-functioning, located on the right spot, knows its job and does it responsibly and well. This is largely due to the management, but one should not neglect the enthusiasm, professionalism and honesty of the direct-work staff. I also appreciate the flexibility with which the organisation responds to the current issues and challenges. The clients' involvement in the processes within the organisation, e.g. services quality evaluation, is also great.

It is difficult to judge the organisation's weaknesses based on a five-day long internship. Due to the economic crisis the organisation is currently undergoing changes, which some employees have difficulties coping with (and some have actually quit because of them): e.g. increased pressure on administrative duties which detract from the time spent on direct work, hiring of short-term contract workers and terminating or merging some projects due to the lack of funds. Nonetheless, these problems do not seem to be in any way remarkable compared to the administrative juggernaut that confronts the average Czech outreach worker in the form of a number of reports for this or that institution, interim, final and other reports, non-transparent financing with minimal space for long term planning and especially the distrust in the expertise of direct-work social workers and the constant need to defend one's activities.

Quality assessment

In the Netherlands, the professional ethical codex plays a very important, or rather, a decisive role. Direction of work is also determined by professional organisation, which provides accredited training of the professionals and serves as a platform where the professionals register and associate. The professional organisation issues licences; if a professional stops working in the field, he/she would lose the licence.

There are no uniform quality standards – the Dutch culture is based on individualism. Nevertheless, quality standards do exist, but they are not prescribed by the government but rather by the organisation itself, in some cases in cooperation with the donor or the professional organisation.

For instance NAPYN is the National Association of Youth Workers. In the Netherlands, there are 2,700 social workers who work with young people between 15/16 and 23 years of age and 800 workers who work with children between 6 and 15 years of age.

The quality assessment includes various reports and service satisfaction surveys, whereby the organisation's work is controlled by the actual target group members through various satisfaction surveys.

Methodology

The basic elements of social work include individual coaching, group work, community work and, most importantly, outreach work. The work evolves around a group of clients, from which the worker 'pulls out' individual clients for individual coaching. On the other hand, if he/she works with more groups, his/her work can spill into the area of community work. Each neighbourhood is serviced by a group of approximately twenty workers, whose qualities must be balanced.

Types of services provided, their focus and target groups

Trajekt is active in many areas and offers a broad range of services targeted at clients ranging from toddlers to the eldest citizens. Social work in The Netherlands does not specialize on target groups but rather on problems. Often it includes a form of coaching where the social worker supports the client in discovering a path to his/her own resources and capabilities.

Special attention is paid primarily to the prevention of problems; this approach can be easily justified by monetary considerations: each Euro invested into prevention saves the government 3 Euros it would otherwise pay for damage compensation and restrictive measures. Let's recall the well known 20:80 paradigm, according to which 1/5 of the population is threatened by adverse social conditions. That, however, is not all – 5% need specialised professional assistance and 1% are completely marginalised.

Since Maastricht has 120 000 inhabitants, it follows that 24 000 of them are potential clients of social services. One social worker takes care of approx. 100 people. (We should not forget that 25% of social workers attend to children and youth.)

According to Henk Geelen, there are about 40-60 intravenous drug (methamphetamine, heroin) users in Maastricht. *“Everyone knows them and all of them attend health centres. We are afraid of escalating social unrest.”* continues Henk. He talks about the influx of immigrants in the past and the natural segregation of children based on their ethnicity at the so called ‘black schools’. Up to 60% of Moroccan immigrants are in contact with the police.

Although The Netherlands is a developed and wealthy western country, the social inequalities are rising and deepening. According to Henk Geelen, 11% of children in The Netherlands live in poverty; in Maastricht 1/6 of children live in poor neighbourhoods in families dependent on food banks. *“Yes, the standards here are higher than in other countries”,* says Henk, *“but the feeling of poverty is the same everywhere.”* It is precisely the struggle against poverty and social exclusion that he regards as the main goals of social work in general.

The Trajekt organisation offers the following services:

- ✎ Basic social counselling. The service is intended for persons over 18 years of age. Consultations typically cover the following topics:
 - Relationships: problems with a partner, parents, or children.
 - Feelings of loneliness or isolation.
 - Financial issues: indebtedness, insufficient income.
 - Work: problems at work or with colleagues, unemployment, disability.
 - Crisis situations: death, divorce.
 - Discrimination, abuse.
 - Health issues: stress, illness and coping with them.
 - Providing information on other social services in the fields of education, housing, or other forms of assistance.
- ✎ Self-help groups for people who have experienced the death of a life-partner.
- ✎ Mediation.
- ✎ The Buurtbrók community café.
- ✎ Drop-in centres for young people between 16 and 23 years of age. Mobile centres operate in some neighbourhoods.
- ✎ Child work. This type of service is provided by educators. The programmes are based on the principles of free-time education.
- ✎ Community work. Support of local communities, assistance in communication with local authorities, support in solving neighbourhood issues.
- ✎ Centre for Children and Families. The service has an educational nature and reacts to the education-related needs and inquiries of the parents. It includes:
 - Home-start: professional assistance to parents who experience problems with the upbringing of their children.
 - Play Together: common play activities for children and parents under the guidance of an educational assistant that take place directly in the families.
 - Play Together Centre: a day centre where parents with their children can use didactic toys under the guidance of a professional educator.
- ✎ Senior-citizens work. Athletic and creative motivational activities for persons over 50 years of age.
- ✎ Counselling for senior citizens. Questions related to housing, safety and security, food, home-care and services, financial issues, health, or loneliness.
- ✎ RTV Maastricht. Volunteer-produced TV and radio broadcasting.
- ✎ Social work at schools. Consultations are intended for pupils as well as teachers.

- ✎ Field work. The service is intended for young people between 16 and 23 years of age who cope with multiple problems at the same time.
- ✎ Adolescent work. Free-time activities for children between 12 and 15 years of age.
- ✎ Support of volunteers – coaching.

Establishments visited

1) Painting with children – Kunstketel

The art studio is largely glassed-in and appears joyful and colourful from the street. In the shop-window there is an exhibition of various textile and pottery artefacts, the walls are covered with paintings, mosaics and sculptures. A group of six 6-12 years old girls are working around a large creative work desk situated in the middle of the bright room. The girls are creating a jewellery box – a heart-shaped wooden box, which they paint on and decorate with beads and fabric appliqué. They are guided by Ralph Bollen, a long term intern in Trajekt and by a young woman who is an art teacher. The centre offers regular free-time creative activities. We are getting acquainted with those that are focused on children. The centre is visited by children in the age groups 6-12 or 4-12, as well as 12-15 years old tweens from the Happy Kids Programme. Furthermore, the centre also offers free time activities for middle aged people, senior citizens and mentally disabled people. The centre also organises occasional communal events in the neighbourhood, e.g. a recent neighbourhood football match.

The aim of these activities is to meet, cooperate and develop through art. The atmosphere is very cosy, even familiar, it is obvious that the children like coming here. We enjoy ourselvesbut because of our Czech experience we also crave to find out if there are any other activities in the centre that would resemble the Czech conception of social services. *“Children who attend the centre pay a fee of €1. Their parents are busy working and cannot spend afternoons with them. Playgroups and various after-school activities are very expensive and that is why the children come to our centre. Each neighbourhood has its own centre. Our painting classes are also attended by adults around 40-50 years of age. They are unemployed and painting helps them in their personal development and motivation. The number of participants in each activity is capped, and once the limit is reached no new participants can be admitted.”* Ralph adds: *“Today, they have no problems, no difficulties. But that does not mean that they won't have them in the future. If they get into a difficult situation, it is probable that they will seek assistance in time.”*

We have to agree with this statement. These activities have a strong preventive and motivational dimension as they positively influence personal development and prevent, or mitigate, the impact of difficult life situations.

A leaflet in Arabic and Turkish posted on the door and bearing the words ‘DRUG FREE’ caught my attention. While the site looks peaceful at first glance, the drug trade is present here and recently a serious conflict related to the use and sale of drugs took place nearby. The leaflet was created by an organisation devoted to increasing the security of the neighbourhood.

Information about the activities offered by the centre reach the target group primarily through leaflets; the programme is posted on the door and hence can be read by passers-by. It is also posted on the web pages.

I reflect about the Czech drop-in centres' attitude to free-time activities, which appears somewhat deformed. In my mind, there are two extremes. The free time activities are either surrounded by a sort of hysteria, as they have an air of something inferior or even inappropriate, or the centre does not offer anything but free time activities and hence operates as a playroom rather than a social service. I would like to urge the readers – get over it. Free time is a tool at our disposal and it is up to us as professionals to decide when, how, and why we use it. It is perfectly OK this way and one does not have to defend oneself for playing Ping-Pong with the clients or for not having table football or darts in the club

2) Centre for Children and Families (Christina and Monique)

We meet with Christina Mavridou and her colleague Monique in the Youth Centre – an analogue of Czech NZDMs (low-threshold facilities for children and youth). Christina is a youth worker and a learning difficulties counsellor. She specialises in adolescents over the age of 12. Christina mentions that a common issue is educational problems, such as “the child shouts too much”, “he/she does not go to bed on time”, etc.

She emphasises the importance of learning about the client's system and family when he/she is still a child. This is the only way that enables working with him/her when he/she grows up.

Monique is a social worker who provides basic social counselling and individual assistance to all target groups. Common issues she works on with her clients include relationships, divorce, job related problems, multiple problems at the same time, domestic violence – here she provides counselling both to the victims and the perpetrators. The consultations are free and they constitute the first stage of assistance. Monique does not determine the diagnoses but rather refers the clients to specialists who focus on the given type of problem based on the information obtained during the consultation meeting. The clients make the appointment in advance; Monique has 4-5 appointments each day. Monique's work load is 32 hours per week, out of which she spends 19-20 hours working with or for the clients, 6 hours on administrative activities, and for the remaining six hours she works as her supervisor's assistant – this job also includes coordination of the services.

Provided services are preventive in their nature, potential clients include the entire community. The key is a gradual and long-term building up of the relationship; after some time the client him/herself approaches the social worker with a problem he/she wants to solve. The client may be also referred to the counselling centre by his/her GP. Upon the client's demand, the service may be provided anonymously. The social worker keeps records of the meetings with the clients, which are obviously confidential.

The Centre for Children and Families is a platform created upon the initiative of the municipal authority, which unites several organisations. Trajekt is responsible for the first stage of assistance – it conducts so called intake, i.e. the initial meeting, during which focussing is conducted in order to further specify the client's problem from his/her own perspective. A list of priorities is created during the meeting, the social worker provides space for the client and leads him/her in the quest for the correct solution of his/her problem. It means that each Trajekt employee automatically belongs to the Centre for Children and Families. The Centre works with children and young people up to 23 years of age. In the case of young adults, it is often the parents who approach the Centre with a problem about their offspring who continues living in his/her parents household but does not participate in the household chores in any way.

The task of the social worker is to identify the problem and guide the client in his/her own choice of the appropriate way of addressing it. The problems that the Trajekt workers deal with in the Centre for Children and Families include, for example:

- ✎ computer games and the Internet, prevention of Internet-related threats,
- ✎ doubts related to child rearing,
- ✎ counselling for new parents,
- ✎ school bullying – introvert children, outsiders, children with suicidal tendencies, counselling for parents,
- ✎ pregnancy,
- ✎ tips for parents on raising children focussed on a positive upbringing.

There is a Dutch equivalent of Czech OSPOD (Orgán sociálně-právní ochrany dětí – Authority of Social-Legal Protection of Children) called the Office of Youth Care. It is a governmental institution in charge of children under 18 years of age. (In 2015, the funding for its activities will be taken over by the municipalities; the institution will be abolished and its activities will be taken over by the Centre for Children and Families platform.) There is one important difference in comparison to the Czech practice: the client goes through a maximum of five meetings with the Office of Youth Care worker and subsequently is referred to one of the (non-governmental) follow-up institutions. Trajekt always checks if the client is registered with this institution and that he/she does not participate in a programme of some other organisation. (The Office keeps records of this.) If it is the case and it turns out that the client has been already enrolled in a programme run by a different institution, the applicant is rejected.

This is a very inspiring way of sharing information about clients and delegating tasks to organisations that are close to the client without causing any duplicity in the services provided. Nonetheless, the system is new even in Maastricht and all the parties involved – including the municipality – are still getting used to it. However, it is fantastic that the project was initiated by the city and that it is meaningful.

3) Buurtbrök community café

We finish our morning programme with lunch at Buurtbrök – a community café operated with Trajekt's support by volunteers. The café is used as a meeting place for people from the local community and is

a setting for various community events (e.g. traditional Moroccan cuisine cooked by Moroccan mothers). For a symbolic price you can have a sandwich, traditional Dutch vegetable mash with a sausage, coffee and other refreshments, have a nice chat with your neighbours outside in the sun, or you can borrow some games, get involved in beading, knitting or other creative activities. It is up to you – it depends which of the things that you can borrow free of charge appeals to you.

4) Community social work (Youth centre & Meet the neighbourhood)

A bus takes us to the Malberg neighbourhood where we have an appointment with Denis – a community social worker. This is the first time we see a Maastricht housing estate. Local prefabs stretch along the main street by which we arrive, the buildings are well-kept and the tallest one's have a maximum of seven stories but usually fewer – four or five. We start looking for the local Trajekt office but after a brief wander about we decide to ask the local inhabitants – hopefully they will give us directions. And indeed, a middle aged gentleman, upon hearing the word “Trajekt” brightens up with understanding and directs us towards a local department store. Once there we hesitate again and therefore we approach a group of dark-skinned youngsters in sweatpants who give off the distinct odour of marijuana. Once we explain that we are not looking for drugs but for Trajekt, the group kindly points out that it is directly ahead of us.

The local Trajekt office is located in a large modern building; actually all the buildings over here are modern because the neighbourhood is newly built. Denis, a community social worker, is a smiling communicative middle aged guy of a smaller stature. Although his English is not bad at all, he is obviously struggling with it. Nonetheless, he tries really hard. Denis is no greenhorn, he has obviously done his share of street-work. We board a van, a sort of minibus with a Trajekt logo that he uses to drive around the streets. Denis shows us around the neighbourhood; we can see that right behind the prefabs are other smaller parts of the neighbourhood with smaller attached houses. The neighbourhood has a reputation as a problem area. We wonder why. The buildings are new, the streets are clean and there are no street gangs in sight. In spite of the language barrier, I understand that the problem are caused by the concentration of the poorest families in one place – this place. Denis explains that the choice of your home address depends on your income – if your income is low, the housing agency assigns you an apartment in this neighbourhood. If you earn more, on the other hand, you cannot get an apartment around here even if you wanted to. This leads, on the one hand, to concentration of poor people in one location, on the other hand, ‘good neighbourhoods’ inhabited by doctors, lawyers, etc. are emerging.

We drive through a backstreet and people are greeting Denis, smiling, waving to the van. Denis waves to ‘his’ people. It really touches me. A young mum with a pushchair nods at Denis, they greet each other. *“I know everybody, from the children to the old people”,* says Denis. *“Do you see that young girl? So young and she smokes. It is terrible how much the kids smoke around here.”* The approximately fourteen year old young woman drags on her cigarette and casually starts chatting with Denis.

We reach a vast sports stadium built by the municipal government. You can borrow equipment here and exercise or play practically any kind of sport. Denis comes here to play some football with a group of bored teenagers. There is a large enclosed hall, a huge football field with several pitches – I do not even manage to count them – a long running oval, tennis courts, outdoor bodybuilding machines. We enter the hall. Denis takes us into a sports-equipment rental office and – what else could we expect – he greets everyone. Two guys in the rental office are winking at us while dragging on their cigarettes (in the middle of a sports complex, in the very heart of the hall!), they are issuing jerseys and balls to the kids. We are somewhat shocked. Both by this gorgeous and huge sports complex available free of charge to the locals (unless you are an entire team and you come here on regular basis – then you can rent the field for a friendly fee) and by the local tolerance towards smokers. Laughingly, we tease Denis. He should not be so shocked that the children smoke, since everyone smokes around here and the sports-equipment rental office reeks like a tobacco plant, emanating clouds of cigarette smoke.

It is getting dark as we are finish our visit to the neighbourhood. The word that defines everything I have seen today is ‘relationships’. *“I am a social worker but I am not trying to solve complex issues,”* says Denis. *“There are other experts in charge of this in our organisation. I know well my place, my people, and my people know me. When they have some trouble we talk it over and I give them a contact or help them to set up an appointment. I know about everything that is going on in the neighbourhood.”*

5) Music group Malberg

In Malberg we have ahead of us a music evening under the leadership of a teacher from the local conservatoire, which participates in this music project. The band meets every Tuesday between 6 and 8 pm. The rehearsal is in full swing: a boy is playing electronic drums, another one a keyboard, a girl and a boy are signing on a microphone, and a boy is playing a guitar. There are about six teenagers, and the audience is made up of a mother and one contact worker. Denis, who is accompanying us, starts talking with the women.

The lecturer is building up the composition from the foundations, by providing the drummer with a rhythm and showing him how to play it. Three keyboards serve as a universal musical instrument – one plays a violin sound, another one a classical piano, and the third one provides background when the player uses various effects to create musical surfaces. Apart from the electronic drum there are also floor tom drums with drum sticks and other percussion instruments. The lecturer uses a sound mixer to tune the sound, the singers have microphone stands at their disposal. The group invites us into its midst and each of us gets given a musical instrument. The lecturer helps each player to find the right tone and rhythm, those who are more skilful find it themselves. Playing music this way is very easy, anyone who can press four keys over and over can do it. Nevertheless, the result is impressive. What is emerging is real music, a common project, communication, mutual coordination. On the faces of the teenage boys and girls (but also on our faces :-)) you can see a sort of elation, fulfilment and joy. I can feel that they are really proud of themselves, their eyes are shining with passion and enthusiasm. Nobody is disrupting, protesting, arguing. The lecturer works with the dynamics, he quietsens the band down almost completely and then, when there is almost total silence, makes a sign and, again, all musicians in sync and with passion escalate the energy in the final part. The relaxed faces reflect emotions, smiles, ecstasy. These children do not need any drugs – they are experiencing such intense feelings that they are completely dazzled.

The rehearsal is over. We chat for a while and help the lecturer pack up the equipment and instruments. The equipment is borrowed from the above mentioned conservatoire, Trajekt provides the space and the clients. A young man, approx. sixteen years of age, plays a song on his mobile phone. The lecturer explains: "This boy composed a song and sent it to a very popular German pop singer. And he plays it now! He plays his song." "That is really cool!" we nod in appreciation, while the boy's face shines with pride, but not in a boasting way. This is not the last time in Maastricht that I reflect about the local conception of community social work. Community means real life – not centres full of clients and their problems, with their special rules that do not exist in outside world. Are we trying to solve our clients' problems and it is not working? Fine, sometime it works better, sometimes worse... But all the time, we are keeping alive a sort of artificial construct. We are working with topics in isolation from their context. As such, our clients frequently miss the most important and most basic things – a place where they can belong, acceptance, the feeling that they are important, useful, that they can accomplish something and once they accomplish it, that they can also teach it to others. And that the 'others' from their community can see it because they witness the entire process. Perhaps you have a feeling that playing the guitar is not as important as finding a short-term job or having one's ID card issued. That feeling is wrong. An ID card is an ID card, a job is a job, and a guitar is a guitar. Let's not compare what is more important and what is less valuable in social work. Let's pay attention to what is really important to the client. What if he simply has no motivation to look for a short term job or to have his ID card issued, although he should? Let's work with him on motivation, on his relationships with people around him and with himself. Playing the guitar may lead him to realise his own worth and make him proud of himself. Perhaps it will lead to him to finding a job that will allow him to devote himself more to his interest, or he will decide to complete his education because his self-esteem will have risen. Through music he may learn to give and to receive gifts, understand when it is important to assert oneself and when to withdraw to let the others excel. He may also find a way to express his feelings.

I believe that music has a huge development potential in work with people and that it may be very suitable precisely for the work with teenagers. The point is that it contains a kind of cycle, which is at the core of the transition rituals that help young people understand their transformation into adults – a boy or a girl is first roused out of the everyday experience by something that captures their attention. Interest is the first prerequisite, the next step is learning and practice. If they set out on this path, after a period of painful beginnings the first successes will come. Nonetheless, to complete this path of success it is important to share it with those around us, they have to see it, hear it, acknowledge it and appreciate it. This is the way we grow up. And it is also the strength of the community.



Discussion with Henk Geelen
(community projects director)



Free time programme – cooking with
foreigners' children



Community garden where unemployed people
work as volunteers



Free time artistic workshop for children

6) Gardens Project

We wake up to a sunny morning and set out for a meeting with Leon Banzer who leads the community garden project. This is a strip of land behind a block of attached houses, used for gardening by local people. We are greeted by a group of men, each of whom tends to some work. Leon takes charge of us and our group of social workers enthusiastically join the gardening activities. While we are digging the garden beds and pruning bushes, we learn further details. The plot, which belongs to a shopping mall, was being unused, which led to the idea of using it to make garden beds where people could work together growing vegetables. With Trajekt's assistance, the project was carried through. Anyone can come here to help out with the project. The people who come to work in the garden include young, most often unemployed people, as well as mentally ill persons and children from the neighbourhood. Occasionally some drug addicts also arrive but they usually do not continue coming for long. The garden has a touch of wilderness to it but it is very pleasant and our mood, which was already very good, improved even more under the influence of meaningful manual work.

Leon is an agreeable older man, a gardener and an experienced social worker who worked as a children's free-time activities leader for many years. He has a gentle face and his sense of humour and good manners indicate open-mindedness as well as natural authority backed up by the life experiences accumulated over the years. Leon spent his youth in the era of hippies.

We take a break and accept the offered refreshments. We talk, Leon is very interested in my work with Roma children and youth. I, on the other hand, am interested in this garden, as I am actually trying to start a similar project in the centre of Prague. Although I am already convinced about it, it is important for me to actually SEE that it is meaningful even if the plot of land is not particularly lucrative from a gardening point of view and you cannot harvest crates full of vegetables after the first season. The activity itself is meaningful, rather than the proceeds it yields. I am really captivated by a gorgeous piece of furniture in the tool shed. *"One guy created this table from recycled wood"*, says Leon, *"he is extremely handy"*. The table is made from pallets, i.e. from freely available material. I imagine what a great feeling it must be if you breathe life into something that would otherwise be thrown away, creating something that is practical, beautiful and that everyone admires, and its creator can see that he has done something beneficial for others.

The children with whom I work started joining our community garden project, which was launched in the summer of 2013, spontaneously. At the beginning, the children acted negatively – they would hit earthworms with spades, they shrank from the earth, and did not understand why they should do something 'just for the sake of doing it'. Nonetheless, they kept coming, taking the tools in their hands and asking for work. They wanted to help out but did not know how. We always found some lighter task for them that made them happy; gradually, they stopped killing all the living creatures they discovered in the earth. I really look forward to the next gardening season when we want to make garden furniture, build a community open-air oven, and plant flowers, herbs and vegetables.

I would like to get inspired and try to engage the broader community in our project, e.g. older people, mums with kids on maternity leave and unemployed people. We have already accomplished such involvement (although so far only on a limited scale) and the drop-in centre clients perceived it as a very positive contact with the broader community on neutral ground – in a literal sense.

7) Play Together

The Play Together project has a new base in a centre that has been open only briefly – since April 2013. (Until recently the premises that were eventually acquired by Trajekt had been used as a store). Nonetheless, the service itself, has been around for a long time. The point is that the social-workers' pay visits to families that, for example: do not have enough space at home, do not have good (or any) toys, have conflicts in the family, have parents who don't have enough time for their children or there are too many children in the family. The Trajekt workers visit the families with toys and teach the parents how to communicate with the child and how to play together. The service aims to promote motor, social and emotional development of children between two and six years of age (the condition for participation in the project is that at least one child in the family is between two and six years old).

In the past, there used to be a special project focussed on travellers' families and another project focused on families living in conventional households; however, the two projects were merged due to a lack of funds. The Play Together project currently involves ten families that are being visited by its workers, while seventeen additional families are on a waiting list for a trained volunteer. The project is staffed by two professionals, three students and 3-4 volunteers. The volunteers are trained in special preparatory courses.

As for the data reporting, records are kept of the number of children and parents to whom the assistance was provided. The families may remain anonymous, if they want to, but if they provide their address or some other contact, they can receive invites to group activities.

The day centre provides a base which is equipped with high quality educational toys that are freely available, and the parents who visit the centre with their children can freely borrow them (and, of course, return them back to their place). The centre is staffed by trained educators who are ready to provide professional advice and motivate both the children and their parents. The centre is usually visited by mums, but sometimes dads arrive too. The centre is open twice a week for two hours. Apart from that it runs various groups for mums, which operate at times when the children are at school. *"The only rules are: play together and tidy up before you leave"* explains Chrisje Bruijnzeels, a preschool educator by training and an experienced social worker.

The Play Together service, which is also part of the Centre for Children and Families platform, helps parents to cope with minor problems in the upbringing of their offspring, i.e. it provides the parents with prevention-focussed counselling. Information leaflets about services provided by Trajekt and follow-up institutions are available to the parents in the centre. Such follow-up services include e.g. Home-Start, which is coordinated by Chrisje's colleague. It is a volunteer programme, in which the volunteers visit families, helping mothers with their needs. Another service offered is video-training.

The ethical aspect of the work is very important, which is something that I perceive throughout the entire duration of my internship. Chrisje sums it up briefly and succinctly: *"When we come to a family, we come there as visitors and it is important to develop a relationship with the family. As the first thing, I always ask whether I am supposed to take my shoes off. In the Netherlands, we do not take our shoes off but the immigrant families, with whom we work, may have different habits. By asking whether I am supposed to take my shoes off, I show respect and people appreciate it. It is important to realize that we are entering someone's households, that we are there as guests. Respect is most important. Even if we have different opinions on something than the parents – who are we to advise them and tell them how are things supposed to be?"*

8) Trefcentrum Wittevrouwenveld Youth Centre

After a full day my head buzzes with ideas (I will try to summarize them in the conclusion). We return to the youth centre (an analogue of Czech NZDMs), which we have already seen empty today. However, I now have a meeting here with a friendly social worker Tobias Vermin and I look forward to witnessing direct work with the youngsters.

My expectation is fulfilled – there are several teenagers in the centre (its target group are 16-23 year olds), they are playing football on a game console and Tobias is winning. He glances at us with a smile and says, in a conspiratorial way: *"This is my favourite part of the job – the only moment when I can kick my clients' ass."* Tobias is an experienced worker with a great talent of establishing and maintaining contact. Being close to someone and keeping one's distance at the same time is a special talent. Tobias' behaviour is completely un-authoritarian and the clients respect him. Around ten clients drop in during our visit. The most distinct one is a talkative Moroccan, who keeps telling cowboy stories full of guns, chases and injuries while smoking joints and drinking beer. The contact with the social worker takes place in front of (or, rather, behind) the centre by the entrance to the club. At one point, all the youngsters disappear into the club. We ask whether the clients are allowed to smoke marijuana inside the centre. Laughingly, Tobias answers that they are not, and firmly but kindly sends the group to smoke outside. The clients laugh. They have had a try but no tension or conflict emerge. Tobias' colleague allegedly had a major conflict with the clients who assaulted her by throwing stones. *"It has never happened to me"*, says Tobias with a shrug. *"I respect them and they respect me."*

Tobias is in charge of the club on his own and he also structures his work and to some extent his working hours by himself. He keeps the club open in the afternoon until 6 PM, then he closes it to go home and eat some supper and returns back to open again at 8 PM. He mentions that lately he has to write reports that he previously did not have to file. The reports are important for the fundraising, which is becoming increasingly important in this time of economic crisis. That is the only thing about which he gives any sign of discontent. *"I would rather focus exclusively on the clients"* says Tobias.

Our friend, the Moroccan cowboy, is confiding his problems, especially his enormous debts that prevent him from entering into a long term relationship and starting a family. He also talks about various run-ins with the law. He is visibly older than other clients. *"We work with young people under 23 years of age, but he has the mentality of a teenager and behaves like one, so I work with him as well"*, explains Tobias.

About the club equipment: the space is just the right size and it is almost empty. In one corner there is

a bar, apart from that there is a huge sofa, a screen and a PlayStation and a table football in another corner. Nothing else is apparently needed.

9) Addictions Presentation

The last day of our internship is started by Pauline Heperman, a prevention worker from the Mondriaan organisation. Her target group are teenagers and secondary school students, especially those with lower intellect. Prevention starts in the last two years of primary school. Attention is also paid to the parents' education; for example, the parents are taught how to distinguish addiction from experimenting.

64% of children have their first experience with alcohol when they are 12-13 years old. The usual pattern of alcohol consumption among teens is that they get drunk at home and then they go out – this trend is on the rise.

One out of ten fifteen year olds have smoked marijuana during the past month, while 1/3 of marijuana users smoke at school or in front of school. In the Netherlands, young people are allowed to drink alcohol from the age of 16 and visit coffee shops from the age of 18.

Another problem, with which some of the teenagers struggle is addiction to online games, internet and social networks. Problematic gaming concerns about 7% of boys (i.e. they spend at least six hours a day playing games).

Pauline talks in detail about the problems of the so called designer drugs, or smart drugs, which are very similar as in the Czech Republic. In 2011, 41 new drugs emerged, mostly methamphetamines, DMT and other substances – these drugs are used mostly at parties and festivals. The drugs are being tested to determine their real composition – sometimes they contain only caffeine, sometimes really dangerous substances. In the past, testing was provided directly at the parties. However, the government banned this service as being too pro-drug. Now people have to bring the drugs to the office to be sent for analysis. Another substance that is being abused is Ritalin, a prescription drug used in children suffering from ADHD. Problems are also caused by GHB; the drug is used in liquid form, which increases the likelihood of an overdose causing coma, heart attack or death. Moreover, the drug is highly addictive. The drug is very popular because it has the same effects as alcohol but it fades away within 12 hours and does not cause any hangover. It is frequently used by females above 26 years of age. Hard drugs, as well as their users, are usually perceived negatively among young people. On the other hand, ecstasy and cocaine are popular.

Since 2008, various natural drugs have been illegal including magic mushrooms, salvia divinorum, hallucinogenic cacti, ayahuasca and others.

Regarding coffee shops – the sale of marijuana in them is legal but growers are not allowed to supply the coffee shops. Interestingly enough, the drug sold in the coffee shops is not taxed.

Pauline and her colleagues focus on prevention. For instance they have a stand at a carnival where visitors can solve various quizzes, perform tasks such as a run with special glasses and as well being exposed to various banners and photographs they can also, for example, learn the basics of first aid. They also run educational programmes at schools targeted at pupils, parents, as well as teachers. I also found interesting a campaign during which parents were photographed together with their children, while the parents had tattoos on their arms with slogans like *"I won't serve alcohol to my children."*

In the case of problematic drug users they perform so called indicated prevention but not treatment. In the Netherlands, there are marijuana addiction treatment programmes for users over 15 years old. Some users smoke as many as 26 joints a day. This is aggravated by the fact that the amount of THC in marijuana is rising and some plants contain as much as 32% THC. There is an effort to make this kind of cannabis illegal, after all it is known as 'amnesia'. Since the THC content was about 7% in the 1970s, its increase has been really enormous.

10) Cooking with Children

Our internship concludes in Daalhorf where there is a club for both young people and children. The club for the older ones was currently shut down for approximately three weeks as a result of the incident mentioned by Tobias, during which clients threw stones at social workers. The club for children (up to twelve years old) is located in the basement. A nice touch is that you enter it through a window, to which a short stair-case leads. Today's programme is cookery. The children arrive on their scooters, they wash their hands under workers' supervision and then they start cutting meat and vegetables. Each child has a small wok pan and each group shares a range, on which they stir-fry their share of meat and vegetables.

The atmosphere is very friendly, a friendly looking tattooed instructor is surrounded by little girls who think he is fantastic. A mum with a baby is also present. We say farewell to Daalhorf, as well as Trajekt and Maastricht.

CONCLUSION

I brought home a lot of inspiration from the internship, as well as many questions. To some of them, I have been searching for answers continuously, some are still waiting to be answered. The crucial question is how to apply the recipes that work in The Netherlands in the Czech environment given the fact that the context in our country is very different from The Netherlands. Nevertheless, it is better to focus on those things that work well rather than on problems. As such, I am trying to imagine an ideal situation and look for a way of achieving it.

Am I looking for a way of achieving good cooperation with the municipal and regional government and local institutions? The social workers I met in the Netherlands had one thing in common – a healthy dose of professional self-confidence. That is something I sometimes miss in the Czech Republic. In our country we have a tendency to criticise other people's bad decisions and to complain about those in power while feeling powerless ourselves. People usually believe in what they say and hence if we are going to believe that we are powerless, we will really be powerless, and so will be our social work. We will also be perceived in this way by the municipal and regional authorities. Therefore, I have resolved to keep in mind that we are the experts who know the situation in the field and therefore we are the ones who know most about the problems and their possible solutions. And in this way, I will be shaping reality – as a social construct. If someone does not take my work seriously, I will talk to him as if he was taking it seriously and regarded it as completely indispensable. While doing so, it is important not to forget (and mention) facts and stories. Nowadays facts mean most importantly money. It is useful to know how much money can be saved by investing into prevention. Indeed, who would not want to save money! It is important (and apart from being effective, it is also quite impressive) to be able to determine the required number of social workers for a given area using a brilliant calculation and to stand behind it, as if it were a matter of course. But people also ask about stories and desire to hear them. We should be able to give them some good, deep and true stories.

I have also become strongly aware of a certain rigidity that is apparent in the Czech Republic in contrast to The Netherlands. We do not talk enough and bring enough innovative solutions. When some innovation occurs, it is usually something that was dismissed ten years ago as complete nonsense. Let's be more courageous and let's try new approaches, try different solutions and then analyse their results. We may save ten years this way.

Another question that comes to mind is the issue of target groups. It appears that abroad a different model is successfully used, where the social workers specialise in certain problem areas rather than target groups. Should we be specialists or generalists? It is certain that we cannot understand everything and this should not be our goal. I believe that our specialisations are the relationships – we should be working on them, we should trust our clients and we should show them our trust. We can increase their self-confidence and make them believe that they can achieve something, that they can change their situation. Small changes are important.

Community work and work with the family are very important. Our clients are not some isolated particles in the vacuum. They live in a system and if we want to understand our client, we must understand his system. That is impossible without being in touch with it. We enjoy the trust of our clients, their parents, and their close ones, we stand between the clients and the community. (If we do not enjoy such trust, we should be thinking about it as if we had it and we will gain it). Who else if not us should be promoting better communication when it is dragging? Even a small step can be a breakthrough.

As I like to say, I drew a lot of inspiration from The Netherlands although – paradoxically enough – I did not see anything 'special' there. But that is the point – really special and exceptional are the most ordinary things. Like cooking or painting with children or working in a garden with the people from the neighbourhood. Or teaching teenagers how to create music together. My resolution is not to be ashamed of ordinary things. I know why I am doing them and generally they lead to the desired goal, if you think about them.

The internship also reminded me about the necessity to keep reflecting on the ethics of my work. When I feel the urge to give advice to someone, it may be the right time to ask whether I am supposed to 'take my shoes off'.

GOOD PRACTICE EXCURSION TO BELGIUM

...

Vanda Zemanová, Jan Frühbauer

“Outreach social work takes care of public welfare and the main aim of such work is to strive for everyone’s welfare because everyone is entitled to it. Only societies that strive to achieve this goal deserve our respect...”¹

In the 1990s, the model of preventive outreach social services was virtually unknown in the Czech Republic. When the field was being established, the pioneers of Czech outreach social work looked for inspiration to Western Europe, especially to England, Germany and the Benelux countries. Belgium belongs to the countries with long traditions of outreach social work, indeed next year it will commemorate the 30th anniversary of its inception. From a cultural point of view, Belgium is in many ways a very different country, and precisely for that reason it can serve as a source of inspiration for Czech outreach workers. The call published Czech Streetwork Association outlines the outreach programmes as programmes where the outreach worker engages with anyone who requests or deserves his/her attention, without regard to the limitations of exactly defined target groups as we know them from our country. For us, who are used to the labels of children and youth, homeless persons or drug users, it was such a challenge that we had to go to see the Belgian community social work field with our own eyes. How can the field workers be acquainted with all of their target groups²? How are they able to provide each of them what they need? And, most importantly, who are the vulnerable Flemings that are at the centre of the attention of the outreach workers? These were the questions that came up as we were reading through the call. I believe that the internship was a good way to find answers to them.

“Gasten” – the key expression of the entire excursion. The term is used for the individuals whom the outreach workers contact. The term will be mentioned and explained below. Nevertheless, I will be translating it as *user*, rather than as *guest*, *buddy*, or *acquaintance*, although linguistically these translations would be more precise. The reason is purely pragmatic – the reader will be able to understand more readily to whom the term refers.

VLASTROV

VLASTROV was established in 1990 as an umbrella organisation that unites outreach workers from Brussels, Limburg, Gent (East Flanders), Oostende (West Flanders), as well as Antwerp. It provides an umbrella for a total of 85 organisations. It is funded by the Flemish government as well as municipalities. Its main task is to provide methodological support to outreach workers, promotion of outreach social work and advocacy of the outreach workers’ clients (i.e. homeless persons, at-risk youth, addictive substance users, immigrants, prostitutes, simply all persons in difficult life situations.)

Outreach social work in Belgium is constantly developing; nowadays it does not work individually with different target groups but rather works with the entire community. The outreach workers work with a very broad range of persons. In their own words, this approach has many advantages – they no longer have to decline some of the potential service users. At the same time it turned out that this approach is more efficient and cost-

1/ Cis Devaele, Vlastrov association coordinator.

2/ We mean “target groups” from our perspective. In Belgium, there is only one target group – “the vulnerable.”

effective than providing services separately to each target group. On the other hand, they do not know specific target groups as well as they used to. (In the past, they for example used to know the habits of local teenagers – what school they attended, how they spent their free time, they knew almost everything about them.)

METHODS

In 1995, VLASTROV introduced a methodical framework, which was accepted as a standard model of work with outreach services users. The framework was then described in a ninety page long manual, known among the outreach workers as *De Bijbel (The Bible)*³. The manual specifies four principle points that must be taken into account in providing outreach work: *vision, aim, relationship, work techniques*.

Outreach worker's *vision* is the assistance in securing a dignified life for the individuals with whom he/she works. A dignified life means most importantly securing the balance between three components: *social rights, solidarity, and personal values*. Social rights include the right to choice and exercise of employment, health protection, legal assistance, the right to housing, etc. Here the authors were inspired by the 1994 amendment of the Belgian Constitution, which defines these social rights. From individual rights the authors move to *solidarity*, which turns an individual into a member of a broader community and encourages him/her to be a partner in the interaction with other individuals. In addition to the general rights and mutual solidarity we must finally add personal values, which an individual may freely profess. After reading this paragraph, one can summarise the Belgian outreach worker's vision as providing the user with the well-known *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

The *aim* of outreach work is to gradually establish contacts with the users, which helps to empathize with their situation. Moreover, it is the beginning of the process of building up the user's motivation to resume the responsibility for his/her own life. The outreach worker is also a mediator between the user and the public. Last but not least, his/her aim is also to alert society (local authorities) about specific issues he/she encounters on the streets. Nonetheless, the most important thing is regular contact, which leads to a professional relationship.

The *priority* of the outreach work is to establish contact with the user, to be in a relationship with him/her and thus do one's work. This is comparable with the Czech approach to social services. However, in contrast to us, the Belgian outreach workers do not aim primarily at assisting the users, improving their social situation, supporting them in their actions. The goal is to listen to them, support them, and amuse them – to be there for them. Since the relationship is the focal point of outreach work, it will be discussed throughout the report. Nonetheless, the methods also stress the importance of professional detachment. The outreach worker thus maintains a relationship that is caring, respectful, unconditional, and contains professional dedication.

In the conclusion, the manual defines a *system of techniques* that may be used by the outreach workers in the field. This system of work does not significantly differ from the Czech model. The outreach worker first and foremost contacts the user (offering an equal relationship, providing feedback and information), offers follow-up services provided by his/her organisation (hobby groups, authorities). Subsequently, he/she can provide information about the situation on the streets (needs of the users and communities, risks, etc.)

1) ANTWERP, OR THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES

Antwerp was the first stop on our journey. VLASTOV represents the local organisation ASTROV. Our guides were coordinators Luc Martens (ASTROV) and Erik Castermans (VLASTOV).

Examples of services offered in Antwerp:

✎ **Centre of General Social Work (CAW)** – an organisation created by the merging of several smaller ones. It runs a contact point for the most vulnerable persons aged 12-25 years. Its work consists of providing psycho-social support to people in difficult life situations. Vulnerability is perceived primarily in the context of social exclusion, such as homelessness. CAW also provides support via email, telephone or chat (<http://www.cawantwerpen.be/>).

- ✎ **General Social Work Residential** – a homeless shelter that provides basic services. The employees try to establish relationship with the guests as means for further work with them. The number of beds is increased during the winter months.
- ✎ **De Plataan** – a community-focussed place that provides long-term accommodation (in most cases for up to one year); the rent charged depends on the tenant's income (the average is €600/month).
- ✎ **Day centre for the homeless** – a place that provides basic services during the daytime (possibility to take a shower, eat a meal, store one's belongings in a locker).
- ✎ **Street-corner work** – a field social work service provided in 14 districts of Antwerp. Each district is served by one social worker. For details, see below.
- ✎ **Outreach work** – in contrast to street-corner work, this type of service is performed “on demand” when requested by the city government. If disorder occurs somewhere in the city, the outreach workers are called on to stop the disorder (e.g. by moving addictive substances users from a square.) The city government is usually content that the problem is no longer visible. The street-corner work and the outreach work are hence based on different principles and the different styles do occasionally clash. Nonetheless, the cooperation with outreach-workers who used to work in street-corner work tends to be more successful.

Free clinic

A service for addictive substances (hereinafter AS) users that comprises both an injection material exchange programme (which also includes other application utensils), as well as counselling services, therapy, substitution therapy (using methadone, we did not even hear about any other form of substitution therapy in Belgium), and medical services (GP, psychiatrist.) The Free Clinic hence provides a broad range of professional and multidisciplinary assistance on an outpatient basis. The work with the patients is guided by the harm-reduction principle. Other activities include indicated prevention and clients' social integration.

The principle mission of the Free Clinic is to improve users' physical and mental condition and to provide assistance and support in social areas. The social workers help clients to stabilize their situation (i.e. assist them in finding work, applying for social security, etc.)

During our visit we went to see the room used for the injection material exchange. In contrast to the Czech Republic, it is provided exclusively on an outpatient basis. The users can pick up free needles, as well as other utensils (containers of various sizes, aluminium foil, spoons, filters, etc.) The needles are available in various sizes (e.g. for the users who apply AS into the groin, bigger needles are available). In principle, the material should be exchanged for used syringes, but in reality it is often not the case. During our stay we witnessed two users who received a bag full of everything they needed without bringing in any used material. The idea is that it is better, or rather safer, for the users if the policy is not strictly enforced. Used syringes are collected on the streets by a so called 'needle patrol', which consists of both volunteers and clients. There are also three dedicated containers around the clinic. The clinic staff would like to see more of them around the city but the city authorities vetoed the plan because they believe that it would encourage more people to use AS.

De Biekorf Dormitory

A dormitory and a day care centre focused on homeless persons who experience problems getting into other dormitories (apart from homelessness, they often suffer from substance addiction or other psychiatric condition). A night's stay costs €2.50, the clients may also take a shower and eat here (in the morning and in the evening).

The De Biekorf environment struck me as very pleasant. The premises were clean (including the toilets). The beds were changed every day! The clients must use a different bed each night, which is supposed to prevent them from getting too established there. They are allowed to drink or use non-alcoholic AS in the rooms, obviously provided that they keep the premises clean and do not disturb others.

The staff also provide a regular programme on Mondays and Fridays. On Mondays, there is no pre-planned activity, it always depends on the agreement of the clients. On Fridays, the activities are more or-

ganised. Since we visited De Biekorf on a Monday, we witnessed less organised activities – the staff played various parlour games with the clients, talked with them and played foosball with them. Overall, De Biekorf appeared rather calm to me, only one client (who suffered from a psychiatric condition) was louder. I was very surprised by the lack of the typical ‘homeless’ odour I know from the Czech Republic. All clients were clean, well kempt, and had washed hands.

Straathoekwerk, or street-corner work, or field social work

I will now turn to a more detailed definition of straathoekwerk, i.e. field social work in the context of the host organisation VLATROV, which could be described as the essence of their work.

Street-corner work principles

Street-corner work is a professional social work method, which emphasises a respectful attitude towards the target group, its values and norms. The street-corner work is based on four basic principles:

- ✎ **Active approach**, i.e. actively addressing all members of the community in various places (streets, squares, cafés, laundries, public transit, but also in the homes of the inhabitants of the city.)
- ✎ **Integrated approach** – the service is not aimed at a particular target group but rather at the entire community, it is provided at all places frequented by members of the community (see the item above).
- ✎ **Positive approach** – the work with the clients focusses on their abilities and potentials, rather than on their problems and shortcomings. The clients are accepted as they are, the street-corner workers respect their needs and values, as well as themselves.
- ✎ **Structural approach** – what is happening on the streets is perceived as a factor that influences both the political representation and the public servants, as well as public opinion. The aim of the street-corner work is to ensure that people enjoy living in their community.

In contrast to their Czech counterparts, the Belgian social workers are used to working alone among their guests (this term is used to describe the clients in Belgium) on the streets. The social workers first have to thoroughly familiarise themselves with their area and it is therefore impossible to describe the specific techniques and methods of work in detail, as they depend on the specific conditions of the given area, as well as the street-corner worker’s personality. Each has a different background, education and other experience that affect the style of their work.

Prerequisites of effective outreach social work

As I have already outlined above, good knowledge of the area is an important prerequisite of outreach work (the outreach workers really have enough time to acquire such knowledge: they can spend half a year or even a year observing the area and getting familiar with it.) It is also very important to know one’s community very well; such knowledge is acquired by establishing contacts, interacting with the target group and actively becoming close to it. The established relationships then have to be nourished and contacts further developed.

Another prerequisite or factor that affects outreach work is the environment. Therefore, the aim is that the outreach workers encourage mutual social solidarity among members of the community by organising social events and supporting clients’ own initiatives. The result is a closer bond between the client and his/her environment. The outreach workers must also strive to develop connections among members of the community, organise group activities, etc. Contact work with the clients is also important. Among other results, it should lead to improved self-knowledge, ability of self-reflection and the learning of responsibility and independence.

The outreach workers should also advocate availability of social care, counselling services, etc. in their area. They should be able to publicly present their work to be respected both by the city authorities and the entire community.

The current situation in Antwerp

The time we spent in Antwerp was not particularly pleasant for the social workers. Actually, it was rather the opposite. In January 2015, the city will impose massive cuts, which means that the social workers are working with the awareness that from the New Year, only four out of the current thirteen employees responsible for thirteen areas will remain on the staff.

According to the social workers, the main reason is the victory of a right wing political party in the last election. After discussing this topic further, I have reached the conclusion that the budget cuts were also caused by the fact that the social workers did not manage to find common ground with the city officials. After the first disputes, the social workers seem to have partly lost interest in negotiations with the city officials believing that it was impossible to reach a compromise.

Therefore, I believe that they should try to renew the talks with the city government, and try to better explain the essence of their service, outlining comprehensively its value and importance, perhaps even demonstrating the efficiency of the services provided.

Villa Voortman - a low-threshold facility for persons with dual diagnoses

Villa Voortman, or Vila Vilekula, as I have renamed it, is located in a marginalized area of the city of Gent (administrative centre of the Flemish province of East Flanders). For me, it was one of the places that impressed me the most by its very pleasant atmosphere, layout, interior decoration, philosophy etc.

The villa serves as a meeting place for people who struggle with dual diagnoses in their lives. The premise for the creation of this establishment was the fact that people with dual diagnoses experience difficulties in being admitted to regular psychiatric care precisely due to the dual diagnosis. Therefore, they often used to experience feelings of failure and helplessness. Another premise is hence social psychiatry. The philosophy of this low threshold day-care centre is based on the need of people to belong somewhere, to be capable of maintaining relationships with others, to be useful and keep developing. The villa is a place where persons with dual diagnoses are welcome and, most importantly, completely respected. Attention is paid to the development of social skills, participation and social connections.

The villa is open every weekday from 9 am until 5 pm. Similarly to Czech NZDMs [low threshold facilities for children and youth], the visitors may arrive at any time during the opening hours. How much time they spend in the facility depends only on themselves. Most of the visitors come here almost every day, largely because they receive a friendly acceptance. The villa is a calm place where they feel at home and where they can satisfy their need for social contact in a safe environment. They can socialize here both with their friends and with the staff. The visitors and the staff treat each other with respect.

The staff of the villa offer to its guests various irregular activities, which are strictly voluntary. On most weeks, at least one such activity is organised – usually it is some form of musical or dance activity, creative workshop, arts workshop, etc. Each visitor to the villa may either participate in such group activities or find a calm place for him/her-self.

Regular activities in the villa consist of common cooking and meetings between the staff and the visitors. One person is always responsible for the preparation of lunch; depending on the need, he/she may ask others to assist with the cooking. Someone else sets the table. Lunch must be ordered ahead of time and paid after the meal (€2 per lunch). The meetings between the staff and the guests constitute the most important part of the programme, because the inputs, outputs and feedback from these meetings play a crucial role in the work with the clients. The meetings also serve for the planning of the weekly activities and provide an opportunity for a free and democratic deliberation about the programme and its structure. The guests can use arts workshops, a room with a TV used for film screenings, a garden, but also a room with a bed used as a resting place (e.g. for those who had not slept during the previous night). In principle, the guests are not allowed to visit the facility while under the influence. Nonetheless, if it does occasionally happen, this room can be used as a ‘chill-out’ place so that they do not disturb other visitors.

The staff of the villa also support their guests in staying in touch with the healthcare system and society in general. Therefore they often use the services of volunteers (usually artists or students).

2) OSTEND - OUTREACH WORK BY THE SEASIDE

The final city we visited during our internship was the coastal city of Ostend. This was also the first place where we met social workers who had worked there for less than a year. In Ostend, just like in the cities we had already visited, they used to work with individual target groups in the past. Nonetheless, since 2003 they have worked with the entire community.

The place with a 70km long tram-line

Just like in other cities, the emphasis is on establishing contacts with the 'guests', which are based on mutual trust (the outreach workers explain to the clients that all the information passed to them will remain confidential; client's consent is required even for sharing the information with another social worker). The outreach workers are required to become familiar with their assigned neighbourhood and its inhabitants, they should also identify their needs to enable further development of the system of services. The outreach workers duties therefore include the drafting of proposals or suggestions related to the improvement of the clients' situation by providing a sufficiently broad range of follow-up services.

From my perspective, the co-operation between individual services appears to work very well. The staff members know each other very well. This may also be the reason why we had an opportunity to see a rather large number of services. Below, I will discuss each of them in greater detail.

Klein Verhaal - artists linking together the community

It is an arts association that has been around for ten years. Its name was translated to us as "little story". They work with people from various backgrounds in creating various projects. E.g. a film shot by a professional director that mapped a project of connecting communities from various cities through renovation of and a group ride on old mopeds. Each of us has received a DVD of this film (fortunately enough with English subtitles). The artists cooperate with the street-corner workers in order to link together groups of people that would otherwise not meet each other. The aim is to engage in various positive activities. The basic premise is that anyone can come up with an idea, have the energy to cooperate with others, and be active. The association is funded by the city government and by the ministry of culture. It has five employees and many external/volunteer collaborators.

The house on Dekenijstraat Street - how an Olympic doctor decided to help homeless people

Another place we visited in Ostend was a house on Dekenijstraat Street that serves as a homeless shelter. It is operated by an over seventy year old doctor who used to work for Belgium's Olympic team. The striking contrast between the lifestyles of the homeless people he knew from the streets and the athletes (with whom he had lodged in the world's best hotels) led him to the decision to do something for the homeless. First he acquired a motorhome for them and later, when it was decommissioned, a boat. Finally he managed to acquire the house on Dekenijstraat Street.

Cooperation with the street-corner workers is very important for the doctor. The street-corner workers can refer new prospective occupants to his house, the doctor in turn can refer the occupants to the street-corner workers' services, etc. The house is inhabited mostly by men – women can stay here only in a pair (they have an assigned room and in order to fully use the capacity of the house, there must be two of them.)

Altogether, there are ten beds available in the house, as well as a kitchenette, a lavatory, a bathroom and a room with clean clothes. The keys are kept by one of the inhabitants, who is responsible for the house. The inhabitants can live in the house on long-term basis on the following conditions: they have to keep their place tidy, they cannot drink alcohol on the premises, and they have to behave themselves. 'Doctor', as he is known to everyone around here (including the street-corner workers) stresses that he does not provide social services. That is the task of the street-corner workers, to whom he refers the occupants. He only



Café Anonym – Day Centre for Homeless People, Hasselt



Outreach work, Gent



Youth Centre, Gent



Public exchange boxes, Antwerp



Exchange programme, Brussels



Dormitory founder – Olympic Doctor, Ostend



Dormitory, Antwerp

provides a shelter. The goal is to enable the inhabitants to return to normal society – to find a home and a job. Therefore, they are allowed to stay in the house only between 5PM and 9AM (so that they do not hang around the house). The success rate of this concept and this place is admirable – last year, seven out of ten inhabitants managed to return to a normal life! I believe that an important factor is Doctor's personality. While he does not live in the house, he frequently visits it. His enthusiasm is truly admirable.

Jeugdhuis De Takel, or the Vrtule club exists in Belgium too

During our stay in another part of Ostend we also visited the local Salesian youth centre. It was incredible how much it reminded us of the Vrtule club in Prague, they even have a “Belgian Jan Vališ” here. When we found out that the person in charge of the club is also called Jan, we were really astonished that the similarity is not only physical J.

The club operates in a similar way as in the Czech Republic. The teenagers and young adults have at their disposal a pool table, table football, computers, a TV room and a bar where they can buy refreshments. Smoking is allowed in the backyard behind the club. Taking into account that the club is staffed by a single person, its opening hours are unbelievable – four days a week it stays open until 10PM, on Fridays and Sundays until midnight.

Jan, the club employee, believes that more people should work in the club. He has to divide his time between too many clients and hence the case work cannot go deep enough. One of the advantages of the club is that there are two beds here that can be used in case of emergency. Just like all the other services, the centre closely cooperates with the street-corner workers.

The last day - football and a picnic

On the last day of our internship, we went to see a training session of a couple of players who had enrolled into the Homeless Cup. In less than a week, the social workers and their guests were going participate in the finals of the national round. They train in a local gym that they can use free of charge. Nonetheless, each time they have to explain to the gym custodian who they are and what they are going to do there. Just as in our country, it is impossible to guess ahead of time how many people will arrive at the training session. The Belgians take the Homeless Cup as seriously as the World Cup. Every city we visited during our internship will have its representative at the Cup, who will fight for a chance to participate in the world finals. In Ostend they even lend them jerseys for the training. The team is coached by a seventy year old former client!

As a reward for the training everyone enjoys a picnic in a local park. The social workers buy food and beverages (obviously non-alcoholic) and then have a feast together with the clients and us J.

In Ostend I witnessed a strong interconnection between the social workers and other organisations and services active in the city. These included services for homeless people, but also for example for mothers with children or entire families. One of these services provides free nappies and discount laundry services to mums in financial distress. Another programme organised by one of local centres offers package tours to families in adverse financial situations, who can pick a holiday destination from a catalogue. Interestingly enough, this programme does not have any sponsors. The hotel-keepers simply offer friendly prices to this clientele without being compensated for such “loss” by anyone.

Ostend was the place where we spent most time with direct care workers (in Antwerp and Ghent we interacted rather with coaches). We could hence experience that the social workers are well known in their neighbourhoods and have well-established relations with other organisations and with their guests. In the case of the guests we should rather speak about a close personal relationship. To me, the proof of such relationships was the way in which the outreach workers parted with their guests – with a kiss on the cheek. To our dismay, some of the clients parted the same way with us.

3) LISS

The LISS organisation is based in the Limburg province in the vicinity of the German border. We stayed in the city of Genk and during our stay we also visited the university town of Hasselt. This was the most fruitful part of our stay in Limburg and therefore I will focus on the practice we observed there.

LISS⁴ belongs amongst several organisations that operate under VLASTROV's auspices⁵. The Limburg outreach organisation was established in 1985 and hence is one of the oldest ones in Belgium.⁶ The organisation is headed by a provincial coordinator who is in charge of ten outreach workers. The coordinator, Theo Christoffels, who has been working for LISS for twenty years, explains that the beginnings were complicated among other reasons because the organisation was not perceived positively by the public. They encountered the problem, which is familiar also in our country, that the socially undesirable phenomena were more visible. In 1991, after they had managed to become partly established, another blow came in the form of Black Sunday, when the extremist Vlaams Blok⁷ party gained a large increase of votes. Once again, the outreach work faced a lack of understanding from the public. Currently, LISS sees itself as a fully-fledged partner of local authorities, thanks largely to the following three factors:

- 1) Increased professionalism
- 2) Stories
- 3) Connections with institutions

Methodological grounding of the outreach work according to him led to a substantial increase in the expertise. The outreach workers are also better represented in the offer of local services and institutions, while using their clients' stories as means of presenting their work. For this purpose a booklet entitled *Straatverhalen* (Stories from the Street)⁸ is published annually.

The outreach worker

LISS employs ten outreach workers. All of them have been working in Limburg for more than five years. The outreach worker's profession requires a college degree in social work. In the case of the coordinator, the length of field experience is also important. In Belgium, employers distinguish between college and university degrees, university educated employees receive in general higher salaries. Nonetheless, LISS can afford only afford to offer college level salaries in the range of €1200 – €1300 a month after taxes. Over the years, the monthly salary can reach up to approx. €1500⁹.

The outreach workers are employed solely on full-time basis. Currently, there are six women and four men working as outreach workers. Their ages range between 27 and 35 years and more. All workers were surprised when we told them about the high employee fluctuation rate among Czech social workers. According to them, the 2-4 year average length of employment makes it virtually impossible to establish a valuable trustful relationship with a client. They believe that positive results can be reached only after five years of cooperation. Most workers confided that they dislike the filing of the reports and try to shun it. Therefore they prefer to spend most time between Mondays and Fridays on the streets. It is also recom-

4/ Limburg Steunpunt Straathoeckwerk (Limburg outreach work base).

5/ Other examples include e.g. ASTROV (Antwerpse Straathoeckwerk) or VZW VOS (Oost-Vlaamse Straathoeckwerk).

6/ Limburg was originally a mining area. Throughout the twentieth century, coal was mined here. The coal mining attracted immigrants from all over Europe, mostly from Italy, Poland and the Balkans. In the 1970s, a new wave of immigrants arrived – this time from Maghreb. In 1985, the mines were closed down, leading to massive unemployment and partly also to riots. The situation led the local political authorities to open the first outreach programme in Belgium. Our group had the honour to meet the first Belgian outreach worker, Erik Castermans, currently an ASTROV coordinator.

7/ Similar shock was recently experienced by Antwerp, when the right wing NVA party chairman became mayor.

8/ Translated from the booklet: Murat would like to work as an international transport driver. One of his friends has a job like this. Murat joined him on several trips abroad and he liked it a lot. He was currently employed but his contract was about to expire and he knew his employer would not renew it. For an extended period of time we were looking for offers for driver's positions. However, these are rather rare. Meanwhile, the work contract termination date was approaching. Together, we decided to look for a different job. We discovered a car-testing position offer. The offer seemed attractive to Murat. We had already created his CV and now we just slightly altered it. Murat however confided that he was not sure how to proceed exactly. Can he call the employer and inquire about further information? Should he mail the CV or bring it to his interview? ... So I kept answering Murat's questions.

9/ For comparison, the poverty line in Belgium is about EUR 900/month.

mended that they reserve one Saturday a month for the users. Their working hours can range between 10 AM and 10 PM¹⁰ and they can adjust them themselves according to their needs.

Each Monday, the workers gather at a meeting held in the coordinator's office. Apart from that, they also undergo weekly team intervision that is regularly attended by a VLASTROV worker. The intervision sessions last for three hours. The first hour takes the form of an informative meeting on updates and news related to outreach work. During the next hour, the workers speak, one after another (Theo, the coordinator, really motivates each one to share something about themselves, their current feelings, etc.). During the last hour, selected cases are discussed under the supervisor's supervision. Those who need more time or who do not want to discuss their issues publicly can arrange an individual appointment. The external supervisor may hence spend the entire day with the Limburg outreach workers. The intervision system is appreciated by all workers.

A visible difference compared to Czech outreach programmes is the number of workers in the field. While in the Czech Republic, outreach work is normally performed in pairs, in Belgium, each outreach worker is on his/her own. At first, the Belgian outreach worker regarded the model of two outreach workers working together as baseless and believed that it may frequently place the workers in a position of superiority over the users. After listening to our arguments, especially the availability of instant feedback (as means of maintenance of professional distance or personal mental hygiene), even the Belgian lone wolves acknowledged the advantages of teamwork. Sometimes, the Limburg outreach workers seemed to us to be lone soldiers fighting for the public good in the jungle of street vulnerability. In the end, even Theo, the coordinator, was inquiring about the advantages of pair-based work and, judging from his reactions, it seemed that he might actually like it. It is hard to say whether an eventual increase in the number of employees would lead to a decrease in salaries because the Belgian outreach workers pay is already well below the national average.¹¹

The workers enter user-related procedures into a record-keeping system, which is quite similar to the well-known Czech *PePa* system. The procedure report is submitted annually to municipal and provincial authorities. The programme is funded from grants and performance payments by the provincial government. The employees collect primarily statistical data. First and foremost about the number of users; for example in 2013, there were 453 users in the city of Genk (only 29 of whom were female – the reason is the mostly Italian, Moroccan, or Turkish origins of the users). These users are assisted by six social workers from Genk. The statistical tables are rather detailed containing the place of contact, users' age distribution, family background or even number of users who passed away during the reported period.

The second part of the statistics contain records of provided procedures. Again, we can see that in 2013 the six workers executed 6,491 procedures related to a certain *area of life* (*levensdomein*) of the users. The second most frequent procedure was information service. The most frequent procedure was obviously listening to the user (5,252 procedures which means 81% of all procedures). It should be noted that these statistics are much more detailed than the statistics provided by our organisation JAHODA, o.p.s. to Prague 14 local government and Prague city government. The outreach workers document not only the number of times they provided information services, but also record further details about the information service provided (finances, employment agency).

The statistics also reveal that the most numerous target group, from our point of view, are young people between 21 and 25 years of age (almost 30% of users).

Kwetsbare Gasten (Vulnerable Users)

It is generally known that the provision of social services in the Czech Republic emphasises the division of users into specific target groups (children and youth, homeless people, drug users, etc.). In the 1990s, some experiments with providing outreach work services across various target groups were conducted.¹² On the other hand, recently we have seen the launch of the first community-based outreach services.¹³

The big difference that we all looked forward to seeing was precisely the wide scope of services where it is not decisive to what target group the user belongs. Who then can be a user of a Belgian outreach service? For

10/ It is not that unusual that the working hours end late at night. (With Jessy van Gemmert, one of the outreach workers, we were once leaving a new Italian bar at about ten to midnight.)

11/ The net monthly income for college degree holders in Flanders is approx. € 2400. To clarify the disposable income, we should mention that housing costs for a single person start at about €600/month.

12/ Cf. the experiment of the Municipal Social Services Centre in Prague.

13/ Cf. the community outreach service provided by Neposeda NGO.

instance, a forty year old man who visits the local café every day and does not leave it before 10 PM. A sixty year old pensioner who does not receive any support from her family may be also using the service. Another user may be a fifteen year old boy who struggles with his Italian origin and his relationship to his adopted homeland. Last but not least, the outreach workers do not avoid long-term cooperation with homeless people or drug addicts. A Belgian outreach worker is hence truly a community worker who can be addressed by local citizens. The main criterion for the provision of the services is *vulnerability* (*kwetsbaarheid*)¹⁴ that may lead to the social marginalization of the concerned individual. The outreach workers strive to avoid such exclusion through contact work (in the case of the forty year old man), or in case of those who are already living on the margins of society (such as the drug addicts or homeless people), to offer a trust based relationship.

Although they do work across various target groups, they are not necessarily experts in everything. Their domain is contacting the users, establishing a long-term contact with them (support during difficult times), providing them with basic information and referring them to specialists.¹⁵ Their priority is establishing a contact, especially a long-term one. For the treatment of specific problems, there are professional workers who specialize e.g. in drug addicts. One could perhaps call them "*professional friends*" who provide support to a person, listens to him/her, provides advice and knows where the person can seek further assistance.

To establish such a relationship in which they are trusted, the outreach workers are willing to hang out with the users in a café¹⁶ or even accept an invitation for a (non-alcoholic) drink. The female outreach workers¹⁷ who guided us through their areas claimed that so far they have been able to handle (with the help of intervision) all situations where it seemed that such behaviour might indicate an interest in more than a strictly professional relationship.

Observation record

The outreach work was similar in both observed cases. The outreach workers arrived to their respective areas by car and immediately went to their favourite cafés where they were warmly welcomed. The outreach work then consisted of twenty-minute long sessions with the users. Both Wendy and Jessy were actively communicating. For instance in one case Wendy discussed with a fifty year old man how he had managed to cope with the death of his mother, which they discussed two months ago. Before she even reached the café, she managed to hand over a kitchen scale to a fourteen year old boy, with whom she had discussed how he might surprise his girlfriend on her birthday. In the end, they decided he would bake a cake for her. We asked two users of Moroccan origin (approx. 30 years old) who Wendy is to them. After joking that she is a beautiful girl or a girl that would date them, they said she was someone who knows them, talks to them and can advise them.¹⁸

Where to go further?

We have already mentioned that the outreach workers in Genk have good connections with other social services and institutions with whom they can cooperate. We have to mention above all social restaurants and then also the genuine *community workers* (*buurtwerker, wijkwerker*).

Social restaurants are establishments that provide affordable meals primarily to the socially vulnerable. They are funded partly from municipal and provincial funds, partly from their own revenue. A main course

14/ The methods specialists draw upon Social Vulnerability Theory by professors Walgrave and Vettenburg from Leuven University. According to this theory, there are socially vulnerable individuals and groups that are treated by various social institutions (the police, schools, employment agency...) exclusively from the position of a supervision and sometimes from the position of power. The institutions treat them this way because these individuals develop their own culture, which over time acquires negative connotations among the majority society. This clash then hits the individuals (they feel hurt), forcing them to further augment their negative self-definition vis-a-vis society. This vicious circle leads them further and further away from the standards of mainstream "averageness". Eventually it can happen that society that keeps punishing them no longer actually believes in the possibility of their adaptation to social norms. The point of this theory is not to criticise the social system (it does acknowledge its legitimate demands). Rather, it points out the sources of the process of exclusion of some individuals.

15/ They might be compared to general practitioners who refer their patients to specialists.

16/ The outreach workers dispose of a monthly budget of €100 for petty expenses. They use cars to move around their area and their fuel expenses are likewise covered by the employer.

17/ Wendy Tkach (Winterslag neighbourhood of Genk – most users are of Moroccan and Turkish origin) and Jessy van Gemmert (Zwartberg – most users are of Italian origin).

18/ A pleasant similarity between Czech and Belgian outreach work. During last year's ČAS audit, our users gave the same answers.

costs from €2.50 – €3.00. For LISS outreach workers they provide an opportunity to contact new users, meet with the existing users or refer them to other services. In the city of Hasselt we had the opportunity to enjoy the typical Belgian *frikadels met patat*¹⁹ in Café Anonym, which caters exclusively to drug users. Places like this usually employ cooks in the kitchen (or they use volunteers) and are managed by a social worker.

Community workers are a special kind of partner to outreach workers.²⁰ Usually, they have an office in the middle of a neighbourhood where they are available to local citizens who come to visit them and discuss the life of their neighbourhood. The community worker then reacts to his findings (e.g. by an offer of free-time activities or by suggesting some changes to the municipal authorities). In Hasselt, we saw the local community worker Sara Marcoen with three people (also *gasten*) in the middle of a cheerful conversation over a cup of coffee. Both subjects (community and outreach workers) closely cooperate, exchange information and refer users to each other.

Success rate of outreach work

Since outreach work consists primarily of establishing contacts with individual human beings and working with their motivation and ability to change, the Belgian outreach workers also face problems with presenting the success rate of their work. As the best tool of evaluating the effectivity of their work they have chosen positive stories of their users, which they try to present as much as possible in their community, among other ways by the above mentioned booklets. The experienced outreach workers with ten or more years of practice argue that the efficiency of work with a given user can be assessed only after an extended period of time, approx. five years. Assessments based on shorter (e.g. one year) periods cannot, according to them, prove anything in outreach work.

Good practice

Just like Czech social services, the Belgian services have to compete annually for grants from federal and municipal treasuries. Long term (thirty year) experience of the local outreach services is the key to the annual financial backing of individual programmes. The communities know their outreach workers and their work. This is an area we have mastered only partially in the Czech Republic. Moreover, Belgian social workers also emphasise good relations with local authorities without whom they could not accomplish their goals.

The priority of this trip was search for best practice inspiration. What has been said so far in my opinion clearly implies the lessons we should take from Belgium. We should be inspired by the greater visibility of the service within the community, which leads to greater public awareness about the usefulness of outreach services. In Genk we saw how the regular public events and presentation of “stories from the street” keep emphasising the usefulness of the service, which ultimately serves the needs of the community. The Belgian system is different. In particular, their focus on the needs of the clients often seemed incomprehensible to us, although from what the social workers as well as some of their “guests” say, it seems that it works. Nonetheless, with the colleagues in our JAHODA organisation we have agreed that the relationship with the user is useful, but only as a tool for cooperation and the user’s development, possibly even to the discovery that he/she no longer needs our assistance. Besides providing inspiration, the excursion organised by the Czech Streetwork Association also confirmed the correctness of some well-established and proved practices that do not need to be changed.

Acquired impressions

What are the biggest differences between Belgium and the Czech Republic? Outreach social work in Belgium is financed largely from municipal treasuries (the outreach workers are municipal employees). It is hence much more dependent on the current political representation, on how the municipal authorities and organisations providing outreach work manage to find “common ground”. As a result of opinion differences

or perhaps inability to find a compromise, the outreach workers in Antwerp currently have to cope with substantial budget cuts introduced by the municipal government. While currently there are thirteen outreach workers who operate in thirteen areas, only four workers will remain on the staff from January 2015.

Another important difference, besides the method of financing, is the time for which the outreach workers stay in their profession. I had an opportunity to talk with a total of ten outreach workers. All of them have been working as “street-corner workers” for an average of 8-10 years. In the Czech Republic, the outreach workers remain in the profession only for 2-3 years! (Štefková & Tučková, 2011) I believe that the main reason is not so much better financial remuneration of social workers (compared to the Czech Republic) but rather that they understand their work to be a calling (while maintaining professionalism), they perceive it as important and fulfilling and at the same time they enjoy it. They are also less constrained by mandatory administrative duties – they enter records of their work into a central registry on average only once a month (they only report information on the client’s gender, age and ethnicity, type of work with the client and the issues it addressed) – and hence can spend 70% of their working hours in the field (60% is obligatory, while 40% is devoted to administrative tasks and meetings with coaches.)

The working or ‘opening’ hours of outreach services in Belgium are irregular. The time that the outreach worker spends in the field keeps changing. The general rule is that he/she must work at night at least twice a month and on at least one weekend a month. The point is to ensure that the outreach workers get to know their area as thoroughly as possibly during all times of the day. *“In order to get to know his area, a worker may not have fixed working hours. He/she must visit all of its parts during all hours of day and night”* - Tjil Meheus, Vlastrov – Gent. The workers also contact and meet with their clients in pubs and cafés. The bills are reimbursed by the employer (at some places they have a small expense fund from which they draw – e.g. in Gent, elsewhere they submit the bills, which are then reimbursed – e.g. in Ostend.) Some workers describe certain establishments as their virtual offices where they meet with clients on regular basis.

I also believe that the six year or longer difference [in the length of experience between Belgian and Czech social workers] is reflected in the workers’ level of knowledge about the given community but also in the level of awareness about social work among the community, street officials and other political representatives. The inhabitants of Belgian cities know their street-corner workers very well and have good, sometimes even rather close relationship with them. At the same time they know that the street-corner workers are professionals on whom they can turn if they ever get into a difficult situation. Principles of proactive approach; actively addressing all members of the community, integrated approach (the service is not targeted at a single target group but rather at the entire community), but most importantly the principle of positive approach (emphasis on relationships with the members of the community) is in my opinion reflected in the habit of referring to the clients who use the services not as “clients” or “users” of services, but as “guests”, “visitors”, or even “friends”.

As I have already mentioned several times, Belgian outreach-work services put great emphasis on the relations between the outreach-workers and their guests, which they consider the single most important prerequisite of a cooperation that may lead to improvement of the guest’s situation. At the same time the workers are capable of maintaining an all-important professional attitude; the guests do not take them as their friends but rather as persons on whom they can turn when they face some adverse situation. Another important tool is conversation. The workers really talk a lot with their guests.

Instead of supervisors, the workers have coaches, or rather, service coordinators with whom they usually meet (one to one) every 3-4 weeks. They discuss individual cases, e.g. when the worker is unsure how to proceed with a particular client, but they also reflect upon the worker’s performance in general (i.e. they place interventions performed on behalf of clients in the circle, which may show that the worker performs only a particular kind of procedure.) The coach is also in charge of supporting, motivating and listening to the workers and taking note of their strengths.

As I have outlined, the street-corner workers have far fewer administrative duties than we do. Nonetheless, they are aware of the importance of keeping records of their work, which constitute an important reflection of their work. What I find really convenient is that each worker can choose the record keeping style that he/she prefers (pen and paper, computer, daily, weekly, a general record on all clients, or a separate record for each...). The records are also used during the meetings with the coach.

19/ A kind of sausage with chips.

20/ Plechárna community centre in Prague 14 will probably serve the same purpose in the future.

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Notes from the internship

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GOOD PRACTICE EXCURSION TO AUSTRIA

...

Karolína Brabcová, Zuzana Šťastná, Hana Laurentová

Our good practice excursion took place from July 7 until July 11, 2014. The trip was organised for staff members of low-threshold services by the Czech Streetwork Association with the support of ESF, operational program Human resources and employment within the framework of the project entitled "Improving quality of low-threshold social services through sharing good practice in selected EU countries".

Within the framework of this report I would like to focus on the description and issues of services provided to drug addicts that we met in the course of our trip abroad. The goal of this report is to introduce the readers to the course of our internship and the principles of operation of facilities presented. I shall therefore focus on differences and personal experiences. In the conclusion I shall try to summarise the outputs and discuss the fields of possible inspiration.

City of Graz

Austria has a long and a complicated history full of wars, invasions and battles. However, the Austria of today is a stable and neutral state with a high international cultural reputation and a tendency towards stronger European integration.¹

Austria is a federal republic consisting of nine self-governing units (states). Styria is the second biggest federal state as far as area and population is concerned. Similarly, the city of Graz, which is the capital of Styria (Štýrský Hradec in Czech) is the second largest city in Austria. The population is 287 000 and the city centre is a listed UNESCO heritage site.² Some of the readers might already suspect that Graz is a relatively small, beautiful and old European city. The city centre is really picturesque. It is dominated by the Schlossberg fortress with the river Mur winding down below.

People say Graz is a city of students. It is the home of approximately five Austrian Universities. You will meet many young people here, find numerous coffee shops, restaurants and bars. The city certainly has a rich cultural life, be it in music or graphic arts. People in services are usually very pleasant and we had no problems communicating in English with them. As far as prices are concerned, Graz is comparable to Prague. Meals in restaurants were usually 100 CZK more expensive than back home, but supermarkets charged almost the same prices as shops in the Czech Republic.

The majority of the population consists of Austrians. The strongest minority consists of people from the former Yugoslavia. These include Slovenians, Croatians and people from Bosnia and Hercegovina, due to the proximity of the borders. Among other minorities you find Macedonians, Afghans, Turks and Chechens. Unfortunately, I did not find any information about the percentage of individual minorities living in Graz and Styria on the internet. There are fewer Czechs and Slovaks compared to the North-West part of Austria, but you would still occasionally find some compatriots even here. Luckily/unfortunately, we did not meet any compatriots during our travels.

Austria is not very varied in terms of religion either. There is a Muslim minority in the city of Graz, but the overwhelming majority of the population are Christians with the Roman-Catholic denomination prevailing (approximately 75%). The Catholic tradition has left a significant trace here compared to the situation in the

1/ Quoted from <http://www.zemepis.net/zeme-rakousko> as of 30.8.2014

2/ Quoted from www.wikipedia.cz/styrsky-hradec as of 30.8.2014

Czech Republic. Significantly more people practice their faith and it is still true here that people do not work on Sundays (everything was closed down with the exception of a few restaurants and we enjoyed a really nice and peaceful day!) with the Catholic conviction being reflected in politics (at least this is what some people we met told us). In real life this means that politics (including the social policy, of course) is rather conservative and traditional. At the same time, Austria is distinctively pro-European (within the meaning of integration and EU affairs) despite of the fact that Austrians are relatively strong nationalists.

Caritas was our host organisation in the city of Graz. Helmut Steinkellner accompanied us throughout our stay. He has been with the organisation for more than 10 years. He started his career as a street worker with drug users, but later moved to low-threshold services for children and young people. He now works as a leader in the low-threshold section for adolescents. Among other responsibilities, he is also in charge of international co-operation. He prepared the entire plan for our visit while being available every single day in order to answer our questions and provide a unique view of the individual facilities we visited. We learned more about the operation of other organisations in the course of our internship, but the majority of the facilities we visited were run and operated by Caritas.

TAILOR-MADE LOW-THRESHOLD

Karolína Brabcová

Tag.werk

This project was founded in 2004 and focuses on the production of bags, wallets and other accessories from recycled material (banners, sun blinds and cloths). The production material is obtained free of charge from local factories or private donors. It is a sewing workshop with the capacity for up to thirteen workers to be able to work in the workshop at the same time. A shop selling the products is an integral part of the workshop. The shop is part of a network of similar facilities in Austria, Germany and other countries. The shop also operates its own e-shop and regularly participates in fashion shows of famous designers (with the Paris fashion week being the biggest success so far). Young people entering the service have the option to choose from activities offered and to come up with their own original designs.

- ✎ **Target group:** Young people between 16 and 25 years of age; number of users involved: 60 – 70 individuals per year.
- ✎ **Work plan:** A client can work a maximum of three shifts a week (15 hours). The wage is €5.40 per hour, the maximum amount is €380 per month. Wages are paid in cash after the shift. Clients are insured while working and are not subject to personal income tax. A name list of clients present at each shift is sent to the Labour Office (due to insurance requirements).
- ✎ **Service staffing:** The team consists of seven staff members who work part-time, a civil service employee and external collaborators. Staff members' professional backgrounds varied (marketing economist, designer, social educational professional, office worker). Two staff members are always on duty. Social workers come in for four hours twice a week. Clients have the option to use legal counselling or consultation with a psychologist.
- ✎ **Supervision, meetings:** Staff members hold regular organisational meetings twice a month with supervision meetings taking place two or three times a year as needed.
- ✎ **Record keeping:** Records are not kept. Only the social workers keep records of clients who sought counselling services.
- ✎ **Funding:** 30 to 40 % comes from the production of goods with the remaining funding provided by the city of Graz and small donors. Financial support from the city constitutes an integral part of the budget and the program simply could not exist without the support of the city. Free market competitiveness of the project is limited by non-standard conditions applicable to clients (for example non-existent quotas for number of products manufactured by client per shift, individual probation period length, etc.).

Heidensplass

This project founded in 2005, based on the philosophy of the Tag.werk organisation. It is a creative sewing workshop producing designer bags, wallets, key cases, etc. The majority of the products are produced from recycled materials provided free of charge by local factories, such as banner remains, sun blinds or textiles. Heidensplass focuses on production of bicycle inner tubes, plastic bags and processing of other household waste the ecological liquidation of which is rather problematic and expensive in Austria. Compared to the Tag.werk workshop, Heidensplass offers a wider variety of activities to choose from, starting with the manufacturing of products through production of components to cleaning of the premises. If it is not possible to accommodate a newcomer in the workshop, the organisation offers free positions in co-operating social companies (for example gardening work).

The name Heidensplass can be translated as pagan entertainment thus expressing the situation where pagans have fun while Christians spend most of their time praying.³

- ✎ **Target group:** Young people from the age of 15 to 25 years
- ✎ **Work plan:** A client can work a maximum of three shifts per week (15 hours). The wage is €6 per hour with the maximum amount being €380 per month. The wage is paid in cash after the shift. Clients are insured while working and are not subject to personal income tax. A name list of clients present at each shift is sent to the Labour Office (due to insurance requirements).
- ✎ **Service staffing:** The team consists of 10 employees working part-time as well as of trainees and a civil service worker. Staff members are mostly social educators, designers, office workers, shop assistants and graphic designers by education. There are always two staff members present at each shift supervising the workshop operation, with one more staff member on duty in the kitchen. The social worker and other external experts are called in as required by the clients.
- ✎ **Supervision, meetings:** Employees hold regular meetings and supervision meetings a number of times a year as necessary.
- ✎ **Funding:** 30 % of the costs are covered by manufacturing activities (sale of goods in the shop, on the internet, orders by other companies) with the remaining part of the funding provided by the city of Graz.
- ✎ **Common dining:** The work includes communal lunches. One staff member and two clients are on duty in the kitchen cooking lunch for the others. The communal lunch takes place in a spacious dining room with the clients on duty setting up the tables and serving food. The lunch is followed by a desert and a coffee. The atmosphere is very friendly. The menu is prepared by the young people with traditional national dishes prevailing. The clients also procure the ingredients for cooking. The communal lunches have a family atmosphere and for some clients it is truly a ritual that replaces the families that they left behind in their native countries. Last, but not least, the lunch is often the only hot meal of the day for many of the clients.

Threshold one: Language a.k.a the more languages you know, the better a worker you are?

The city of Graz lies in the southern part of Austria approximately 100km from the borders with what is today Slovenia. And it is exactly this position close to the countries of the former Yugoslavia that significantly influences the composition of the target group for programs with children and teenagers. The city of Graz became the gateway for all refugees heading west following the fall of the Berlin wall and especially at the beginning of the 1990's due to the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it has maintained this position until the present day. Nowadays, people from Asia and some parts of Eastern Europe such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iran and Macedonia make their way through this gateway. This phenomenon is quite clear especially in low-threshold facilities for children and teenagers in which foreigners constitute of up to 80% of all clients. According to the Tag.werk final project report for 2013 there were 55 young people involved in the

3/ In my opinion, the name used is an allusion to the Catholic part of the society that maintains traditional 'ossified' opinions, not open to innovation in the area of social work with youngsters (the biggest issues include premarital sex, abortion, contraception and homosexuality). The attitude of staff members to the Catholic Church was very reserved in the organisations we visited in the course of our field trip (including those that are an integral part of a charitable organisation).

program, with the majority of project participants being Austrians (39 individuals). The second most populous group consisted of Afghans (6 individuals) with the remaining program participants coming from countries such as Russia, Chechnya, Romania, Germany and Turkey.⁴ When it comes to foreigners, boys significantly prevail over girls. It is often the case that families can only afford to send one family member abroad due to economic constraints, so they usually send a boy between 12 to 15 years of age who stands a much better chance of becoming integrated into the society.

We noted during our visit to various facilities that despite the language barrier there were no interpreters on the team (not even external interpreters) with the main communication language being German. The main reason for this measure is to make sure that people learn German as soon as possible, thus dramatically improving their chances of finding a job on the open job market and making their way through ordinary life situations. Solidarity is shown among clients, with young people interpreting for one another if necessary.

What also came as a surprise to us was the focus of the social sewing workshop, simply because sewing is the domain of women in our country. Furthermore, it requires a certain level of skill and patience (trying to imagine some of our clients holding a needle in their hands truly required a great deal of imagination). We witnessed first-hand that these stereotypes are far from the truth. The workshop is attended by almost as many boys as girls (the final Tag.werk project report for 2013 states that there are 55 clients out of which 58% are girls and 42% are boys)⁵. I find the main reasons for this situation in the cultural differences of some target group members (sewing is purely a male activity in Afghanistan) as well as in the way in which the staff members present the program. Both Tag.werk and Heidenspass do not focus on sewing, but on production and creativity. Everyone can come up with a design for the products and the products are marked with labels stating the name of the client. Clients also take turns in the shop selling the products, giving them the opportunity to get in touch with the customers. The philosophy of both projects is based on the assumption that every individual harbours a natural creativity and the need to materialize his intentions needs to be supported and developed. Everyone is given the choice upon arrival of what they want to do and what they want to design. Newcomers get plenty of time to get accustomed to work procedures and practices while experiencing the feeling of success from every product sold. There is a great interest in positions in these two organisations with the waiting time oscillating between 3 and 5 months.

Inspiration point

It was very inspiring for me to see how language can be used to advertise the services not only among the donors, but among the clients. What can appear only as a game with words at first sight, becomes a very useful tool when used correctly in preventing clients suffering from stigma. Simply, *the sewing is for fools, while design is cool*. The program provides the clients with an opportunity to make money by doing something the clients are really capable of and good at. Moreover, there is a great demand for products thanks to a very well thought out advertising and promotion system. Let's ask ourselves a question: How do we promote our services in our facility? Are we capable of explaining the program content in a clear and attractive manner? The other thing related to the language barrier is the notion of the *client* that became dangerously domesticated in the Czech language. They don't use this word in Austria since it evokes an unequal relationship and the semantics of the word correspond to the Czech word *patient*. There is no equivalent of *client* and young people are just *youth*.

Threshold two: Contract, individual plan aka what on earth do they want again?

Individual planning is a menace for every social worker who does not want to spend more time sitting at his computer than in direct contact with his clients. When it comes to preventive programs focused at children and youth, one cannot help having doubts over the wishes and needs of the target group and whether or not we are able to react to such wishes and needs in an adequate way. The Tag.werk and Heidenspass projects apply a very simplified planning and contract identification process. People coming to the project simply want to make money and the service target is to allow for that. Hence the composition of their teams is much more

4/ Source: tag.werk Jugendbeschäftigungsprojekt der Caritas Diözese Graz-Seckau, Jahresbericht 2013

5/ Ibid.

varied compared to the composition of our own teams. Professions not directly related to social work clearly prevail – designer, fundraiser, social educators, marketing manager. And every team is complemented by a staff member on civil service (this has been abandoned in our country due to the professionalization of the Czech army). There are usually two staff members overseeing the workshop operation at each shift. As we witnessed in real life, the supervisors are not only able and willing to give advice as to how to stitch a button or a zip, but talk openly to the young people while they work and often have a coffee or a cigarette with them during the lunch break. The social worker comes in for four hours twice a week and the young people can make use of consultancy provided by a lawyer or a psychologist. Full time staff members who do not usually have a qualification in social work, provide both sides with freedom in a rather atypical manner for us – the young people can ask for help and it is up to them whether or not they make use of the opportunity. The staff members decided that the young people earn respect and trust more easily in a natural environment in which adults act as colleagues rather than authorities.

Inspiration point

The issues of young people in Austria are not that different to those of their contemporaries in the Czech Republic (the Tag.werk project final report states that the most common issues of young people are as follows: unrealistic ideas of future occupation, financial issues, language barriers, family issues and problems related to the use of addictive substances).⁶ The main difference lies in the way the staff members get this type of information. Although I very much like the Austrian way of work I am not really sure it is applicable in our environment in the Czech Republic. I have to mention the attitude of staff members that is often very informal at first sight (it may appear as unprofessional for some people), but very functional (for example, 59 out of 70 people involved in the program have returned to school or found a job on the open labour market). As long as the staff members know what are they doing and why, even a cigarette can be a tool for deepening mutual relationships and the afternoon coffee the right moment to start a conversation on a very difficult topic. The most important thing is the right of the client to decide whether or not he wants and needs the help, while having the right 'not to do anything at all'. Last but not least, it is important that the staff members are capable of justifying their practice (for example in front of supervisory bodies and inspectors).

The colourful mix of team members complemented by individuals with education outside the social work field thus offering an outside point of view, is yet another interesting idea that we were enchanted with. Social workers working in a closed group can start to repeat certain stereotypes and established rules over time (i.e. what is/what is not professional / OK / in line with standards). I am of the opinion that an individual being able to view the situation through a layman's eyes can be very useful in the team and is very approachable for the clients, especially if he/she works in a field that might be interesting for the clients (for example a hairdresser can prepare a number of workshops on hair treatment while establishing solid contact with female club clients). A well trained long-standing volunteer might work better than a social worker by education in some situations.

Threshold three: The rules

The rules very much reflect the question of who we want to provide our services to. If we set the youth club opening hours from 8am to 12 noon it is very likely we will have no one to work with. Rules of both the projects are based on the real needs of young people for whom the service is intended. There are two basic rules applied: be on time and do not damage workshop equipment and materials. Shift start times are set at 9am, 9:30am and 10am and the clients can start work at any of these times. Furthermore, they can leave once they complete the five-hour-long shift. This is ideal for those who like to sleep in a bit after a party. The work plan is compiled a week in advance. If a client is unable to work, he/she has to report it by ten o'clock and apologise. If there is no apology and the client does not show up (the rule of three instances is applied here) his position will be assigned to another individual. The wages are paid in cash after the end of the shift (€6 EUR per hour, €280 per month max). Clients can work three days a week maximum. In addition to the number of hours worked the only limit is the age of individuals. The program can be used by individuals up to 25 years of age. The average duration of project participation ranges from six months to two years. After that the majority of young people

6/ Ibid.

either return back to school or enter the open labour market. Young people create their own portfolio in the course of their project engagement that comes very handy in their future professional lives.

Inspiration point

What really caught my attention was the fact that this service is tailor-made for those who use it (see the option to start work at 10am, for example). Social entrepreneurship is based on the assumption that the main goal is to allow young people to make money. The service does not reflect the real demands of a true work environment by its nature (for example by special working hours, unlimited training periods, etc.). Our experience from the visit has started a discussion in our club with respect of how to set the club rules (especially entrance to the club under the influence of addictive substances) and the adjustment of club rules according to actual situations. My most valuable experience of all was the fact that providing the client with sufficient space and time is far more effective than motivating him/her by letting him sign the contract and the individual plan addressing his/her particular situation because he/she has to be ready to do that.

Caritas Schlupfhaus

Caritas Schlupfhaus is a unique project of a hostel for young people between 14 and 21 years of age. There is no such project in the Czech Republic. The facility offers accommodation in 7 rooms and the total capacity is 17 beds. The facility also houses a lounge with a TV and computer, which very much reminds the clients of an ordinary living room. There is also a sports hall with the gym in which the clients can play table football, table tennis or work out. The clients have the opportunity to cook meals for free, wash their clothes and have a shower. The rooms are divided into boys and girls sections. Boys and girls can meet in the lounge but visits of the opposite sex to the rooms are not permitted. The facility is open from 6pm until 9am. The day starts at 8am with breakfast available in the kitchen. There are two staff members on duty with one of them leaving the facility at midnight and the other one in the morning. The organisation employs ten part-time staff members with education in fields affiliated to social work (psychology, social pedagogics, pedagogy).

If you consider the question of low-threshold, the use of facility is limited only by the age and the limit of ten nights a month (with the possibility to extend the accommodation period to one month once a year). The only reason for this limitation is to ensure sufficient capacity for all individuals interested in the use of the facility. According to the statements of staff members they did not have to refuse a single person due to capacity issues in the last five years. The composition of the hostel users is mixed – in 50% of cases the individuals use the service on a short-term/one-off basis with the length of stay between 2 and 3 nights. The remaining 50% of dwellers are long-term clients. This project manages to prevent the young people from living on the streets, despite the limit on length of stay in the facility. The ten-day-limit is no coincidence. It is based on experience from previous years of operation. Even clients with no permanent residence are able to combine their accommodation in the hostel with other sources and possibilities (sleeping at a friend's place or outdoors during the summer), which significantly reduces the risk of becoming dependant on the service. Clients who are 18 or older can make use of a special accommodation program with four initiation flats available with seven beds. They can live in these flats for a year with the only cost being the cost of utilities. The staff members only get the client's names and surnames in order to report it to the authorities for insurance purposes.

Inspiration point

This project/facility does not address the issue of addictive substances use in comparison to facilities of a similar kind in the Czech Republic. The basic assumption is that the young people making use of this service use both legal and illegal addictive substances in one way or another and as long as the client does not show clear signs of intoxication, is not aggressive and is not a threat to others by means of his behaviour, the use of alcohol or drugs does not constitute a reason to refuse the use of service. The clients are not tested. Our Austrian colleagues even go one step further in this liberal approach by accepting the fact that the area surrounding the facility is known not only for the use of addictive substances, but their distribution and sale.

Therefore, the hostel also includes a 'drug-free zone' – a set of lockable metal cabinets in the entrance hall by the main entrance into which the residents deposit any items the possession of which is in contradiction to the facility accommodation rules (most frequently these would be drugs and weapons – knives, brass knuckles, and even pistols). The dwellers can pick up their belongings from the lockers upon departure of the facility. This revolutionary approach is actually on the very edge (or rather over the edge) of currently valid legislation allowing the staff members to be 'above suspicion' in case of criminal activities of the youth. There is an unwritten rule in the neighbourhood that in case of a police raid the cabinets are not subject to search.

I do not assume that we would install storage for addictive substances in our facility, but the approach of our Austrian colleagues is truly inspirational, namely how far towards the needs of those we are providing our services to one can go while setting up the rules. This in turn leads to the question of what rules are essential for the service to be functional and which rules are on the contrary limiting and excessive.

In similarity to the Heidenspass sewing workshop I very much liked the idea of a communal meal as a tool for establishing communication as well as a tool for reflection of incorrect eating habits while making sure the clients can have a standard meal at least once a week (all irony aside I have to admit that the sight of a fourteen-year-old spreading cottage cheese on a slice of bread and putting cucumber on top instead of eating chips and lollipops for breakfast is truly an unforgettable experience for a NZDM staff member).

Threshold four: Funding

In the final point I would like to briefly focus on the questionable issue in the area of low-threshold services while giving an answer to the question of whether or not our colleagues in Austria tackle the same issues as our staff members. The answer is: Yes, they do. They have the same problems with funding uncertainty for individual projects, which is very much dependent on the current political situation in the region. The services are predominantly funded from one source, i.e. from the budget of the city or the region. Staff members are typically working part-time, usually a couple of hours a week. Only a very small percentage of managers have a full time job. The salary of a social worker is comparable to the salary in civil service or education, allowing the recipient to achieve an average standard of living. However, the fluctuation of staff members has become a trend over the past few years. New staff members leave frequently for positions within the civil service that offer a guaranteed income. Social services are working on the basis of a yearly budget with no possibility to ensure the continuation of the work for other years to come. It is not exceptional for the staff members have to wait a couple of months to get paid. When asked what they live on in the course of the months with no regular income (which might be up to six months in length in some of the organisations) they replied: *Family support and savings*. This leads me to the conclusion that if one wants to work as a social worker, you not only need a good education, but also financial resources. The position of a social worker within the society is very much dependant on the actual political setup, public opinion, media campaigns and very much reflects the society-wide sentiments.⁷

Volatility of funding is one of the reasons why they work according to the here and now method in Graz. Nobody knows what will happen next year or in the next election term. The stability of services is in danger.

The most valuable lesson we learned from our good practice trip to Austria is that we need to decrease the thresholds in a professional manner in order to be available to those who need us. We need to repeat for ourselves over and over again; why, for what purpose and who for do we work for and, most importantly, whether or not the individual in question is interested in our help. The possibility of experiencing a professional service in which the client is a human being and not a mere piece of paper, individual plan, number or project item is immensely liberating and practically exploitable. We are currently merging the street and ambulatory form of NZDM (NZDM = low-threshold facility for children and youth) in our organisation, which brings along the need for new methodology, standards and work procedures. Therefore, our goal is to try to simplify some of the processes with the help of an external facilitator in order to spend more time working directly with our clients and less time doing paperwork on the computer.

^{7/} Internship co-ordinator has been very critical towards the attitude of the ruling party. Furthermore, he demonstrated the attitude of the local government, which endeavours to downplay the problems of youth, on a recent event when the mayor of Graz commented on a case of sexual abuse and bullying in the juvenile prison (offenders from 14-18 years of age) by saying that prison is not a holiday. Furthermore, she stated in the same address with respect to the increasing drug-related crimes that: "Young people drink alcohol and smoke, so please spare us from introducing the drugs over here." However, this particular attitude comes as no surprise to us.

LOW-THRESHOLD CLUBS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Zuzana Šťastná

In the course of our stay in the city of Graz located in the South-East of Austria, we visited three low-threshold clubs for children and youth working with the same customer base in the age range of 12 to approximately 22 years. All facilities were funded mainly from the city or regional budget with other sources of funding covering only a very limited part of their budgets. The low-threshold facilities have been in operation for more than 10 years, which made it much easier to communicate with respect to service needs and importance within the community level, and influenced the amount of funding as well.

Jugendstreetwork/Jugendcafé

The low threshold club founded by Charita is located in Graz city centre. However, the club has recently moved from its previous location where it provided services for 10 years. The new location is approximately 100 meters closer to the main transportation hub in the city. Following the change of location the structure of the clients has changed. While in the original location the attendance was very stable, nowadays approximately 40 people who did not use the service before attend the club every day. Approximately 2/3 of club visitors are boys with the remaining part being girls, they are mostly children of migrants from the Balkans, Middle East or Africa. However, the language barrier is not a problem since all of the children either already speak or are learning German. The club is open three days a week with 3 staff members on duty and available to the clients. Staff members do street work for the remaining days of the week. The staff team consists of 1 woman and 3 men, all experienced in the field of social work.

Apart from the typical equipment of a NZDM (low threshold facility for children and youth) and a very interesting interior, the clients also get free food and coffee. This serves as yet another motivation to visit the club. Refreshments are funded from project money and the equipment installed so far did not require any special arrangements with the sponsor. Furthermore, the clients have the option to consume free vegetables, fruits and bread instead of fast food or chips. The eating corner was used to establish contact with the girls in order to discuss with them how they cope with the media pressure regarding the ideal of beauty. It is often the case that they are directly confronted with the boy's eating habits point of view, which creates room for discussion about reality and prejudices. I consider free refreshments for clients as a very positive option, especially in view of the variety of food on offer. Most of the clubs have a bar and the clients can buy chips, chocolate and soft drinks, but it was very interesting for me to see first-hand that the offer on the bar might look significantly different and not in contradiction with what the staff members try to communicate to the clients with respect to healthy eating habits.

Furthermore, there is a shower and a washing machine in the clubs, but this equipment is not yet in use. There is a sofa in the girl's room in order to give the girls a chance to discuss their intimate issues in privacy. The concept of a room or space for girls only is very common in Austria and staff members consider this to be a natural thing. This space is used regularly and female clients like it very much indeed. I have personally not come across a similar approach to a girls-only space in the Czech Republic. The girls in our club always look for a quiet place where they can discuss their secrets, but unfortunately they are often unable to find one. It is very difficult for girls to escape the attention of the boys in clubs where boys are in the majority. I very much liked this approach and it was even respected by the clients themselves – the boys recognised the girl's room to be theirs and they did not interfere. There was a reserved table with chairs in the corridor of one of the other clubs we visited. This table was not visible from the main room. In other words, it does not have to be a room, it is sufficient to allocate a part of the club or one corner to the girls.

Client work is comparable to the work we do in the Czech Republic. The staff members get in contact with the clients while on duty, following up discussions started earlier and they also resolve any outstanding issues or situations. The club has managed to reach an agreement with the police that police officers do not enter the club, but ring the doorbell instead. A staff member then accompanies the client on the way from the club and with his permission remains present during his contact with the police officers. It took quite a few years to negotiate the deal. Numerous meetings were held during which the importance of the service



Heidenspass, sewing workshop and products



*Jugendcafé Caritas Graz
– room with table football and computers*



*Jugendcafé Caritas Graz
– sitting area by the bar*



Contact centre, contact room and kitchen

*Tag.werk,
shop
and sewing
workshop*



*ja.m Mädchenzentrum
– girls only
low threshold club,
bar and resting room*



had to be explained. It is positive that the agreement with the police appears to be good practice following practical experience, especially in larger cities with significant fluctuation among police force members.

Currently valid Austrian legislation allows for youth over 16 years of age to buy wine, beer and cigarettes. Furthermore, the same age group is allowed to vote in some elections. Therefore, there is a smoking room in the club for those who are 16 and older. Their age is determined upon entry to the club. This solution not only means a greater level of comfort for club visitors who are not forced to walk out of the building just to have a cigarette, but it also generates a positive effect on how the club is perceived by the community. There are no cigarette butts on the pavement in front of the club and there are no people hanging around. And this is what concerned people prior to the club moving in – the increased concentration of youth at public transport bus stops.

There is a different system of measures taken against children and youth that commit criminal offences. Parents are responsible for their children up to 14 years of age. Once 14, children are fully responsible in front of the court. There are juvenile prisons for juvenile offenders between 14 and 21 years of age. This means that in cases of children who are below 14 years of age and commit a criminal offence, the police usually wait for the juvenile to turn 14 and then bring them to court. Juvenile prisoners are separated from adult prisoners either in a separate prison or a ward. They get basic education and they are allowed to work as well. They are provided with a club room, leisure activities and they also have plenty of personal free time. The staff members maintain contact with the clients in juvenile prisons near the club with their visits subject to approval by the prison director and minister. Staff workers visit those who request a visit twice a month. Furthermore, staff members introduce their services to all juveniles in the prison four times a year so the newcomers can also make use of the service as do the juveniles in prison who already used the club services prior to being sentenced. Many juvenile offenders start to use the service only after being released from prison because they understand what is on offer and what to expect. We are working on a similar type of co-operation with a correctional institute in our club. We inform the juveniles about NZDM and our services in the course of information meetings. The good practice from Graz clearly shows that this model should work and forced us to revise the frequency of information meetings.

Jungenstreetwork, which is also run by Caritas, is funded from the regional budget. This funding covers 92% of the costs. The remaining 8% is funded through subsidies of the city and ministries. Hence funding is continuously available, although the amounts are getting smaller every year with the difference being balanced by grants. Corporate and private fundraising is not of interest to this organisation due to the regional nature of the support it gets. The major part of the funding is used for staff member wages that are comparable to what teachers get paid. Staff members usually work for 30 – 34 hours a week and they do not have any other jobs. NZDM and street work staff can be educated in fields similar to social work, such as teachers and other types of professions. The leaders clearly indicated that education is not really necessary to be able to work with children. It is the motivation and will that matter. The majority of managers and long-term staff members did not study social work or social pedagogy. The reason that they stayed for many years was actually their affinity to the target group. Furthermore, it was extremely interesting to learn more about the age difference between the staff members and the clients. This difference was considered beneficial by both parties. Staff members shared the opinion that young people very rarely establish contacts with older people who are a part of mainstream society on top of that. The benefit already lies in establishment of the contact itself, as well as in the possibility to share their point of view with someone the young people respect based on the age difference. The added value of work with young migrants in Graz is constituted by presentation of the nation's culture and customs, which makes the country more understandable for young migrants.

One staff member on duty was always responsible for keeping records of clients using the services. Team record keeping was performed after the end of the shift. Individuals interested in rendering services had a paper file and following numerous meeting and their acceptance into the program they were migrated into the database. The number of clients using individual services has been monitored as well as use of computers. These data are used as project indicators. The client database contains client names or nicknames the clients want the staff to use, including a short description. A record of each visitor of the club contains information about the service the client used. Important consultations or interviews are recorded in the client's file including a brief summary. Staff members conclude every day with a written report. This means they do not have to do office work the next day in the afternoon, and are still able to remember very well the topics discussed with the clients on that particular day. At the same time, they use the team report

as a tool for feedback. Furthermore, it is consulted with the clients, which in turn leads to decisions on changes in the way the service is being provisioned.

We were lucky enough to witness the annual club event aimed at the presentation of public space and the youth that want to be an integral part of the public space. The general trend of building children's playgrounds and leisure zones for families leaves out the needs of youngsters to meet and to be an integral part of the community. The town hall perceives this issue in the form of young people trying to spend their leisure time in the city centre and does everything it can to push these groups out of the city centre and into the suburbs. Therefore, the staff members move the club to the street for one day of the year. They fill the public space with sofas, table football, boxing bags and music. The invitation is extended not only to regular clients, but also to MPs and the general public. Everyone can make use of the zone and get information from staff members concerning their work and the meaning of the event, which in a way replaces more traditional open house days.

Jugendzentrum Funtastic

The Funtastic club was yet another facility we visited. It is located in the area with the highest number of immigrants. This was the reason for the reputation of the club, which was considered to be rather rough although the surrounding area appeared to be a peaceful residential estate. The club was designed and refurbished by the clients themselves. The large space is divided by walls made of gypsum boards that can be moved easily if necessary. The club manager confessed that the club had changed its visual appearance at least ten times under his tenure. Self-made adjustments are less costly and since many club clients are studying at apprentice schools to become electricians or masons, the quality of work is guaranteed. Staff members consider the club to be purely for the clients and endeavour to support all proposals. I very much appreciated the attitude of staff members, because it is the staff members who define how the facility will really look at the end. Furthermore, I can see some opportunities for adjustments in the case of changes to the target group. New clients are free to decide how the facility will look, with no need to adjust themselves to what was satisfactory for a different group of people a couple of years ago.

This flexibility can be best demonstrated in a newly formed room for mothers with children. The club has a number of female clients aged between 16 and 19 years of age who have given birth to babies in a relatively short period of time and would like to make use of the club's services together with their babies. Following the necessary approval and with the help of the other clients, the female clients chose a part of the club which they decorated and furnished themselves. Staff members try to react flexibly to other needs of the target group while trying to be as low-threshold as practically possible.

Paperwork was definitely a secondary matter in all of the clubs visited. This was possible thanks to a great project indicator setup. The lowest volume of paperwork we came across was in the Funtastic club. Staff members do not even have an office in this facility. They managed to do preparation and reports directly in the premises of the club. The manager on duty had his own office, but he said he used it for approximately 2 hours a month to do the bookkeeping. Staff members focused on client work and meetings exclusively. All this came as a real surprise in comparison to the volume of paperwork we have to do in the Czech Republic. Our paperwork has become as important as the work we do, because it determines how much funding we get for the services, while in Graz the clients always came first. This made me ask myself a question: Who's interests come first back home?

We found their work with client's leisure activities to be thought provoking as well. Staff members never prepared a program with activities that would most likely not spark the interest of the clients. They very much followed the principle of 'here and now' instead. The clients were free to use all the equipment available in the club including the recording studio or home cinema at any time. The number of rooms in this facility allowed for one group to watch a film, while there was a sports tournament in the room next door and other clients were having a disco at the other end of the facility. If the clients indicated their interest in an activity that required some degree of organisation or was supposed to take place outside the club premises, staff members always tried to accommodate the request. This meant the clients were allowed to organise such activities under clearly defined conditions and with the support of the club. We noticed a similar attitude to pedagogical and educational activities. Staff members never offered their clients discussions or activities they were not interested in. In my opinion, this model is much more agreeable for the staff members who

do not have to deal with the eternal question of how to get clients involved in organised activities, which is the case in many of the clubs these days.

The club manager always put a great emphasis on the personality of his staff members. According to his experience collected over 20 years of service, it is not the education of the staff member that matters, but his/her attitude towards the target group. He considered NZDM work a challenge especially for female staff members since it is much more difficult for them to gain respect among the clients. It was interesting to find out that female staff members talk to (and shout at) clients with a low-pitched voice since the clients tend to get irritated by typically high-pitched female voices.

ja.m Mädchenzentrum

The very last club we visited was dedicated to girls only. It was founded and operated by the Mafalda organisation. This club is dedicated to girls between 12 and 21 years of age with opening hours on Tuesday and Friday afternoons. Currently, there are three staff members available to the clients. The target group consists predominantly of girls from families of immigrants. The premises are adjusted in a way to make the girls feel as comfortable as possible. As the composition of clients gradually changed and became multicultural the staff members started to think about hiring a staff member of similar origin to the clients. However, this assumption proved not to be correct since the staff members are capable of better explanations of the rules and traditions of the country the girls have immigrated to.

Each room is decorated in a different style while providing privacy to the clients. One room looked like a girl's bedroom, there was a TV set allowing the girls to watch films or even close the doors if they wanted to discuss something in privacy. Intimacy and undisturbed discussions had priority over supervision and rules. However, according to the staff members the rules were breached very rarely.

Metal and wood working workshops constituted an integral part of the club allowing the clients to test their skills. The workshops were introduced mainly due to the fact that girls very rarely get the opportunity to experience manual work first-hand. Under the leadership of an expert, the clients produce various utility products that are then used in the club. Following a request from the clients a football club has been founded. The team practices under the leadership of an experienced female trainer in a nearby sports hall. Work with family stereotypes constituted one of the main topics the club focused on. Girls coming from cultures that do not treat women equally to men were particularly fond of 'non-girly' activities. Since we treat women on a different scale of equality in our societies, we still tend to divide the activities to those for boys and those for girls. It is very natural to have boys play a football tournament whereas we would organise a day with a beautician and jewellery making workshop for the girls. Although anyone can register for the activities we still assume that the girls would go to the football match to support the boys and not to score goals themselves. I was very much attracted by the philosophy that endeavours to get the female clients much closer to unusual activities. Likewise, it was great that they had the opportunity to find out whether or not they would be happy working with a hammer or a saw. Or whether they prefer to decorate other products manufactured in the workshops. However, the girls did not only have the opportunity to work in the workshops, but many other classes from various fields and disciplines and these were also very popular indeed.

Since up to 90% of the clients do not come from Austria, they bring along a number of various taboos within their family traditions. One of the greatest taboos happens to be sex in any form. Many of the girls are not allowed to see a gynaecologist until a certain age or to ask questions about things they do not understand. Therefore, there is a special letter box in the club in which the clients can post anonymous questions. Once there are enough questions collected in the box the staff members invite a female doctor to answer all the questions asked. Furthermore, the staff members are also capable of intermediating in an examination with a gynaecologist for the clients and accompany them if necessary.

Low-threshold facilities in Austria really do put the emphasis on the 'here and now' principle. There is no need for a structured and regular program prepared by the staff members that would satisfy the target group's needs. Service methodology describes the basic rules to be followed by the staff members, but does not serve as a description for every single task and is even considered to be the facility internal document. Paperwork constitutes only a fraction of the work performed with the main output and deliverable being how many people were offered the services available. The work is very much client-oriented, which was self-evident in

all the facilities we visited. May be this was the reason why staff members spend so many years working in low-threshold facilities. It was very pleasant to be in an environment where work with the client was the most important thing and we very much appreciate the possibility to witness good practices in our neighbouring country first hand.

SERVICES FOR USERS OF ADDICTIVE SUBSTANCES

Hana Laurentová

1) Streetwork im Drogenbereich und Kontaktladen

Service description and day programme

We visited the local Contact centre on the very first day. The Contact centre in Graz is also involved in street work and happens to be the only contact centre in the city. Therefore, the services are not strictly separated while being provided at the same place and the contact members of staff are also street workers as well. Mag. Stefan Pree was our guide both in the Contact centre as well as on the streets. I would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude for taking very good care of us. He spent the entire day with us describing, explaining and answering all the questions we asked. He was full of positive energy and showed great charisma. Last, but not least, he spoke excellent English. He set the bar very high the very first day and even though we fell asleep dead tired in the evening, we enjoyed the day 100%.

The Contact centre is located very close to the city centre. It is in a strategic position in terms of reachability. The position is strategic also from its neighbour's point of view. There is the so called Orphanarium next to the Contact centre. It is a place where cultural events and concerts are held. The next building is a residential house, but it is separated from the Contact centre by a yard. According to Stefan, staff members have never had to deal with complaints by neighbours. If there were any complaints from those living nearby they always concerned the Orphanarium and the loud music played there. All this in spite of the fact that there are always groups of clients standing in front of the Contact centre smoking cigarettes and talking to each other. This came as rather a surprise to us especially when I consider all we had to go through in terms of conflicts with neighbours in my employer's Contact centre.

You enter the Contact centre by a spiral staircase despite all the traditional ideas of a low-threshold facility. We admired the contact room upon our entrance. It is the same size as our entire club, which is not small by any means! The contact room was really large and spacious. It was also clean and well equipped with two table football games. And here came a surprise – there was a **kitchen** too! It smelt of food and not of disinfection chemicals as in the Czech Republic. There was a young man on civil military service in the kitchen. He helped to cook food together with the clients. Stefan said that they cook about 80 meals in the kitchen every day. It is in operation from Monday to Friday from approximately 11am until 3pm. The menu consists of one meal at a price of €3 every day (which is far less than half the price of a standard meal in a restaurant). Apart from the contact living area equipped with sofas and tables there was a separate room to the left of the contact room with the exchange point. Furthermore, there was a laundry room and a cloakroom behind the exchange point. Clients use the toilets in the corridor, where staff toilet is also located. Furthermore, you could find separate showers for men and women in the corridor. The corridor took us to yet another flight of stairs, but this time they were in the staff only area. The stairs lead to the next floor housing offices, a warehouse and a roof terrace where staff members could go to have a break or a cigarette. One needs to add that with respect to equipment and technical facilities they were at least one level up compared to what we have back home in the Czech Republic. The entire Contact centre appeared very luxurious to us.

The Contact centre day programme was structured into three main parts: theoretical instructions on services provided and methodology, field trips, and contact room operation observation. From a service provisioning philosophy point of view we can summarise that the basic principles are identical to the ones used in the Czech Republic (*harm reduction, public health*). Despite some deviations and differences the socio-cultural climate is identical in Graz. The basic service provided consisted of the exchange of needles and other injecting materials complemented by socio-legal counselling, therapeutic help, crisis intervention or medical

treatment. As opposed to the generally applied standard in Czech contact centres where we employ nurses as regular members of our staff, this is not the case in Graz. However, the Contact centre co-operated with two medical doctors who were external partners of the centre. Furthermore, the clients may use the food service in the form of everyday lunches or the hygienic service in the form of the shower, washing machine and dryer. All this is free to clients provided they observe the waiting list.

The field trip was very short indeed. We walked through the most important contact points, got a brief explanation about each, but did not witness any real work with the clients as such. The most interesting (and astounding) fact was that there is **no exchange** in the field whatsoever. Staff members only distribute non-transparent paper boxes with injection material. Two staff members hit the streets, but it happens from time to time that only one staff member has to run all the errands. The field program primarily works as a contact and monitoring service. Stefan was very surprised when I told him that we exchange about eight hundred syringes a day in Prague. He also asked where we deposit used needles, he wondered whether or not we put them into the backpacks we carry on our backs. We immediately arrived at a major dissension, with Stefan not knowing about our safe yellow containers. It is the main task of street workers in Graz to send clients to exchange their syringes and needles at the Contact centre nearby. However, they do not exchange the needles and syringes themselves. They are an integral part of the everyday chaos on the streets with the basic tool being their personality and the art of leading a conversation. Any material they carry with them in the field is used as a contact tool only.

Following our field trip we were invited to the Contact centre to take part in the events of the day. Let me underline a number of remarkable experiences we usually do not come across in the Czech Republic. The usual number of staff members on duty ranged from 5 to 7 with **each staff member** on duty having a **specific role**. The scope of work depended on the type of role played by the respective staff member. Staff members divide their roles prior to the start of their duty. The single most interesting role for me was the "staff member of the day", which I would describe as a role of "informer and mediator". This staff member was seated behind a special desk and answered various questions mainly related to organisational and logistical matters. The other interesting role was the role of the "smoker". This staff member was supposed to stand outside the Contact centre with smoking clients while building contact frameworks for the upcoming case work. We were wrong to think that the "smoker" staff member has to go through a pack of cigarettes together with the client over the course of his duty. Furthermore, we were wrong in assuming that the role of the "smoker" is to watch over and check the clients. The "smoker" made use of informal and relaxed atmosphere to "maintain contact with the clients". All that without evening smoking himself/herself.

We succeeded in talking to one of the female clients in the Contact centre, but we spent most of the time outside the Contact centre since the atmosphere there was far better. We were invited to join the debrief of the day, which was rather amusing to me and my colleague since we do not speak German, but still it was good to see how the Contact centre employees communicate between themselves.

Comparison and inspiration

In this part of my report I would like to focus on summarising the most important experiences from our good practice internship in the Contact centre of Graz. For the sake of clarity I shall divide this part into three sub-chapters – the Methodology, Direct street work and drug situation in Graz and Experiences from the field and the Contact centre.

Methodology

We did not make any ground-breaking discoveries in terms of methodology and HR management. The team is numerous and consists of social workers, psychologists and social pedagogues. Regular supervision is a standard tool, just like regular meetings. Staff members use a database similar to our UniData version to record case work. It was interesting to find out that the database always contains the full name of the client. Each client has a file in the database that allows for recording information such as how long the client has contributed/not contributed to public health insurance system, how long has he/she has spent in prison, etc. The service is funded primarily through state subsidies (city of Graz, Styria region), but also from private sources.

However, there is one thing I brought back home as a certain difference in terms of methodology, which

is the (very) low-threshold attitude to work. Having spent a day in the Contact centre I got the impression that the staff members had far less control over the clients compared to the situation in the Czech Republic. Whereas it is of utmost importance in the Czech Republic to follow the adherence to the "rules and supervision" the staff members in the Contact centre in Graz did not really concern themselves over this. I do not want to say that the clients would not get clear feedback if they breached the rules significantly, for example by lighting up a cigarette in the Contact room or being aggressive towards another client. However, Stefan was unable to clearly answer our question about what sort of sanction mechanisms are applied for repeated breaches of basic rules. From what he has shared with us I derived there is no such system in place. Perhaps it is decided on an individual basis. In other words, if a warning is not sufficient the type of breach and the client who committed the breach is considered and a suitable sanction is agreed upon. However, there were no general guidelines as to how to proceed in cases of rules and requirements not being met by the clients of the Contact centre in the city of Graz. In my opinion, our Austrian colleagues perceive the low-threshold attitude as a way of work whereby the street worker is very close to his/her clients. He/she listens to them, gives advice when asked, does not ask the client to do anything, nor does he/she penalise or criticize him/her. All responsibility is moved towards the client. Non-adherence to the rules is not the staff member's business, but the client's problem. For example, if the client spends more time in the shower than allowed, the staff worker informs him/her (with a smile on their face) that he/she exceeded the shower time and that it shouldn't have happened. And that's all. No sanction, no anger, and no conversation along the lines of you should think of the others who want to take a shower, etc. To my surprise the clients did not abuse the free mode of operation – at least according to what I saw and Stefan's information. Naturally, we are very close to our clients in low-threshold facilities in the Czech Republic. We listen to our clients, do not criticize and do not place significant demands on them either. However, I could not get rid of the feeling that the notion of "low-threshold" is perceived a bit more "low-threshold" in the city of Graz.

Clients and the drugs

Our interview with one of the female clients was of a great benefit to us. We learned that the most commonly used drug in the city of Graz is morphine. Substitution programs have been in place for more than 10 years in the city of Graz and are used extensively. The programs are partially paid for by the health insurance companies. A fraction of clients still use heroin, but most of the clients are using morphine now (they use what is known as Vendal in our country) and Methadone. However, morphine is more popular among the clients. It is easily available in terms of price and access (prescription drug in pharmacy). It is served in the form of tablets similarly to Subutex or Suboxone in our country. However, the clients use the drug intravenously. Subutex and Suboxone are available in the city of Graz too, but are not very popular among the users due to their weak effects compared to morphine. The other interesting fact is that clients in Graz **are not aware of meth**. This drug does not have any tradition nor trade route. The only stimulant the clients use in Graz is Mefedron. This synthetic drug went through a big boom about three years ago, but is on the decline now. The users got scared mainly by the health issues experienced (most often skin problems in the form of festering wounds). A large number of the clients receives what is known as emergency benefits (living subsistence) in our country, which amounts to €800. According to the client we spoke to, this is very little money. She can barely pay the rent while being able to sustain a reasonable quality of life. Furthermore, the client said that she spends approximately half of her benefit on morphine substitution each month. She also negatively commented on substitution, stating that morphine is comparable to heroin in terms of effects. She does not perceive substitution as treatment, but she rather replaced heroin with morphine and nothing has changed in terms of her addiction as such. Furthermore, she expressed her wish to stop using morphine in Graz while replacing it with a different medicine with a smaller effect, such as Subutex. The possibility of choice is misleading in this particular case. According to the client the drug addicts will always opt for stronger drugs. The only option for them is not to have morphine on the market at all.

Yet another finding was the fact there is almost **no homelessness**. Only a small number of clients lives on the streets of Graz in the warmer months of the year. Stefan said there is so called latent homelessness, i.e. many clients do not have a real home (rent), but are not forced to live on the streets either. They usually live with their friends, family or people they know. They migrate from one place to another all the time. There are no squats in Graz either. The female client spoke of an abandoned building she used to stay in when starting to take drugs, but illegal forms of housing are significantly suppressed by the repressive bodies hence they cannot be sustained. Furthermore, the female client also mentioned that Graz is a small city. Something in between

a city and a village and people know each other. It is a terrible shame for the whole family if you end up on the street. Hence it is easier to look for temporary residence with friends and family.

Generally speaking, the clients of the Contact centre in Graz looked far better than our clients in terms of appearance. I am of the opinion this is mainly determined by the fact they have a place to stay. The clients appeared healthier, neater, provided for and simply in better shape. There were no signs of varicose ulcers, endocarditis and phlegmon and not even abscesses. The female client we interviewed even drove her own car to the Contact centre to get her substitution treatment kit. A large number of the clients had a job.

To mention the very last interesting point with respect to client work, I would like to state that the work does not include work with minorities' neither in the Contact centre or in the field. In other words, 80% of the clients are people with Austrian citizenship and they have no problems speaking German. The language appears to be the crucial reason for not having different procedures for client work. In spite of the fact that some of 80% of clients are not Austrians by origin, they are Austrian citizens who speak the language and know the society. Stefan also mentioned that there is no problem in communication with the clients. The remaining 20% of the clients consist of Chechens, Slovenians and a few Afghans. These clients usually do not speak German very well so they are just provided with syringes. Contact is usually speechless as confirmed by Stefan. The Contact centre does not prepare leaflets or any other projects to address the issues of minorities at the moment.

Streetwork

The most interesting information from the street work was the fact that syringes are not being exchanged. This is something we surely cannot transfer to our own conditions. However, I would like to state that this is very much influenced by the fact that the street workers do not have to resolve disputes with the general public or police forces due to such offensive behaviour caused by the fact that people are of the opinion that this "anti-social and dangerous thing" is performed in public places in front of everyone. The syringes street workers carry on them are packed in non-transparent paper boxes. Each package contains two syringes, an information flyer, alcohol disinfection by B Braun known as Kozelín to Czech contact centre staff members and street workers. The additional package contains acid for preparation of heroin and aseptic water (physiological solution).

Furthermore, the clients in Graz **do not use** our popular **insulin syringes**. They use standard syringes with 2 ml volume and disposable needles. We had a short and mild row over this topic with Stefan. Insulin syringes are used in the Czech Republic mainly due to the fact they have a very thin needle and a very sympathetic volume of 1 ml so the application is really easy. One can even say these syringes are relatively gentle to the veins, especially due to the very thin needle. Stefan tried to deny this asking why we use such "outdated" syringes with integrated needles while claiming that their syringes and needles are gentle. However, we ended this debate quite swiftly since we were attracted by yet another non-standard piece of equipment: a stainless steel coffee spoon. Stefan explained their clients have had very bad experiences with stericups (sterile cups for dose preparation) hence they started to distribute these spoons. This fact is yet another proof of the "luxury" the clients in Graz enjoy in comparison to our clients.

Furthermore, syringe vending machines are working well in the city of Graz. The machines are of very neutral appearance and only very well informed individuals can identify their purpose. One of the vending machines is even operated by a pharmacy, which came as a shock to us. This is something we can hardly imagine in our country. On top of that the pharmacy installed the vending machine on its own since they had clients picking up their substitution drugs in their premises. From what Stefan said we understood that pharmacy staff members are also addiction experts (in terms of their job duties, not qualification). Attending to vending machines is an integral part of street work.

The last point regarding street work concerns co-operation with the police. Our colleagues from the city of Graz have no problem with police officers whatsoever. They even have a deal that they do not mutually interfere with interventions. This means that when street workers are talking to their clients the police officers would just pass by and let them do the work. The same is applicable in the reverse situation. Stefan also mentioned that they have common meetings from time to time and consider each other as colleagues rather than rivals.

Contact centre

First and foremost I would like to underline the wider spectrum of services offered. However, it gets

more complicated in terms of transferability into our conditions since it is primarily the question of money. On the other hand I noted the fact that the Graz Contact centre staff members are more accustomed to getting the clients involved in numerous activities. For example, the clients help in the kitchen, prepare the paper boxes for street workers to distribute in the field or to put into the syringe vending machines. On top of that the clients get €3 per hour for helping out, which is slightly above-the average-wage considering the situation in the city. Furthermore, the Contact centre organises various themed days or events with the clients (the female client told us about a theatre performance). In short, the Contact centre clients are as empowered as practically possible.

2) Anti-drug co-ordinator (Suchtkoordinator)

We visited the local anti-drug co-ordinator the following day. It was a very brief meeting that took just over an hour. The co-ordinator's name was Ulf Zeder and he was originally from Sweden. He spoke very good English making the communication very easy.

Ulf was sitting on two chairs so to speak. Apart from his rather political and white-collar position of anti-drug co-ordinator he was also the substitution program manager. He said his position was multidisciplinary after all.

Drug situation

Basically, Ulf repeated what we had learned the day before – compared to the Czech Republic there are more clients using opiates with practically no presence of meth. The most commonly used stimulant drug is **Mefedron**^{8/}, a new synthetic drug with similar effects to MDMA. Mefedron was first legal in Graz, in common with other European countries. It was possible to buy it freely on the internet or in regular shops. The purchasing price was €1, the market price was €30. Nobody was afraid of the new drug at first, with the users claiming it to be safe. Then there were a number of reported deaths and health complications in the media and the usage immediately decreased significantly. Mefedron is now used by young people at parties and other events, with intravenous drug addicts not practically using this substance at all due to fear of health problems. They have been attempting to establish an application room in Styria for the past 15 years, but this effort has not been successful so far. It is impassable from the local anti-drug policies point of view. As far as opiates are concerned, Morphine is the most commonly used substance in tablet form as a part of legal substitution programs. Obviously there is a black market for Morphine, but it is rather marginal since the intravenous users make use of legal substitution forms. The street sale of drugs is performed mainly by the Afghan and Chechen minority. However, they mostly sell marijuana. As a matter of fact, the majority of THC users do not buy the drug, but grow it in small quantities at home. As far as marijuana is concerned, the legislation is as strict as with other types of drugs. There is no way to speak about making this drug legal in the city of Graz. Therefore, the young people usually get a two-year suspended sentence and end up in jail if they breach the law again.

Ulf said that Austria has a big issue with alcoholism. He described the political strategy for the fight with alcohol as "hard core catholic" and even "hysterical". He said that when young people got drunk, they usually end up in hospital and it is discussed far too often (both at home and in school). Alcohol is nowadays much more controlled than in the past.

8/ *Mefedron (4-Methylmethcathinone) is a synthetic stimulant with empathogenic and euphoric effects. It belongs to the cathinone derivate group. Cathinone is efficient substance found in Catha edulis plant (khat). Mefedron is a rather new drug. It first appeared in Great Britain in 2007 and started to be used around Europe, in Australia and New Zealand in the following two years. However, the number of deaths related to the use of this drug started to rise in the same period. Legislative steps have been taken making this drug illegal as a direct effect of the situation. Mefedron was freely available in the Czech Republic until April 2011 both in shops as well as on the internet. However, today it is included on the list of substances the production and distribution of which is illegal. It is commonly mistaken with Methedron (4-methoxymethcathinone) or Methylone (bk-MDMA) due to the similarity in name. In slang it is referred to as meff, dron, bubbles, MMCAT or miaow miaow. TAKEN FROM WWW.EXTC.CZ*

Substitution treatment

It is very easy to get into the substitution treatment programme – it is necessary to obtain an approval from a psychiatrist, however the psychiatrist does not issue prescriptions. He/she only confirms that the client is indicated for substitution treatment. The prescriptions can be issued by any authorised physician (something like the “blue” prescriptions for opiates in our country). The clients always pick up their drugs in the pharmacy. There are no such centres in the city of Graz that would distribute Morphine. There are 15 “drug offices” in the whole of Styria – these are facilities issuing prescriptions for substitution treatment and providing psychological and social services. In 2012 there were 120 users in substitution treatment. In 2014 the number has risen to 800. Ulf said that it makes no sense to have just consultancy centres for drug users, especially when you focus on long-term users addicted to opiates. We also discussed the pros and cons of substitution treatment in brief. According to Ulf, substitution treatment is a logical and natural way. The only disadvantage he pointed out is the fact it is difficult to get rid of it – a) people simply do not know how to live without drugs, b) they are in a unsolvable paradox in which they do want to use drugs, but don’t want to be addicted and c) they get into the stage where the side effects of substitution substances (health complications) are of little importance. Apart from that the existence and functioning of substitution facilities brings only positive effects: first and foremost substitution treatment pays off to the society and the government in economic terms, the operation of facilities is cheaper than the subsequent therapy of seriously ill people. Furthermore, drug crime is reduced due to the legal availability of substitution drugs. And last, but not least, substitution substances are safer. The number of overdose cases dropped by one half following the introduction of Morphine. Substitution substances are generally safer. Ulf mentioned that one third of his clients shows positive changes in their lives following inclusion into the treatment programme – they are stabilised, have a functioning relationship, etc. The other third is rather unstable and unanchored, but on the right path, whereas the last third is still interested in taking and distributing drugs. He indicated this state of affairs is very good. Substitution treatment continues even if the client starts to serve a prison sentence – they co-operate both with the inmates and the correction facilities as well. Furthermore, Ulf stated that the substitution centres in Styria are currently underfunded, which is very much reflected in his work and activities, i.e. there is insufficient staffing in order to serve the existing number of clients. In common with the situation in the Czech Republic, the substitution centres in Graz are overcrowded and there is no positive change expected in the near future.

3) I.K.A. – Interdisziplinäre Kontakt- und Anlaufstelle

The last facility involved in handling drug issues was the I.K.A. centre, which resembled the Czech substitution centres in its appearance and scope of services. We were given a quick tour of the facility and a short lecture on the services provided. We met Max Foissnerr, head of the program and project manager.

A multidisciplinary approach is the characteristic feature of this facility. This approach is provided due to the team comprising of medical doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers. The multidisciplinary approach is used to get as real and as complex a view of the client’s life as practically possible. I.K.A. centre offers total health care delivery, substitution treatment, psychological and social advisory as well as treatment of specific diseases. Furthermore, I.K.A. is also a low-threshold facility hence it is open to everyone with the only indication being drug addiction. The service is not limited by age, sex, citizenship, etc. Services are provided ad hoc with no need to make an appointment first.

I.K.A. is therefore a health care facility. At first, it is necessary to medicate the client in a suitable way and take care of his health, both physical and mental. A major part of I.K.A. clients are clients with so called dual diagnosis (addictions combined with mental disorders). Social work is perceived as a complementary activity. The centre has only one social worker who is capable of coping with all requirements and work, despite the fact that the centre currently has more than 100 clients.

Generally speaking, the facility services provided and client work in Graz were very similar to the standards applied in our country. The main learning I brought back with me was how the notion of “low-threshold” is perceived. This was very inspirational for me personally. We saw a lot in the city of Graz and all the facilities were operating on the basis of low-threshold principle. My impression is that there is good ground in the city of Graz (and maybe in Austria in general) for development of low-threshold programs across all target groups.

It seems to me that the low-threshold approach towards clients is very popular and frequently used irrespective of whether it is a contact centre, street work, asylum building, substitution program or social company for groups of individuals disadvantaged on the labour market. This is very good and interesting indeed. Furthermore, I often asked myself the question: what does the term ‘low-threshold’ mean for local staff members? I felt it was mainly the way that it allows the staff members to be close to the clients, while not demanding anything from them. Nor do they want the clients to work on themselves and show change (which is rather high-threshold), or want them to abide by the rules. For example, the clients grabbed handfuls of candy and threw them at each other, punched the boxing bag, etc., all during an open event for the general public organised by a low-threshold Caritas youth club to which we were invited. If something like this had happened in the club I used to work in, one of the staff members would have intervened and warned the clients to stop. However, having asked numerous questions about whether or not the clients abide by the rules or whether there is a problem with aggression, fraud or other issues, the staff members in all facilities unanimously kept answering no. All this gave birth to an idea. I may be more used to controlling the clients, verifying they speak the truth, etc. This may be wrong and a reason why the clients try to test the limits and get tempted to breach the rules. May be it would be well worth considering loosening the rules and leaving the responsibility and behavioural discipline to the clients.

GOOD PRACTICE EXCURSION TO FINLAND

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Renáta Turoňová, Zuzana Vopálková

Finland is a country with a population of more than five million, most of whom live in the southern part of the country. We had the opportunity to witness street work in Turku, a city with almost two hundred thousand inhabitants, as well as in Helsinki with a population of roughly half a million.

FINLAND – A COUNTRY WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THEIR OWN YOUTH ACT

Renáta Turoňová

We kept coming across the Youth Act as amended from 2006 throughout our entire best practice excursion. The purpose of this Act is to provide support for the development and independence of youth, encouragement towards active citizenship and reinforcement of young people's position within society, as well as improving the quality of personal development of the youngsters and their living conditions.

The Act itself defines youth as individuals up to 29 years of age. Reinforcement of the social position is perceived as the improvement in social skills necessary for the successful management of their own lives.

The Youth Act (as amended) has also defined street work with youth (or outreach youth work) since 2011. The purpose of outreach youth work is as follows:

- ✎ To identify and help young people in need of support;
- ✎ To help find services that will encourage the individual in his personal growth and independence;
- ✎ To ensure access to education or labour markets for such individuals.

Outreach youth work is based primarily on information provided by the clients, as well as ones own estimate/determination of the youngsters' individual needs.

The Act makes the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for the preparation of a development programme and national goals in youth policy every 4 years. This strategy is then enacted by the Parliament in the form of a Public Notice.

Due to the aforementioned Act, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a national level outreach youth work program in 2008, which focuses on prevention of youth social exclusion. At the same time it funds the outreach activities. The entire system consisted of 220 participating organisations, 409 outreach workers and a budget of €12.5 million in 2013. However, the outreach network is not complete and will continue to grow in the future.

In order to better understand the situation we must add that the outreach activities defined by the aforementioned Act which with a little bit of exaggeration can be described as a 'futuristic and more active' form of SPOD focused on teenagers and young adults from 15 to 29 years of age. According to the comments of outreach workers it is a very new system that touches many aspects of the current service network.

It co-operates with other social services (even those of an outreach nature such as drug services, homeless people and people in the sex trade) and makes use of information not only from schools, but also from the armed forces (Finland still has compulsory military duty). In fact, all of these institutions and organisations look for young people up to 29 years of age in need of support of a more complex nature.

And what about the children?

We were surprised that it is possible to legally intervene in the lives of young adults of up to 25 (or at the very most 29) years of age. In direct comparison, the Czech legal system has influence over young people of up to 18 years of age (for example OSPOD, Czech abbreviation for The Body for Social and Legal Protection of Children). However, in the following discussions we learned that outreach workers are immediately available to any children in Finland of up to 15 (or 18) years of age should they have a problem. Much clarification was brought by an explanation of the education system, in which all elementary schools (with the exception of small schools in the countryside) have an entire team of expert staff members available, which makes the school not only the educational institution, but also the preventive and support organisation as well. Children at school have the following experts at their disposal: guidance counsellor, youth worker (for group work), social worker, psychologist, therapist, as well as a police officer for youth, medical doctor, dentist and a nurse. In cases where this multidisciplinary team is unable to resolve the issue raised by the child, there is the Youth Clinic with more experts in the area of addictions, eating disorders or mental disorders. On the other hand, there is a very well worked out scope of leisure time activities available, something we would compare to our Children and Youth Leisure Homes, but with the difference that all activities and workshops are free. Therefore, we think that the social authority staff members or correctional facilities come into play only after all the preventive measures and expert attitudes have been fully exploited.

I wish that all children and teenagers in the Czech Republic could gain not just knowledge in the schools where they spend the major part of their days, but also find staff members who are always at their disposal the moment they encounter any kind of difficulties. However, this will not be the case for a long time to come, since at present in our schools we barely have a guidance counsellor (usually an existing staff member) or a psychologist in our schools. Hence I see a great opportunity to appeal to teachers to be more sensitive to any behavioural changes in their children while trying at least to recommend preventive social services within their city, which consist mainly of our low-threshold clubs and outreach programs.

With all this information in mind, it is far more understandable that we did not come across an outreach program for children as we know it from our country during our best practice experience in Finland. This forces me to raise a rather provocative thought: Is it possible that Czech outreach workers who meet children and teenagers on the front line are facing a flood of issues and topics the range of which are resolved in Finland within schools with the help of the aforementioned multidisciplinary teams?

Focus on idlers, renegades and defectors

The question of support for children up to 15 years of age in Finland is more or less answered in the previous lines. It is starting to become much clearer how the Youth Act focuses on older teenagers and young adults. Teenagers usually have a peer group, but this peer group breaks up at the turn of adulthood (18 – 20 years of age). Unless the young people go to university, find a job or a life partner, nobody/nothing can replace the original group and the risk of social isolation arises - reinforced by the indifference of society, neighbours, the anonymity of the cities and loneliness in the countryside. There is talk of a generation of singles. A generation of young people stuck between pubescence and adulthood. Their most frequent problems include solitude or even loneliness, shallowness of relationships with the resulting lack of social contacts and sometimes depression.

Young people in Finland targeted by the Act mainly include the following:

- ✎ *The 'Hidden and invisible'* – they are not on the city streets, but lying low in flats, hidden in countryside houses, and often not even on-line;
- ✎ *'Renegades'* – from schools, vocational schools, universities – students who have not finished their education and dropped out of school in the middle of the school year;
- ✎ *'Defectors'* – from military or civil service – young men who avoid this duty or interrupt the service performance.

These young people are the main target group for outreach work as per the Youth Act – young people without motivation and often without the skill to control their lives.

Outreach worker – street worker for youth

An outreach worker is usually employed by local government (each local self-government authority is obliged to employ an outreach worker) or by non-profit organisations registered for this type of outreach work. He/she has the necessary education and experience in the area of youth work. According to a statement of an NNO employee, the outreach workers employed by the municipalities must have a degree from selected areas as well as obligatory higher education. The situation is not as strict in NNOs where a greater emphasis is put on personality and standard courses are enough to increase the qualification.

Whether the outreach work is done by local government or non-profit organisations there is a great emphasis attached to close mutual co-operation, common meetings (every week) and information transfer.

Outreach workers regularly hold team meetings, client and intervention meetings as well as professional support in the form of supervision. Apart from the aforementioned standards, the outreach workers plan their work with clients themselves, according to the actual needs. As evident from the weekly schedule, the outreach workers have significantly more time for indirect work pertaining to clients as well as for self-reflection, support and intervention than it is the case and generally tolerated back home in the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, outreach workers also maintain adequate documentation. Work performance is also monitored with basic work tasks being recorded. However, the paperwork did not seem an undesirable or dominant part of outreach work whatsoever.

If you are interested in work procedures, methodology and directives please be informed that most likely there are some in place. Following the information provided by the staff I understood that employees of municipalities are organised more strictly, whereas the staff from non-profit organisations are closer to giving the answer "I know what I should do, after all". However, I do not want to downplay the professionalism of the non-profit sector in Finland. On the contrary, it very much resembles the Czech environment in that there is a vast difference in approach towards obligatory paperwork and an informal type of outreach worker.

The youth Outreach worker has a number of options regarding how to get in touch with the target group or potential user of his/her services.

Renegades – the Youth Acts makes it obligatory for schools (vocational schools, high schools and universities) to report to outreach workers all young people under the age of 25 who leave school or interrupt their studies. The major change is that until 2011 it was only possible and recommended by the Act, whereas nowadays it is obligatory following the amendment.

Defectors – similarly, the Youth Acts make it obligatory for the armed forces to report young men who do not enter into the army, interrupts or defects from obligatory military service. However, the obligatory military service can be substituted by civilian service in an organisation that bears the same obligation to report any issues in fulfilment of this service.

Hidden clients – it is considered impolite to take too much interest in the lives of others and many people live alone. If a friend, a neighbour or even a family member of a young person raises doubts about their ability to cope with life, it is far more acceptable to report such a fact to an outreach worker rather than getting involved personally. Of course, other public authorities have the right and possibility to contact the outreach workers (such as medical doctors, social services or labour offices), however, it is not their duty. It is very much desirable for a young person in trouble to make himself or herself heard on their own.

Active search - outreach workers set off into the field on their own, but they do not approach people on the streets. They regularly visit other social services and approach clients who are eligible due to their age and living conditions. Furthermore, they visit schools to be available during the midday break, leisure activities or at lodging houses. They co-operate with the Labour Office, Social Affairs Authority and healthcare authorities, with information even coming from police forces, employers, non-profit organisations or the Church. The other possibility of approach is in the virtual world, i.e. on the internet. The outreach workers present themselves on social networks (FB, Instagram, Ask.fm, Blog, and Vlog).

Dealing with interested individuals

The following procedure is applied in case of reports provided by the schools, armed forces or civilian service authorities:

Telephone contact – *Do you know why I'm calling? How are you doing? Would it be possible to meet?*

Written contact – the outreach worker makes three attempts to call the individual. If unsuccessful, he draws up a letter in which he introduces himself/herself as well as the services on offer while inviting the individual to co-operate.

Personal contact – if there is a response from the young individual a personal contact takes place with the ultimate aim to set up mutual co-operation.

This procedure was described by one outreach worker in Helsinki, hence it is likely that there might be some variations to the process elsewhere. However, the outreach workers attempt to get in touch with the reported individual within 1 month from the time he/she left school or the armed forces. Although the system is obligatory for all institutions, the consent of the individual concerned is strictly voluntary. The success rate represented by the number of individuals willing to co-operate is quite low at only 4 %.

In case of an active client search the approach obviously starts by a personal contact with the interested individual.

Direct work

Provided the outreach worker agrees on co-operation with a young individual they start with a personal case history, trying to gradually uncover the life situation in a complex manner. They would meet as agreed – often in a neutral place such as a café, while walking in the park or, very rarely, in the outreach worker's office. Together they look for a solution to the client's problems. The outreach worker supports the young person, accompanies him/her and helps to get things started. Very often they become very close and their friendship endures beyond the completion of their mutual co-operation.

The goal is to make the young person start to work on 'something'. It is important to make sure he/she finds his/her place in society. The outreach worker offers and recommends social services, training workshops, leisure activities, retraining, etc. Once again, the ultimate goal is a well-informed young person knowing where he/she wants to go in his/her life and ideally studying or working in a permanent position.

The practice procedure is actually not that surprising. Great emphasis is put on a good contact with the client, a trust relationship that grows into an intensive co-operation, positive experiences, a change of status and then gradually comes to an end. With some outreach workers I noticed a high level of personal involvement treading a fine line between professional and personal relationships, a will to give a part of their humanity for the benefit of a young person. This attitude is very close to my heart as well and despite all the risks and theories, the sincere interest in the client and his situation is always a good foundation for the change process.

Image outreach work

We met many outreach workers in the course of our internship that took place in 2 cities and many organisations and I personally felt various opinions and attitudes towards the outreach youth work.

Enthusiasm – the outreach youth workers whose position is clearly defined in the Youth Act are appropriately enthusiastic considering the newness of the system itself.

Co-operation – some workers from non-profit organisations, social services and leisure activities are very much inclined towards co-operation hence they either tolerate the outreach workers on their "own ground" or they endeavour to co-operate for the benefit of the client in an efficient way.

Refusal – some workers do not see the co-operation as beneficial while considering it an undesirable interference into their own attitude towards the client, a threat to the relationship and their previous work they might have been doing for a significant number of years.

These attitudes are fragments understood from our interviews, rather than a clearly proclaimed and reasoned opinion. Differences in views and opinions can easily be caused by the fact that the system has only been in place for three years. I can imagine that every city started to fulfil the Youth Act with different ideas and methods. To give you an example, I noticed that the outreach worker can wear informal clothing while working in the street holding a cigarette in his hand or driving the clients in his car, but at the same time I heard that the outreach worker should wear a high visibility vest with a clear sign on the back saying 'Youth Outreach Worker'. In my personal opinion, this is a typical situation that occurs when something new is introduced, it basically needs time to mature.

Work with young adults in the Czech Republic?

Having absorbed the initial shock of finding out that there is an Act that gives somebody else the right to ask a young adult of up to 25 years of age how he/she wants to live their life, I realised that this was exactly the thing that appealed to me the most. I still can't get rid of the idea of whether or not this group of young adults is a neglected group that deserves more attention and an adjusted offer of services. That is an inspiration. Is it a new trend of work?

City of Turku – 7th – 9th September 2014

Our best practice trip started in the city of Turku, which is the fifth biggest city in Finland with a population of 175 000. It was the capital of Finland until 1812. There are 14 youth outreach workers in the city and Sami was our guide.

City of Turku Youth service – outreach youth work

The local government founded the outreach youth work services back in 2008 and currently the city employs 6 outreach workers. The dominant feature of their outreach work is telephone contact (checking clients reported). The other methods of outreach work include co-operation with schools (visits to schools during breaks) and regular outreach work. The target group consists of youth concentrating in shopping malls, the 'invisible' or hidden youth who are hard to find on the streets, as well as young immigrants that have recently moved to Finland. The outreach workers also implement the Olkkari activity – the 'living room' for young adults. The goal of this activity is to create a space to which they can invite young people and talk to them. It should also be a place where the young people can establish relations with their peers as well as decide and agree on activities of various types.

Yet another activity consists of 2 outreach workers who are on duty during army drafts – there are 9 days a year during which the army drafts young men in Turku. The outreach workers are present during the draft days and are at the disposal of drafted men who can seek advice and make an informed decision between military or civilian service.

Vimma - Art and Activity Centre for Youth

This centre is somewhat similar to our Children and Youth Facilities. It was a four-storey building full of activities open to children and youngsters who could make use of everything free of charge, i.e. maximum availability. What really struck me was the fact that there are a number of other facilities of the same kind in the town. As well as standard activities such as a ceramic workshop, PC classroom, etc. there is also a broadcasting studio for an internet radio station, a sound-proofed and well-equipped video editing room, an almost professional level theatre rehearsal room as well as a concert hall with excellent sound and lighting system. Furthermore, the facility also houses the youth information centre and a very pleasant café. The same facility also houses the 'living room' project. All in all it is an enviable facility fully meeting the purpose of prevention as the operation of this giant building is funded by the city. It is certainly a good practice, but a rather amusing fiction under Czech conditions.

Sininauhaliitto - Polku project

This organisation is a member of Blue Cross and runs a number of different projects. Since 2013 the project portfolio has included the Polku project (a path or footpath in English). It is clearly a youth outreach project. Four outreach workers focus on young drug and alcohol users as well as young adults released after imprisonment. They search for potential clients in other centres and projects run by the mother organisation. Outreach workers first visit a specific project and conduct interviews with the clients present always focusing on young adults of up to 29 years of age.

List of other projects rung by the same organisation:

- ☞ **Sirkkala** – day centre for homeless people, former inmates and former drug users. A building in the city centre offering clients a place to stay – a living room with TV, newspapers, billiards and sanitary facilities (showers, washing machine) as well as food help (food for a symbolic price).
- ☞ **Jokipaja** – a workshop for youth in action. A brand new activity going through the last stage prior to its launch. Young people between 18 and 29 years of age will attend this facility for three days a week. Provided they conclude a co-operation agreement they can choose an activity that they will dedicate 3-5 hours to. The choices will include sewing, creative activities, sports, theatre and repair workshops. The goal is not to gain skills or practise the individual types of work, but to ensure the fundamental activation of young people – to teach them decide, go, keep working and experience success. There will be four outreach workers responsible for the operation of the project.
- ☞ **Milli** – a contact point – injection needle exchange program. This service is located in the residential part of the city centre and has an anonymous (unmarked) entrance. It is open 3 days a week serving approximately 10 clients an hour (up to 50 clients per day of operation). The operation is maintained by two nurses with a medical doctor available once a week. The main activity consists of needle exchange. The client gets 300 new needles and a disinfectant for every packet of used needles brought in. If the client does not bring old needles, he/she only gets 20 injection needles. The client may come twice a week maximum, hence he/she can get up to 600 needles a week. It appeared to us that in real life there are self-appointed 'co-ordinators' who bring in used needles to the centre and pick up new material for an entire group or flat. However, the main goal is to make sure that every user comes on his own and preferably more often with less material, which establishes regular contact. Apart from the exchange program the clients can get HIV and hepatitis tested. This service is not provided within street work activities.

Outreach work in Nousiainen, Mynämäki and Masku

This programme concerns outreach work with youth in rural areas. The name of the project is made up of the names of three small cities/villages that have joined forces to pay for one youth outreach worker. The outreach worker is active in all the villages, hence covering an area of 1 000 km² with a population of 22 500. Furthermore, he is in touch with youth workers in each of the three municipalities, holding joint meetings once every two months. This outreach worker uses all lists and sources to gather contact information about specific young people. With such a thin density of population in the countryside it is unrealistic to do standard outreach work. The project is in its first year of operation and the outreach worker has approached 45 clients over the period of 9 months. Outreach work in the countryside is characterised by long distances, a lack of jobs and it is very easy to escape society and vanish or shut oneself off in a secluded place. However, the purpose of the work is very similar to outreach work in the city – to establish a relationship with a young individual, support his/her self-confidence, reinforce his life skills with patience as well as to understand and intervene.

As far as funding is concerned, the outreach worker is employed by one municipality for a year and then he changes his employer. Having interviewed the outreach worker ourselves it was clear that the three municipalities are happy with the results of the system implemented, but he also said it is a bit difficult for him since he will have to change his employer after a year with all the pros and cons such as having a new boss, management style or work rules.

We also found one other activity of great inspirational value. The outreach worker visits schools and uses the school radio for a short program once a week. He broadcasts a "radio situational play or Q&A on a topic of prevention" informing the children about services available. It is very simple, creative and feasible even in conditions back home in the Czech Republic.

We also visited a club in one of the cities mentioned above within the framework of our excursion. The facility in the city of Nousiainen was a faithful copy of our low-threshold facilities – basement with sofas, table football and a karaoke set. This was the end of our best practice experience in Turku.

Capital city of Helsinki – 10th – 11th September 2014

We spent the next 2 days in the capital and largest city of Finland, Helsinki. The city centre is located on a small peninsula in the middle of the Gulf of Finland, but the city occupies a rather large area south of the peninsula. The total area of Helsinki is approximately 715 km² and the population is around 600 000. Corrine took care of our programme and logistical issues here.

A-Clinic Foundation / Vinkki

Vinkki (meaning 'hint' or 'indication' in English) is a drug service of both ambulatory and outreach type. The centre is opened 5 days a week with outreach workers out on the streets twice a week. The outreach workers rather go out onto the streets during the day so that they can resolve any issues with the authorities if necessary. According to one of the outreach workers, heroin is not used in Helsinki, but everything else is. They exchange approximately 2 million injection needles a year with the estimate that this is only 40% of all needles used. Vinkki is the only organisation in the city focusing on outreach drug services and it has four outreach workers. Hence they are active in the city centre, in the areas adjoining the main railway station, near the social services facility as well as in underground stations. The outreach program has a regular schedule and route that reacts to the real life needs of the users' on the streets.

The target group consists of 70% men and 30% women, most of whom are middle aged. Drug users of 18 years or younger appear very rarely (maybe one or two a year).

Outreach workers go out on the streets in pairs – either two outreach workers or an outreach worker accompanied by a volunteer (known as a peer-worker). Former users are very much interested in becoming peer-workers, and they get a small financial reward for this work. They carry a backpack with materials. In the course of our best practice experience we saw them distribute needles rather than replacing them. The "one clean for one used" rule is not applied.

They launched an innovated project earlier this year within the framework of which they installed special used needles bins in 12 selected areas of the city. The project takes care of emptying and maintenance of the bins while trying to motivate the clients to dispose used needles into these special bins if they are unable to exchange used needles with the outreach workers. So far this project is praised, but it is yet to be assessed and evaluated. However, they already plan on increasing the number of bins installed.

The other curiosity is the practice of getting involved. If someone reports that there are used needles at a certain place in the city (most often in a park), they arrange a cleaning team. They are trying to get the users involved using a financial reward as a motivation.

PRO-tukipiste

This is a service for individuals working in sexual or erotic services. The work principles are as follows: service for individuals irrespective of sex, nationality and age. Up to 70% of their female clients are foreigners from Russia, Estonia, Thailand and most recently African countries. These women are often involuntary volunteers, as they cannot do anything else to survive. The outreach workers stated that they do not have any clients below 18 years of age. The majority of female clients are between 30 and 50 years of age.

This service is trying to react to the target group by employing staff members with extended language skills. Therefore, the team speaks five languages (Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian and Thai). There are even two Thai outreach workers in the team. The website is also available in five languages. There are flyers with basic phrases in various languages that are used for the purposes of initial approach. The service is provided in both ambulatory as well as outreach form.

Drop-in service – contact centre opened twice a week from 12 noon until 4pm offering the following:

- ☞ A meeting point with coffee, food, internet access and condoms;
- ☞ Social services and information on housing, benefits, visas, etc.;
- ☞ Health services – a nurse, medical doctor once a week, testing facility (hepatitis, HIV, pregnancy tests, infectious venereal diseases).

The attendance is 40–60 clients per opening day.
Outreach work –prostitution in Helsinki is hidden, there are no famous streets or night clubs. Outreach workers go out onto the streets once a week in the evening (5pm–10:30pm).
On-line work – chats take place once a week and are very much sought after, even by individuals not working in the sex trade who are simply looking for information.
Furthermore, this organisation also implements the 'Man to Man' project – which consists of approaching homosexual men with preventive offers (such as testing) – outreach workers visit gay clubs and saunas to make contact with this target group.

Rikosuhripäivystys – young victims of crime, online work

The RIKU organisation ('Support for Victims' in English) runs a network of 29 contact points in Finland. These are advisory centres for victims of criminal offences. The centres are run by well-trained volunteers.
Currently, the organisation is implementing a project for young victims of criminal offences (the project to run from 2012–2015). This project is dedicated to young people from 12 – 28 years of age who have either witnessed or been subject to a criminal offence (most often domestic violence or sexual assault).

The goals of the project are as follows:

- ✎ To develop targeted and efficient communication with young victims of crime in order to make help and support easily and readily available.
- ✎ To organise training for professionals such as medical doctors, nurses and teachers in order to help better identify the victims and treat them accordingly.

The project runs its own website for young people containing videos, quizzes and flyers - the victims' guide. Furthermore, the website contains links to chats supported by outreach workers during operating hours. They run a NET COMMUNITY as well as individual chats. As well as answering questions or providing advice they also use this channel to increase awareness about what a criminal offence is, who to report it to and what happens if one does report it.

There were more than 70 individual chats with young people in 2013 and by the first half of 2014 there had already been 57 chats. If possible and necessary, the outreach workers try to direct the young person to the nearest advisory centre where he/she can get personal support and help.

Inspiration – how to bring up preventive topics with youngsters on the internet:

The organisation elicit themed discussions on their blog once a month. They first choose the topic, post the questions on their blog on a Friday, then publish answers to the questions the following Monday. They then re-post the questions and react to and discuss the comments that people have posted below the article. The questions are re-posted once again on Wednesday, a live chat then takes place on Thursday and, finally, assessment of the topic and comments/posts takes place on the Friday, including a brief topic summary.

SOVINTO

Motto: learning by doing.

This is an alternative vocational school operated by a non-profit organisation since 1997. The Sovinto School offers a wide range of activities and individual assistance in order to reinforce fundamental skills with the ultimate aim for youngsters to gain education and work experience.

Target group: young people from the age of 17, adults who need to complete their educations, migrants.

Offered services: courses, seminars, retraining courses, apprenticeship courses, courses for migrants, outreach work for youngsters (which involves approaching people by telephone) and open groups for the general public (to explore a hobby or get to meet other people).

Activities: cabinetmaking workshops, car repairs, ship repairs and maintenance, dining hall/kitchen work, counselling, coaching of foreigners, making things to order.

The system and the courses offered are so functional that it makes it possible for people from a very wide target group to get involved.



Complementing education through work practice in auto-mechanic workshops, Helsinki, Sovinto



Complementing education through work practice in carpenter workshops, Helsinki, Sovinto



How it is possible to do outreach work in freezing arctic temperatures, or the necessary equipment of a Finnish youth centre, Helsinki KRITS



Slightly different outreach workers than we know from our country, Turku



Contact place (so called living room) for young drug users, Turku, A-Clinic



Sports afternoon in a Youth Centre in the suburbs in a club founded by a former policeman, Helsinki, KRITS

The organisation is very mature and appears to be fully functional. The facility is located in an industrial zone between other companies with the work on offer being very hard and masculine.

Inspiration:

The young people, and young men in particular, identified by the outreach worker can get into a real working environment with tools, oil, grease, cars, bikes, production and noise. It would be great to have more workshops like this in our country so our male-clients could experience a masculine type of work. Too often our male clients and forced to do art, pottery etc. as we do not have anything else to offer them.

KRITS – Gang youth support project

The Krits non-profit organisation is active in the area of prevention of gang criminal activities. This field of work is determined by other non-profit organisations as well as by the police, who are afraid of the involvement of youngsters in gang criminal activities. The organisation works in the eastern part of Helsinki where foreigners make up 70% of the population. Of that number, approximately 30% are recent migrants with the rest being second generation migrants. Children and youngsters tend to organise in large groups that often evolve into gangs.

The founder of the project is a former policeman who identified the need for youth preventive outreach work during the course of his active service. He began to approach groups in the streets and managed to win over individuals to support him. These individuals became his peer-workers. He also has a colleague who is a prison psychiatrist and the clients can make use of his services as well. The founder follows the motto: 'It is important to grab one and the chain reaction will follow'.

They started to organise outdoor football tournaments and rented a gym in the winter. More than one hundred young men used to go and play in the gym. Furthermore, they then rented an underground club near a big housing estate which is open for youngsters once a week. The club houses a gym, a large common room where people can talk, watch films, play guitars, etc. Young migrants from Somalia are among the most frequent visitors at the facility.

The organisation is trying to get into the community with the help of youngsters. They try to get to know one family who will then 'open the door' to the wider community. The outreach workers visit families every week and talk to all family members while actively listening – they have managed to become trustworthy by making time to listen to these families.

This rather unique way of work reminds me of what is now an old story of a keen priest, David Wilkerson, who founded a youth centre in the worst part of New York in 1958 all of a sudden and with no money, only supported by his wife and a few other enthusiasts.

By way of conclusion

I can barely understand how we managed to visit so many organisations and projects and gather so much information. I've tried to capture the information and perceptions from our best practice excursion in the most exact form, but there might be some deviations from reality caused by the fact that we only took a peek at the services and didn't have time to investigate in more detail. The variety of approaches and methods is great, with one major view being common for all – the view of a young person who needs support, encouragement and real interest in their lives. Furthermore, the experiences are far from being exotic, so we can certainly draw inspiration for our own work as well.

WORK WITH YOUTH, YOUNG ADULTS AND PEOPLE WORKING IN THE SEX TRADE

Zuzana Vopálková

Work with youth and young adults

Based on the statistics of the Ministry of Education of Finland there is a clear trend of low education and subsequent unemployment in the age group of young people up to 29 years of age. Generally speaking, young adults are a group most vulnerable to social exclusion. The Youth Act is a reaction to this fact. This Act has been in place since the 1980's, however it was recently subject to a major amendment.

Amongst other things, the Act makes it obligatory for schools or armed forces to inform the outreach workers about any individual under 25 years of age who has left school or the armed forces, and to provide the outreach workers with available contact details. It is the duty of the outreach worker, who is usually an employee of the municipality, to contact such 'renegades', however, the choice to accept the offer of help offered is strictly the young person's choice. As confirmed by outreach workers themselves, some people they get in touch with had simply left for a different school or job, hence do not need any help. On the other hand, there are others who refuse help because they do not want anybody to interfere in their lives. The primary goal of this outreach work is to help teenagers and young adults get back into the education system, get integrated in the labour market and make sure they make sensible use of their leisure time.

The legal duty of schools to contact outreach workers in the Czech Republic could lead to much better networking and co-operation among various entities. In my work I often come across mistrust and unwillingness in schools to co-operate with outreach workers or open-club staff members. However, I also think that such a concept is unthinkable for our country due to the long-standing experience of our citizens of surveillance by government authorities. Therefore, I think that if the schools were obliged to inform the respective outreach workers about students who leave, it could be perceived as an interference into the fundamental rights of the individual.

The national plan of social guarantees for youth for the period 2013 to 2016 (Youth Guarantee) implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland is yet another reaction to the aforementioned statistic that puts emphasis on primary and secondary prevention in particular.

An example of secondary prevention in action is one of the activities pursued by the Sovinto organisation in Helsinki. Among other things, this organisation offers young people one-year courses finishing with an apprenticeship certificate, which is equal to certificates issued by similar vocational schools in Finland. These one-year courses are purely practical and cover trades such as car mechanic, joinery, cook/waiter as well as retraining for the position of a youth outreach worker. What really sparked my interest was the car repair workshop. It was as a regular workshop into which customers bought their cars, motorbikes and boats which the students repair under the surveillance of the lecturer. The demand for these courses is higher than the supply and only 20% of interested individuals are enrolled. I am of the opinion that a course devised like this is indeed efficient within the system of supplementary education, since young people learn something really practical. Moreover, they see the results of their work, get used to working habits, are held accountable for the results of their work and following the completion of the course they get a certificate, which makes them equal on the regular labour market.

Primary prevention in Finland consists of a system of leisure time centres for children and young people up to the age of 29. There is one such centre newly opened in the city of Turku. It is a five-storey-high building offering various workshops as well as a facility similar to open clubs that fall under the responsibility of Ministry of Education and Youth in the Czech Republic. Personally, I was very much surprised by the equipment in this centre. There was a pottery workshop with a number of potter's wheels, a fully equipped theatre room and an IT workshop that included a number of high-performance PCs, record players for mixing music as well as a number of PlayStations and Xboxes. There are 16 leisure-time centres in the city of Helsinki, with neon advertising signs promoting the centres installed on the walls and roofs of each one.

I consider information on the aforementioned centres within the system of primary youth prevention important, due to the fact that their operation is fully funded from the municipal and state budgets and all activities are offered free of charge, or for a symbolical fee of €2 per year. Every child or teenager can make meaningful use of his or her leisure time, which I consider to be of great benefit since in the Czech Republic financial barriers often prevent children from attending various clubs and workshops. Children and their parents simply

do not have the necessary funds to pay the fees for an interesting workshop, hence they become the clients of low-threshold clubs that offer the leisure activities free of charge, often operating as the only organisation in the city. However, it remains a question whether or not such a global and non-tested operation is efficient. For example, it is rather strange if a 28-year-old young man spends time in such a facility playing Xbox, when he could easily get one for his own home.

In contrast to that we saw the Vinkki organisation, which is a Helsinki-based NGO providing services for drug users, that is fighting for its survival from one year to another just like the majority of social services in our country. Therefore, it is interesting to consider the priorities and driving forces of funding for various social spheres. However, the other thought would have to be directed towards the argument regarding Finnish social policy, which is something I am neither competent in, nor it is the subject matter of this paper. Therefore, the next part of this document shall be dedicated to our observations from Aseman Lapset organisation that undertakes youth work in Helsinki.

Aseman Lapset

The Aseman Lapset organisation was founded in 1990. We had the opportunity to see one of its projects, which is peculiarly named 'Walkers' and celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year. Walkers encompasses a number of youth outreach work forms. One of them is a youth café situated right in the city centre by the main railway station. It is in the same location as a huge five-storey-high shopping mall. And this location is precisely where many of the Walkers outreach activities take place, simply because the shopping mall is a favourite place for youngsters to spend much of their leisure time. The other form of work includes a contact bus. All of the aforementioned forms of work span the topic of mediation and street violence reduction projects. The Walkers team consists of sixteen staff members of various educational backgrounds, however all staff members have long-standing experience in the area of youth outreach work. Furthermore, there are approximately twenty volunteers, many of them former clients. Walkers' activities are not focused on leisure time pursuits and their status is different to the aforementioned outreach workers who work with youngsters following the impetus given either by the school or the armed forces.

Youth café

The Walkers café is open from Monday to Thursday from 2pm-8pm. Friday opening hours are extended until 11.30pm and 9pm on Saturdays. Hence the opening hours are very much adjusted to the needs of the low-threshold facility target group. The café is open to teenagers from 14 to 18 years of age, however the lower age limit is not enforced that rigorously. No other circumstances of the client's life are surveyed, so anyone within the target age group can visit the café.

Café guests can get a cup of coffee or tea for 20 cents and various soft drinks can be ordered at the bar for 70 cents, smoking is only permitted 127 steps from the entrance to the facility. Leisure time activity tools include decks of cards and a number of board games. At the time of our visit, the café was serviced by approximately five individuals. One of them was seated at the entrance checking whether or not the arriving guests fell within the target group, while the another one was serving at the bar and the remaining outreach workers were in charge of contact work. Staff members change positions in the course of their shift. Outreach team members said that they let the café live its own life and preferred to wait for clients to approach them instead of initiating the contact themselves every times. Furthermore, they said that their job is to identify the issues of the youngsters they are in touch with and consequently help them with consecutive services. In the case of more serious issues they hand their clients over to the Finnish department of social and legal protection of children. In response to our question about what were the most serious problems, they said that they cancan be smoking marijuana or truancy, for example. We also discussed whether or not the clients lose their trust in the outreach workers in this way, but the outreach workers claimed it is rather a question of mutual trust and established communication.

The café was full of visitors, a number of them playing cards at the tables. When talking to the clients we found out that they visit the café especially because of the cheap coffee, nice warm environment and contact with other people. In reply to our questions about what sort of topics they discuss with the outreach workers we

were told by one of the boys that he'd had a number of conversations with regarding his truancy, stating that he returned to school very soon after the conversations. In reply to our question whether or not they would tell the outreach workers that they smoke marijuana, they replied with a smile on their face that they do not need to tell them since they already know. Therefore, I am of the opinion that any reports to the Finnish OSPOD (Department of Social and Legal Protection of children) only take place in very serious cases and outreach workers with their unconditional statements can only defend themselves.

Low-threshold bus

The low-threshold bus is yet another form of Walkers' project work. At the current time, the organisation operates three buses in Helsinki and the adjacent cities of Espoo and Vantaa. The bus offers outdoor seating and is usually parked in areas with high levels of petty crime or offences or in areas habituated by citizens who are at risk of social exclusion, such as the districts densely populated by immigrants. The bus is open on Tuesdays from 2pm until 9pm and on Fridays from 2pm until 10:30pm. The target group again consists of youngsters between 14-18 years of age. The drinks and snacks on offer are identical to those in the café mentioned above. As per the statement of outreach workers, the goal of the bus project is mainly to mediate contact between youngsters and the community, but also to get them in touch with representatives of municipalities, schools and social workers from the respective municipal departments. The bus is not parked permanently. The length of time it will be parked for is not strictly defined. The bus moves roughly every three months as it is said that three months are usually enough to meet its purpose.

Outreach services in the shopping mall and mediation

Walkers outreach services are an extension of the aforementioned café and low-threshold bus projects. Outreach workers patrol the parks and the shopping mall by the main railway station every day. As a point of interest, the shopping mall is approximately five times larger than the largest shopping mall in the Czech Republic. Outreach workers approach youngsters during their shift, the focus is on youth not familiar with their services, but they also maintain contact with those already involved in the project. They use picture flyers instead of business cards. One is for the bus project and the other one for the café. There is very little text on the flyers. The flyers are also tokens for a free coffee or tea either in the bus or the café.

Co-operation with the mall security services is another important part of the outreach services. Outreach workers are granted access to the security services facilities and the security service staff members provide them with information as to where exactly the youngsters are concentrated and what has happened during the day. If a youngster is apprehended by security staff for stealing or vandalism, he/she is given the option either to be handed over to the police directly, or to contact Walkers outreach workers who ensure mediation between the juvenile and the owner of the shop in which they committed the offence. As confirmed by security service staff members, mediation takes place in almost 100% of cases, where the punishment for the offender is to compensate for the damage caused by voluntary service.

The mediation option is very interesting indeed. While interviewing the security staff members who spoke fluent English we also asked how this co-operation came into existence. We were told that the head of the security services had attended a mediation seminar in Norway, where he met the manager of Walkers youth outreach service. I am of the opinion that to introduce such co-operation in the Czech Republic would be far from easy, however it was this activity that was one of the most important sources of inspiration for me. Camera monitoring and the subsequent handover of information to outreach workers is something I perceive with a certain sense of hesitation, for the same reasons as the aforementioned concept of obligatory reporting of individuals who leave school.

Walkers backstage

All Walkers services are 95% subsidised by the largest Finnish brewery, while the remaining 5% comes from subsidies by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Services are based on the 'here and now' concept.

There are no discussions or similar organised activities in either the bus or the café. All activities take place upon the request of clients who also get involved in setting them up.

I was very much captured by the information campaign supported by various Finnish celebrities with sports or showbiz backgrounds. The campaign is focused on clients while informing about Walkers activities.

Outreach workers do not keep records of their clients. They write only a daily report on all three types of services, noting what happened during the service and the number of visitors. Furthermore, there is no system of internal meetings or client meetings amongst the outreach workers. These are organised ad hoc if one of the clients is tackling a more serious issues. Co-operation with other entities such as schools, departments of social and legal protection of children or the police, is regarded as excellent by the outreach workers. However, the outreach workers confirmed that it requires quite an effort, with the most important factor for good co-operation being excellent personal relationships with these groups. Nevertheless, thanks to their good work they have managed to build up a respected position within the partnership.

Work with people working in the sex trade

According to currently valid legislation, sex work is not considered a general criminal offence in Finland, however there are three different acts which regulate the issue of the sex trade. One of them is the Penal Code, which defines procuring and human trafficking as a criminal act. Furthermore, purchase of sexual services from people who may be victims to human trafficking or procuring, or those who are younger than 18 years of age is also a criminal act. The Public Order Act prohibits the sale and purchase of sexual services in public places and any breach of this ban is considered an offence. The Foreigners Act mentions the possibility of expulsion of a citizen from a third country found guilty of selling sexual services. The expulsion penalty is often combined with an exclusion order preventing the individual from entering any EU country. And it is exactly this Act that influences the sex trade the most, since the majority of women that offer and sell sexual services on the streets are foreigners from third countries. The Finnish Ministry of social affairs recently published a study on the sex trade, which proposed to criminalise the purchase of sexual services. However, there are extensive public debates taking place about this regulation at the moment.

According to PRO-tukipiste outreach workers, the activities of whom are described below, the offering and subsequent purchase of sexual services has already moved on-line, and only approximately 10% of women offering sexual services remain on the streets. The rest of the business takes place in private lodging facilities, night clubs or places that are officially declared as Thai massage parlours. In the following part of my report I refer mostly to the female clients that constitute the majority of PRO-tukipiste service users. However, there are also some men using the services.

PRO-tukipiste

The name of the PRO-tukipiste organisation, founded in 1989, can be translated as 'help' or 'support'. The first three letters 'PRO' have multiple meanings. They can be interpreted as an abbreviation for prostitutes, or for professional. PRO-tukipiste services are intended for all people who have ever sold, are selling or plan to sell sexual services. This organisation works in Helsinki and Tampere, the third largest city in Finland, with its services being available both in ambulatory form and in an on-line format. I had the possibility to visit a contact centre and witness the direct work taking place. The contact centre was located in the area with the highest concentration of sexual services offered on the streets. PRO-tukipiste outreach workers also visit night clubs, gay bars and saunas offering the same scope of services. The work in gay bars is mainly focused on education with respect to sexually transmitted diseases. The direct work team consists of social workers, nurses and medical doctors. Furthermore, the peer workers are an integral part of the team. They are actively involved in sexual health education programmes as well as in the programme focused on safe provisioning of sexual services among individuals originating from the African countries.

Contact centre

The contact centre is located in the city centre. It is open twice a week from noon until 4pm. The services offered include counselling, use of a PC with internet connection, anonymous testing for sexually transmitted diseases and consultations with medical staff. Visitors can also have tea, coffee, soup and fruit, and they can read newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, service users are free to take condoms or lubrication gels. Fifty (predominantly) female clients came to the contact centre during the course of the afternoon.

Peer meetings are held in the contact centre once a week at a regular time, during which the women working in the sex trade can exchange experiences, discuss any issues pertaining to their work, or just share their everyday joys and worries.

Street outreach work

Street outreach work in the area with the highest density of sexual services always takes place on Wednesdays, from 5pm-10.30pm. This is complemented by an ambulant contact centre that is open from 6pm-8pm. The outreach workers move to the respective area and spend an hour on the streets. Then they move to the contact centre, which is located on the ground floor of a residential estate and consists of an office and one contact room furnished with a sofa, table and chairs. The outreach workers put a candle in a window with closed curtains to let the clients know it is open. There are magazines, coffee, tea and fruit for the visitors. An average of twenty women visit the contact centre in the two hours it is open. Services offered include counselling, issue of condoms and lubricants and the exchange of injection needles. PRO-tukipiste clients come from Finland and also Russia and Thailand. The number of Thai sexual workers is still growing. According to the information of social workers, Finnish women offering sexual services are frequently also suffering from drug addictions. In the course of my time in the centre women of all three nationalities and various ages visited the centre. Both social workers spoke English, one of them spoke Russian as well. The only language barrier that remained was Thai, since Thai woman using PRO-tukipiste services speak only a very little English and the social workers can only say a few phrases in Thai, but they could always understand each other with a little bit of effort. According to social workers, the contact centre is primarily a place where women can relax before they start work. The atmosphere really corresponded to that.

During the evening outreach the workers focus on not disturbing the clients at work, while also not being invasive. This manifests itself for example when more than one outreach worker goes out, they never walk in single file, but in a group so that the clients do not feel intimidated. The outreach workers also get the telephone numbers of their clients and whenever they see their client sitting with others, they do not approach her directly, but call her first.

The end of the shift is spent in evaluation of the shift by pairs of outreach workers, which is considered an important part of the work with respect to work hygiene. If they encountered a serious topic in the course of their shift, they can share it and reflect on it, while being able to conclude the shift. While sitting in on their shift I received information about the structure of the programme, what I could expect and what my role was, thanks to this I felt comfortable during my service.

PRO-tukipiste backstage

Social workers only keep daily records containing the descriptions of the most important events, first names of women they got in touch with in the course of their shift and statistics regarding material provided to the clients. If consultancy is provided, expert information handed over or crisis intervention carried out in the course of their shift, the social worker writes an anonymous entry into the daily record.

All PRO-tukipiste services are funded from the national gambling machine income fund. This fund is used solely for social services funding support. In addition, further funding is provided from the budget of the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as from the municipal budget. Funding is not conditioned by the number of contacts or intervention reporting. We had a discussion with the social workers on the topic of how such intervention reporting can influence the quality and principles of service provisioning. The social workers, who are under pressure to fill reports, reduce the clients to numbers that are vital for the survival of the service.

PRO-tukipiste has to report efficiency and provide donors with statistical data based on the aforementioned records, but on the other hand the donors allegedly understand the principle of harm reduction services and do not impose any hard figures on the organisation.

PRO-tukipiste is a respected organisation in Finland co-operating with other organisations. Provided that the client is willing and agrees, the organisation becomes a partner in the resolution of the situation the particular client is in. On the national level, the organisation gets involved in public debates and mediates contact between the target group and legislators, not only on the theoretical level but they truly help their clients to have their say either on existing legislation or proposed bills. I was very much interested in the involvement in TV debates through a Twitter account, thanks to which the organisation is involved, despite not being a direct participant in the debate, and is very publicly visible.

PRO-tukipiste attaches great importance not only to communication with the general public, but also to communication with their clients. This is very clear from their website. Apart from online chat and offline question possibilities, the website is translated into three languages. In addition to Finnish the website is available in English, Russian and Thai. Furthermore, the organisation has its all leaflets regarding services offered or harm reduction translated into all three of the aforementioned languages.

Conclusion

The system of social services provisioning is different to the one in the Czech Republic. While staying in Finland I could not get rid of the idea that we are rather moving away from our clients due to an enormous pressure on increasing professionalism. There was peer co-operation with former service users across all organisations. This concept is rather isolated in the Czech Republic. As far as work reporting is concerned, I think that client cards with service use records lead to continuity and allow for better work evaluation. However, the efficiency pressure as experienced in the Czech Republic more and more often, truly influences the direct work in a negative way, because the outreach workers have less and less time to spend with clients, thus making it more difficult to resolve major issues. The ninety-five percent independence of Walkers project from public funding is enviable. However, according to PRO-tukipiste, who are primarily funded by public money, the results of their work are judged on a quality basis. I think that this assessment is subject to influence by a national culture in which the state representatives trust the non-profit sector staff members to do their work correctly. On the other hand, I was very much surprised by the fact that social services are funded by the government using the national gambling machine income fund. In my opinion it is more than disputable to fund this system from the revenues of gambling machines, things which themselves often lead to social exclusion and cause other social problems.

The thing that surprised me most on our best practice trip to Finland was the similarity between their work and what takes place in the Czech Republic. We still have a lot to learn in the area of public relations and we still have plenty of work to do in terms of networking our services and establishing equal co-operation with other organisations and entities. However, the differences in the outreach work were not noticeable and I think that we have made a significant progress in the area of social care since the fall of Communism.

Olga Bat'ková, DiS.

Olga Bat'ková comes from the city of Most in the Ústí nad Labem region. She studied at the Higher specialist school in Most, social/legal consultancy studies. She has been working as a street social worker for the past 9 years in the non-profit organisation Most k naději (Bridge to hope) in the city of Most, focusing on drug services. Currently she performs street work in Most, Litvínov, Chanov and Janov.

Mgr. Juraj Bobula

Juraj Bobula is a translator specialising in law. He supports and develops community investments in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Turkey within the Kinstellar attorney's office from the position of a regional co-ordinator. The Bratislava office of Kinstellar started to co-operate with the KASPIAN low-threshold program in 2007. The co-operation grew into an intensive partnership for which Kinstellar got shortlisted for Via Bona Slovakia award for corporate philanthropy.

Mgr. Marcela Bucháčková

Marcela Bucháčková graduated from Palacký University in Olomouc in special pedagogy. She uses SFBT principles in her work while focusing on the issues of social exclusion and family rehabilitation. She has spent five years working in the DROM low-threshold facility for children and youth, first as a contact worker and later as a special pedagogue and service manager. Currently she is focusing on social-acquisition services for families with children.

Mgr. Katarína Debnáriková, Ph.D. (maiden name Chovancová)

Katarína Debnáriková graduated in social work from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Healthcare in UKF in Nitra. She works in the STORM Association focusing mainly on active drug addicts and individuals working in the sex-trade. Together with her colleagues from the STORM Association she elaborated the methodology of the primary prevention program for risky behaviour of students of elementary and high schools. She is interested in work using the motivation interviews technique. She is also working at the Faculty of Pedagogy of UK in Bratislava.

Mgr. Zuzana Guryčová

Zuzana Guryčová has worked as a contact and street worker with drug addicts and their associates in the Charáč Contact centre in the city of Uherské Hradiště since 2007 (Společnost Podané ruce, o.s.). She contributed to promotion of jelly capsules as a form of oral application of drugs, and has been as a contact person for teenagers in NZDM PVC Blansko (Společnost Podané ruce, o.s.) since 2011. She is currently on maternity leave.

Mgr. Filip Hajna

Filip Hajna began working for People in Need in 2012, first as a co-ordinator and youth preventive activities lecturer. He then became the head of the Low-threshold centre for children and youth in March 2014. He contributes to the organisation of the One World Festival in Bílina. He graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy at J. E. Purkyně University.

Mgr. Magdaléna Halášová

Magdaléna Halášová is currently undertaking postgraduate studies at the Department of Social Work and Social Sciences at UKF in Nitra, focusing on human trafficking and reintegration of victims in particular. Active in the STORM Association since 2008, she has been Program Co-Ordinator since 2012. Dealing with issues of addictive substance overuse and implementation of low-threshold services into new areas, she deals with intravenous drug addicts and individuals working in the sex-trade as a social street worker.

Mgr. Ing. Aleš Herzog

Aleš Herzog has focused on low-threshold programs since 1998. He spent 8 years in a low-threshold club PVC in Blansko and worked in the outreach program for drug users in the same city. He has contributed to the definition of NZDM as a social service type and worked in the Czech street work association as a special assistant. Head of SANANIM outreach programs for drug addicts in Prague. Social services inspector.

Mgr. Jiří Kocourek

Jiří Kocourek is responsible for independent project management with a focus on educational and popularization of low-threshold social services (streetwork.cz portal, Waiting for adulthood documentary, set of prevention comic strip materials, week of low-threshold clubs, low-thresholds tour, Timed shoe, etc.) in the Czech street work association since 2006. Head of the Street work Online innovative project since 2012. At the same time he has been the manager of Commercial bank foundation Jistota (Security) since 20014. He used to work in Czech TV. He was behind the birth of the Help the Children fund raising campaign project. Co-operated with the Dagmar and Václav Havel Endowment Fund VIZE 97, Foundation for the development of civil society, Charles University in Prague and Children's crisis centre. He started his professional career in AIESEC. He got his bachelors and masters degree in social pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy of South Bohemia University in České Budějovice and the University of Hradec Králové respectively.

Ing. Martin Kovalčík

Martin Kovalčík has worked for in People in Need since 2009 as a Social integration programs media co-ordinator. He has worked for a number of newspapers, especially in the Metro daily where he was the deputy editor in chief. He focuses on education at the present time. He is the author of „Zvoní“ magazine that deals with the pros and cons of the inclusive approach.

Bc. Roman Kunc

Roman Kunc gained his first experience of social work in the „Klub hurá kamarád“ association in Pardubice back in 2004. Having spent three years as street worker and contact person he moved to Kolín to join first the local outreach program and then the local Contact centre. He became the street work program co-ordinator for young drug experimentators in 2012. He gathered more experience in social work with families in socially excluded areas in January 2014 and he is currently managing a mobile NZDM that was launched in September 2014. He graduated in social work from the University of Hradec Králové in 2013.

Bc. Lenka Lacová

Lenka Lacová currently works as a street social worker in KASPIAN. She combines the direct work with studies at PVŠPS in Prague. She spends her „leisure time“ organising simulation Saturdays in PDCS using the principle of non-violent intercultural communication. She also volunteered for the Centre for philanthropy and for the Young4BA in Bratislava. She commenced her career in Fun Club Fortuna, a low-threshold facility which has been run by volunteers for more than 6 years. She likes to take part in international projects and training focusing on informal education in particular. She is a visionary who loves her family, travelling, variedness of cultures and opinions and she's always on the move. She is also a blogger. More at lenkalacovie.wordpress.com.

Vladimír Pechek, DiS.

Vladimír Pechek comes from the city of Most in the Ústí nad Labem region. He graduated in social/legal consultancy at the Higher special school in Most. He worked as a contact person in K-Centre in Most from 2008. Since 2010 he has been a street social worker in drug services. Both outreach programs are implemented by the Most k naději non-profit organisation. He is currently doing street work in Most, Litvínov, Chanov and Janov.

Bc. Kamil Podzimek

Studied at Higher social special school in Prachatice and later graduated in social and charity work studies at the Faculty of Theology of South Bohemian University. Spent 10 years working in addiction services and has been heading the South Bohemian Street Work Prevent program since 2008. Gives regular lectures at expert conferences since 2007. He is an experienced lecturer of experience and teambuilding courses and courses accredited by the Ministry of Education. He commenced a five-year-long psychotherapy Instep training in 2010.

Martin Prokop

Martin Prokop is a journalist by profession and worked as a journalist for eleven years. He started to work in the Prostor civic association (later Prostor plus) in 2007 as head of the social programs department. He started to build these programs from scratch. He underwent the SUR self-experience psychotherapeutic training. He focuses mainly on community work and educational/work activities focused predominantly on clients from the Roma minority.

Mgr. Martin Simon is a street worker and statutory representative of the KASPIAN association that operates a low-threshold club at Petržalka in Bratislava and provides a social outreach program as well. He is responsible for co-operation with corporate partners in KASPIAN. He came up with an educational concept in close co-operation with Juraj Bobula, that is intended for who those who consider interdepartmental co-operation to be of benefit and offers this training to individuals undergoing the Low-threshold ABC program.

Mgr. Jana Škodová

Jana Škodová studied social pedagogy at HTF and FF UK. She has been active in the area of low-threshold services since 2011 when she first worked in a low-threshold club and then in an outreach program. She is a street worker and the manager of the Community street program Křižovatka (Crossroad) operated by the Neposedá organisation since 2013. She regularly attends the Street work forum meetings and actively participates in expert conferences. Her long-term focus is in primary prevention.

Mgr. Ivana Štefková

Ivana Štefková studied pedagogy at FF UK and psychology at FF UP. Furthermore, she successfully completed a course in family consultancy. She has been active in the field of low-threshold services since 2006. She worked both in a low-threshold club as well as in an outreach program. She has been a member of NEPO-SEDA organisation management since 2010 - she focuses on fundraising, advertising and methodology for leadership. She actively participates in expert conferences and she lectures an optional seminar Contact work at the Department of Pedagogy at FF UK.

Bc. Zuzana Túčková

Zuzana Túčková received a bachelor's degree in Cultural Anthropology from Palacký University in Olomouc. She is currently in the process of getting her Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology and Andragogy with a focus on social work. She works as a contact worker in the DROM low-threshold facility for children and youth.

Bc. Martin Zajíček

Martin Zajíček graduated in Social and Charity Work Studies at the Faculty of Theology at the South Bohemian University. He has been working with drug users within the low-threshold services (outreach program and contact centre) since 2008.

Česká asociace streetwork, o.s.	[Czech Streetwork Association, registered association] (ČAS) is a professional non-governmental organisation established in 1997 that represents individuals and corporations active in the field of low threshold social services.
ČAS ensures quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Creates definitions, standards, methodical guidelines, sets benchmarks and issues quality guarantees. All ČAS members undergo ČAS quality assessment, which is a condition of membership. ✎ ČAS supports supervision, provides supervision training and maintains a list of qualified supervisors. ✎ On a continuous basis ČAS defines and develops methods of contact work as the common denominator of low threshold social services.
ČAS educates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ ČAS is an accredited educational institution. It offers a comprehensive educational system for everyone from those beginning work up to NGOs' managers (a total of 32 programmes). ČAS programmes are accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. ✎ It organises professional gatherings, conferences, seminars and international internships. ČAS members are entitled to considerable discounts on tuition fees.
ČAS also	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Creates an atmosphere for work in the field (networking, support of the members' communication, promotion). ✎ Launches innovative projects, undertakes research. ✎ Administers the professional web portal www.streetwork.cz. ✎ Lobbies on behalf of its members and the field itself. ✎ Grants awards to the best street worker and team – ČASovaná bota [Time Shoe]. ✎ Has an established Restart Shop – a charity shop with donated goods that supports youth services. ✎ Runs the Streetwork Online project – a web portal for children and youth including professional counselling.
ČAS is a partner for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Organisations and establishments providing social services, start-up organisations and establishments. ✎ State and local authorities. ✎ Donors. ✎ Schools, students, and educational institutions.
ČAS is international	✎ ČAS belongs to the international association Dynamo International – Street Workers Network, which unites programmes from the entire world. ČAS has established cooperation programmes in a number of EU countries.
ČAS accomplished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Tour for low threshold establishments (2006 – 2010). ✎ Professional Annual Award ČASovaná bota [Time Shoe] (from 2001). ✎ Low threshold clubs week (from 2007). ✎ Čekárna na dospělost [Waiting Room for Adulthood] – a film documentary about today's youth. ✎ Preventive materials – comics for the clients of low threshold facilities for children and youth. ✎ Several awareness campaigns including awareness TV spots. ✎ Survey of low threshold facilities for children and youth 2010 – 2014 (a five year survey, which among other things monitored the quality of services). ✎ Streetwork Online – interconnecting new media and street work.
ČAS published	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Kontaktní práce [Contact Work] (2008), Kontaktní práce [Contact Work] 2010, Pojmosloví nízkoprahových zařízení pro děti a mládež [Low Threshold Facilities for Children and Youth Glossary] (2008), Dobrá praxe [Good Practice] (2011)