



Education and Culture

# Leonardo da Vinci

## Summary of experiences during the study trip<sup>1</sup> to Oslo and Stockholm homeless services

Between September 30<sup>th</sup> – October 7<sup>th</sup> 2009, a group of 8 service leaders and social workers from BMSZKI, Budapest Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions, the city's homeless service provider visited homeless services for three-three days in Oslo and Stockholm. In the recent years we have been to other European cities (most recently London and Dublin in 2008) to gather knowledge and good practice in the work with homeless people, which could help us rethink our own work and strategies, making it more efficient. While visiting services, we tried to get an insight into how teams of staff are organized, how they work together, what methods of support are in use, etc.

In Oslo, we were received by Gunnar Sveri from Husbanken, the State Housing Bank responsible for the implementation of the Norwegian Homeless Strategy among other things.

The services visited were the following:

- Norwegian State Housing Bank
- RIO (Recovered Addicts Representation Group)
- The Norwegian Organisation of Local and Regional Authorities (Planning of Housing for vulnerable groups in the Housing market)
- Natthjemmet (a night shelter for women)
- Flexbo (housing project for ex-rough sleepers)
- Street Hospital
- Fredensborgveien (rehabilitation and temporary accommodation)
- Steenstrupsgt (supported accommodation of the City Mission)

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- The Prison project (Salvation Army)

In Stockholm, our program was organized by Nina Ström, coordinator of homeless affairs in the City of Stockholm Social Department. We visited the following services (both belonging to NGOs and Stockholm city):

- Enheten för hemlösa (Stockholm City's Special Unit for the Homeless)
- Grimman (night shelter)
- Bostallet (short-term and temporary accommodation for homeless people, by the City Mission)
- Triaden (low-threshold hostel for people with addiction problems)
- City Mission Day Centre

We have prepared a detailed report about our experiences for our colleagues – in Hungarian. It contains the description of the homeless services we visited, as well as our understanding of how the system of provision is organized in Norway and in Sweden.

Here we try to summarize our overall impressions of what we saw, as well as some important lessons we have brought home with us. These points reflect just as much on the Hungarian practice as that of our hosts, of course.

We were impressed by the overall mentality of the people we met during our study trip. It seemed to us that it was not only staff working in social services, but also the general population who thought it worthwhile to spend money and energy on fighting for the social inclusion of homeless people with multi-problems. This, in our opinion, helps staff feel valued in their work, and proud about what they do. We also noticed that support workers could formulate the goals of their service very precisely, and they would measure success in accordance with these goals. Many times even small steps forward were considered as success, which might add to the professional contentment of the individual.

We found the system of case managers (“social sekretar”) a useful one – it means that one social worker follows the homeless person throughout their journey, from the street to crisis accommodation and temporary accommodation to independent living, ideally. In Hungary homeless people collaborate with their key worker in the shelter/hostel most closely, which means that when they move, a new staff will start working with them, from scratch.

Some of us pointed out that they appreciated the way staff collaborated so closely with each other both within their team and in other sectors. Some service leaders are thinking of starting a team breakfast/morning coffee at least one day a week to get the week going. Cross-sector cooperation is something that we strive for in our own practice, but often the lack of structural support makes it more difficult. Some of us felt that even though case conferences might be very time consuming, they should be an essential part of supporting an individual. We also liked the idea of involving the user as well as the helping professionals in such meetings.

We were intrigued by the practice of restorative justice in the homeless services. It is not an unknown practice in Hungary, but none of us have seen it used in the homeless sector before. We would like to find out more about it.

We were impressed with the existence and practical application of quality assurance in many of the services visited, especially how the values and expectations did not seem to remain mere words printed on paper, but seems to be internalized by the members of the teams we met.

These were just a few of our impressions and the lessons we have learnt about the quality and methods of social support. I hope we will have the strength and courage to try to adapt some of them in our own work.

We would like to thank Gunnar Sveri and Nina Ström for all their kind help, coordination and company during our stay in Oslo and Stockholm!