

## **No Fixed Abode - Crisis situation example**

### **Stealing donated clothing**

The organisation gets many items of donated clothing from the public, which are given free to homeless persons. Donations arrive weekly but not all items are usable. Volunteers help paid staff with sorting out clothing, organising free-of-charge flea markets and distributing clothing in low-threshold centres and housing units.

Two young women started volunteering for the organisation. Their task was to help in receiving, sorting out and distributing clothes. They committed to volunteering three times a week, sorting out clothes at the organisation's storage facilities.

A paid staff member instructed the women in their tasks, told them about organisation work in general and the handling and distribution of donated clothing. Later, the staff member realised that the volunteers left the storage room carrying large bags. However, the staff member did not question the contents of the bags at first.

The same person noticed the women always carried large bags to the storage. When the staff member finally went to greet the volunteers one day, she caught them filling up their bags with donated clothing.

The staff member asked what the women were doing and whether they had been told they could take clothing for personal use, and told them about a possible misunderstanding concerning taking items for personal use. During the conversation it became apparent that two other members of staff had told the volunteers that it is permitted to take home clothing from the storage room. Despite the conversation the same volunteers were caught again for taking pieces of clothing for themselves and were duly asked to stop being volunteers.

### **Conclusion and solution**

We discovered that a contract needs to be made with the volunteers covering, for example, the handling of donations. The focus of volunteer instruction is in the needs of the clients and often illegal activities are not discussed, so the risk of volunteers taking items meant for clients becomes higher. Trust given to volunteers is high and it is important to clarify what activities are not permitted.

Another discovery was that it was not clear to all members of paid staff how to deal with donated items. The organisation should in the future assure that information on all practices is available to all staff members. Similarly, an instructor should be assigned to all volunteers so that is clear who to consult when questions arise.

