

Menhely Foundation – On the Road Programme

The program aimed to improve conditions of individuals and families who were, or were in danger of becoming homeless by defining financial support of their housing not as a goal, but rather as a tool of case work. Both applicants who could be supported at a progressive life stage and those who could be directed away from a road leading to homelessness and disintegration of the family were considered as our target groups.

Our aim is to enhance circumstances of individuals and families threatened by homelessness in a way that we look at housing support not as an aim, but a tool of casework. We find support work successful when throughout the support process, together with the service user we reach to a point where they are able to look at their situation objectively, set realistic goals, possess skills and abilities that can help them to get into a better position. Our task is to make our ideas regarding the support of target group transparent, transform experiences into easy-to-follow steps of a plan and systematically contribute to independent problem solving of the service user. Our operation is transparent and easy-to-follow for the service user from the beginning and throughout every stage of the program.

Composition of the target group:

- those at a progressive stage of life who are ready to change but unable due to their financial situation - mostly families who are motivated to gain independent housing because of their children;
- those at a regressive stage of life who are most likely to fall into homelessness without support - individuals and families with debt, very often with addiction issues;
- those who have never experienced independent living or it was a very long time ago - former residents of state care homes, prisons and people living with addiction.

Principles of selection of the target group:

- Based on a “funnel principle” meaning that we accept every applicant who can use different services of independent program elements. The structure of the project enables us to receive a great number of applicants. In each phase of the project, elements of tailored help and mentoring are outlined gradually. Every phase of the program could stand on its own as well, as they are able to provide participants with advice, information, a clearer reflection on their own possibilities and abilities. In each phase additional services of the program can be used, too, even when the applicant does not receive financial support.
- Filtering service users for full services is a different method. This is a subservient way when the program has definite capacities to accept service users and supporting elements are built on one another. It can be used in housing support

when service users gain placement in a private living space, but in a same building with others.

Methods of selecting the target group:

- Promoting the program in every institutions of the service provider and in partner institutions with similar profiles;
- promoting the program among the public and in social media.

Conducting first interviews according to the needs of the target group:

- in the office of the service provider or in safe community spaces,
- in the habitual living space of service users, even in public areas used by them.

Service users can obtain appointments to assess their living conditions, social network and financial competencies. Service users are informed of the different opportunities for housing, housing support allowances and offer further support including our phone contacts.

Service users then complete a questionnaire mapping how they became homeless, their present conditions, income and expenses and housing plans. Afterwards, service users can apply for individual 'mentoring' as part of the second phase of the program. We decide who could support the applicant most effectively. The service user's living conditions, capabilities and goals are discussed in detail so that the service user becomes fully aware their abilities and limitations. We use questioning and suggestions to help the service user build on their own material and social resources, what plans and tools they may have and use. Our task is to make our ideas regarding the support of the target group transparent, transform previous experiences into easy-to-follow steps of a plan and systematically support the development of problem-solving skills of the service user.

We make notes for the service user's disposal around basic data, contact information, with whom they plan to move to a rental, steps of possible crisis intervention and short- and long-term housing plans. We also include the list of income, expenses and debts in detail – so every important piece of information is gathered that we believe our service user has to take into consideration before they would have a go on long-term and securely sustained housing. This provides guidance for our service user so they can apply for financial support in the third phase of the program.

Volunteers help our service users to find rentals, jobs, prepare CVs and upload them into different job-seeking portals, prepare for job interviews and show them different self-presentation techniques. They review debts and provide advice on household management.

It is important that also our service users should not feel that they have to meet our expectations. We work with the service user to reach a point where they can reflect on their own situation objectively, set realistic goals, possess abilities and skills that help them to better position themselves in the future. We therefore separate support

work from financial allowances to avoid a system of rewarding and to provide tailored support for feasible plans.

Those who were suitable for the housing support could apply. Service users have to find accommodation that is affordable and suitable, on their own or with the help of volunteers. Those who have not found suitable housing are not excluded but the actual support can only be received when there is a concrete accommodation. This condition is indispensable, because before every single decision on the support we carry out a home study visit. We have to make sure that the rental is real and suitable, the landlord is willing to contract the future tenant and the rent is sustainable. If there are unsolved issues, we repeat the visits even more times.

The application for receiving support is reviewed by members of the team who were involved with a service user during earlier phases. The result of the decision and its explanation is recorded on the application form that is given to the applicant. Service users receive an amount of money as a one-time only support. The amount is defined in order to cover the deposit of the rental or the equivalent with the rent for one month. Some may be unsuccessful due to a lack of resources.

There were 24 approved applications. Six months after moving in, 19 households still lived in the same rental, 3 households moved to a new one and 2 households could not be reached.

Further learning

Continuous communication kept on going not only within the team, but also towards service users. Relevant questions could not be left without discussion and we made room for discussing problems even outside weekly team meetings. Through fundraising, the public helped the communication between service users and mentors by donating mobile phones. The use of volunteers to support service users was invaluable. There was a strong need for supervision for processing cases of the team, but due to lack of financial resources we had no opportunity to have it.