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LABOUR MARKET REINTEGRATION IN THE HOMELESS SECTOR

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SUMMARY OF AN EQUAL PROJECT

The Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions (BMSZKI), together with the Shelter Foundation (Menhely Alapítvány) and the Budapest Metropolitan Social Fund, has been involved in a common project in the Equal initiative of the European Union*, supported by the Human Resource Development Operational Program of the Hungarian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. With financial support from the European Union and the Hungarian government the three organizations have realized a joint project entitled “**Labour market reintegration in the homeless sector**” between July 1st, 2005. and December 31st, 2007, with preparations starting January 16th, 2005.

The goal of the project was the following: discovering new ways to enhance the social reintegration of homeless people, partly through the further development and dissemination of BMSZKI’s Employment – Accommodation – Addiction – Old Age Home Pilot Model (the theory and practice of a circle of experts), partly through the newly setup job centres and their services, and finally through activities targeting prejudices against homeless people.

Our work was supported by our belief that though many homeless people lose “everything” they have due to the lack of adequate help, **with adequate help they could be reintegrated into mainstream society**, including the labour market. In most cases a temporary crisis can be resolved with intense and holistic help.

* Equal is a European Social Fund Community Initiative, providing funds to projects which test and promote new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market. ESF Community Initiatives focus on well-defined targets, with the aim of disseminating successful new approaches. The Hungarian EQUAL Program supports those initiatives which aim to enhance the employment and activation of people with disadvantages, such as the roma, the disabled, the elderly, those with low or no qualification, etc. Each project works in a transnational setting, enabling participants to exchange and adapt good practice.

We have also realized that the current homeless service sector cannot provide this type of help for its clientele. Most services only offer accommodation as a base, and case workers do not have adequate tools to efficiently help users become independent and move out. Employment services on the other hand do not know how to help people with multiple disadvantages. There is no organized cooperation between the two sectors.

The project emphasizes labour market reintegration in the fight against social exclusion. Case workers have been given new tools (integrating the social and employment sectors), their primary aim has become to enhance the employability of users and to help them find a job. We have constructed a network to help reach this goal: a system of holistic support in solving various problems of long-term accommodation, finding the right psychological balance essential to find and sustain a job, fighting problems of addiction and substance abuse.

This brochure describes the results of the project. In the first part we give concrete, tangible results in numbers. In the second part you will find the stories of homeless people illustrating the success and difficulty of such a work.

FEHÉR, Boróka
coordinator

I. SUMMARY

1. TRAINING AND HELPING HOMELESS PEOPLE FIND EMPLOYMENT

A. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Development of a set of needs assessment tests and an electronic database: the needs of almost 2000 homeless individuals have been assessed. Diagnosing the exact problems has enabled us to find the best ways to tackle them.

Products:

- ★ Set of holistic needs assessment tests to help case work
- ★ Electronic database to help documentation and to make it possible to measure social work

B. SOCIAL INFORMATION CENTRE

The setting up of a Social Information Centre (SIC), with the following activities:

- Network of employment experts** – coordinating needs assessment in the field of employment, coordinating reintegrational group trainings, collecting, updating and disseminating information about the labour market, continuous training of individual employment experts (working in the front line services). They work in cooperation of the Job Centre.
- Network of accommodation experts** – coordinating needs assessment in the field of accommodation, collecting, updating and disseminating information about accommodation possibilities and financial support, continuous training of individual accommodation experts (working in the front line services).
- Network of addiction experts** – coordinating needs assessment in the field of substance abuse, participating in the training of both staff and users, collecting, updating and disseminating information

about services to help those with substance abuse issues, continuous training of individual addiction experts (working in the front line services).

- d) **Network of Old Age Home Experts** – continuous training of individual old age home experts (working in the front line services)
- e) **Legal counselling** – primarily targeting legal problems of employment and training, and providing help for those taking part in programs of employment or training.
- f) **Psychologist** – psychological counselling, diagnosing homeless individuals, providing personal supervision to social workers.

Concrete results of the SIC:

- ★ 1 office for the director and assistant of the SIC
- ★ 1 office for experts where they can receive participants on an individual basis
- ★ 1 reception – welcome area

The SIC in numbers:

- ★ Personnel: 1 director, 1 assistant, 16 experts on location, 1 lawyer, 1 psychologist (4-4 hours per week)
- ★ Users: 523 persons (40 case workers and 483 homeless individuals). They have asked for help in the following areas (in order of frequency): accommodation, legal problems, substance abuse and psychological counselling (of course, one person could have multiple problems).

Products:

- ★ Information brochures in the four fields of expertise (continuously updated)
- ★ Monthly workshops for experts – curriculum. 55 trained experts

C. JOB CENTRES

We have set up **two job centres** as part of the project, one in the Práter Day Centre of Shelter Foundation (Menhely) and one in the headquarters of BMSZKI. The staff of these two centres received a six month training organized by an already existing job centre. Apart from offering help to find employment these two centres also helped people enroll in trainings.

Concrete results of the Job Centres:

- ★ 1 furnished office for the coordinator and the employment specialist (BMSZKI)
- ★ furnished office to receive users, with IT access for homeless individuals (BMSZKI)
- ★ 1 area of reception (Menhely)
- ★ 1 office for staff (BMSZKI)

The Job Centre in numbers:

- ★ Personnel: BMSZKI – 1 full-time coordinator + 4 full-time employment advisors, Menhely – 1 part-time coordinator + 5 part-time employment advisors
- ★ Opening hours: BMSZKI – 4 days a week, altogether 17 hours, Menhely: 3 days a week, 10 hours

Activities, clientele:

- ★ 2000 registered users
- ★ 50 users per day on average
- ★ Recruiting to skills training – a group event where participants are introduced to the system of trainings, as well as specifics about their chosen trade – 600 participants
- ★ Motivational and psychological assessment – 250 participants
- ★ Directing people into training – based on the results of the motivational and psychological assessment – 150 participants
- ★ Vocational guidance on an individual basis – 989 participants
- ★ Job seekers training – group trainings to help homeless unemployed people learn the skills of finding and sustaining a job or training – 125 participants

Products:

- ★ Set of motivational and psychological tests
- ★ Know-how and system of documentation for job centres

D. FEDÉL NÉLKÜL STREETPAPER

Strengthening of the **Fedél Nélkül (Roofless) streetpaper** – The streetpaper is produced and distributed by homeless people. Those contributors and vendors who are motivated in making steps towards social integration are offered participation in alternative employment and activation projects, as well as individual and group social support. 3 homeless people are employed by the project on a part-time basis for producing a biweekly four-page report on its various activities.

Concrete results of Fedél Nélkül:

- ★ 1 furnished office
- ★ 486 vendors
- ★ 26 special vendors
- ★ Personnel: 3 full-time social workers, 1 editor and 3 homeless part-time journalists of the biweekly 4-page report (see second part for their interviews)

Products:

- ★ 4-page bi-weekly reports throughout the 24 months of the project, altogether 65 editions, 10,000 copies on average
- ★ Activation program for special vendors

E. IT CENTRES

We have created small IT centres in homeless services, where people can learn how to use computers, and with the help of the internet can look for jobs, write Cvs, practice and even find e-work (work from “home”).

Concrete numbers of IT centres:

- ★ 11 new computers with internet access on 7 locations

2. TRAININGS

(FOR STAFF – CASE WORKERS, SOCIAL ASSISTANTS,
EXPERTS – AS WELL AS FOR HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS)

A. TRAINING OF STAFF

- a) **Introducing the project to social workers** – In the summer of 2005 social workers were introduced to the goals and activities of the project in 4 groups, 2-2 days each. They could discuss about their involvement in the project: how to help users more efficiently, how to get up-to-date information, what kind of additional support the project offers to them and to homeless people.

Concrete result: ★ 4×2 days of training, 155 participants

Concrete product: ★ Description of the project in printed and presentation format

- b) **Continuous training and supervision of social workers** – social workers were gathered on several occasions to comment and feedback on the project, to gain information about the developments and to discuss how to do things better.

Concrete result: ★ 12 days of training, 155 participants

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum for the trainings

- c) **Introducing the project to experts** – the head experts gathered the individual experts of their field in the summer of 2005 where they were introduced to the activities of experts, their own role and the way the network operates.

Concrete result: ★ 4×2 days of training, 60 participants

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum in the four fields

- d) **Workshop of experts** – the network of experts have held workshops every month where they have discussed their role, they have

evaluated and given feedback on the work of the network, as well as have gained new information based on presentations by the head expert or an invited speaker.

Concrete result: ★ 20×4 hours of workshop per network, 60 participants

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum for the four networks, information brochures

- e) **Computer skills and methodological training of experts and case workers** – short and long term trainings to help staff learn how to use and interpret the electronic database and to teach users basic IT skills.

Concrete result: ★ 15 training days, 88 participants

Concrete product: ★ 4 curricula, reports analyzing data from the database

- f) **Group leader training for case workers** – theoretical and practical knowledge of how to run groups and to sustain the results of the project when the funding is finished.

Concrete result: ★ 15 training days, 22 trained staff

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum

- g) **Supervision in social work** – teaching the methods of in-service supervision, which is vital in the sustaining of the good results of the project.

Concrete result: ★ 18 trained staff

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum

B. TRAINING OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

- a) **Preparational training** – preparing individuals to the professional trainings organized by the Labour Market, during 1-3 weeks (depending on the length of the professional training). The best candidates are then referred to the professional training.

Concrete result: ★ 16 groups, 280 participants

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum

- b) **In-training support, individual mentoring** – for participants of the professional training. Topics of the training: expectations of the chosen profession and the professional training, tutoring, individual and group counselling, personality development, group work, conflict resolution, mediation.

Concrete result: ★ 8 groups, 169 participants

Concrete product: ★ In-training curriculum, program of individual mentoring

- c) **Continuing and finishing interrupted education**

Concrete result: ★ 12 participants (4 of whom finished the 8 grades of primary education)

- d) **Professional training** – based on an agreement with the Labour Centre, individuals prepared and referred by our project could start their professional training organized by the Labour Centre.

- e) **In-job support and individual mentoring** – its aim is to help the in-job integration of homeless people starting to work, to enhance skills of coping and conflict resolution, the develop their personal strengths.

Concrete result:

★ 73 participants

★ Employed with a contract (min.) 133 people

★ Otherwise employed min. 182 people

Professional Trainings	Started	Dropped out	Finished/still attending
Cook (I.-II.)	33	13	20
IT	19	1	18
Security guard (I.-II.)	22	2	20
Plumber	8	3	5
Crane-driver	2	0	2
Waiter	1	0	1
Mason	5	2	3
Electrician	5	0	5
Baby-sitter	2	1	1
Shop assistant	4	1	3
Forklift operator	18	2	16
Social nurse	25	6	19
Cleaner (with machines)	20	7	13
Stoker	1	0	1
IT software manager	1	0	1
English language	1	0	1
Confectioner	1	0	1
Restaurant management	1	0	1
Marketing and advertisement expert	1	0	1
NC-CNC machine expert	1	0	1
Tradesperson	1	0	1
Altogether:	170	38	132

f) **IT course** – basic IT course consisting of 9 modules (including internet, word processing, tables, etc), the teachers are social workers, the students are homeless people.

Concrete result:

- ★ Finished all 9 modules: 21 individuals
- ★ Participant (not yet finished): 98 people

Concrete product: ★ Curriculum of 9 modules

g) **Helping with the creation and tutoring of VAGYUNK (We Are)**, an Association of Homeless Artists: help with the administration and the organizing of the newly founded association, a course for its members on how to write applications for funding.

Concrete result:

- ★ VAGYUNK Association of Homeless Artists (17 founding members)
- ★ Course on how to write applications: 7 participants

Concrete product:

- ★ VAGYUNK Founding Documents
- ★ Curriculum for course on applications

3. SOCIAL PURPOSE COMMUNICATION

- a) **“City of Solidarity” Conference** – a one-day event held in the City Hall of Budapest in September 2006, where speakers and participants from various EQUAL projects, working with different disadvantaged groups could share their experiences, good practices and results with each others and policy makers.

Concrete result:

- ★ 150 participants
- ★ 6 presentations
- ★ 4 workshops
- ★ 1 roundtable discussion

Concrete product:

- ★ Audio tape
- ★ TV and radio interviews

- b) **“Agora”** – Agora is a place for public discussion. These events take place in hostels, day centres and participants could share their experiences about work, homelessness and becoming independent with each other.

Concrete result: ★ 52 participants, 3 events

Concrete product: ★ Information leaflet about the dangers of working without a contract

- c) **Focus group discussions** – we have invited employers, recruiting agencies, organizations and experts working on employment issues as well as homeless people to discuss about the training and employment possibilities and difficulties of disadvantaged groups, especially the homeless. We have organized special events to discuss the various paths of social communication with representatives of the media.

Concrete result: ★ 43 participants, 9 events

Concrete product:

- ★ Brochure targeting the prejudice towards homeless people (for potential employers)
- ★ Setting up a network of organizations working for the employment of disadvantaged people

d) **Participant Feedback Meetings** – involving homeless people in the decisions about the project, continuous evaluation, enhancing real participation in hostels and day centres

Concrete result: ★ 28 participants, 8 meetings

Concrete product: ★ Study on the possibilities of participation

e) **“Let’s hear your voice!”** – mini-conferences where homeless people can speak up and talk about their problems and difficulties in finding or keeping a job or in their studies.

Concrete result: ★ 27 participants, 3 events

Concrete product: ★ Video about the trainings

f) **Interviews with homeless people and their helpers** – personalized stories of success and difficulties in the lives of homeless people regarding employment and training.

Concrete result: ★ 32 interviews

4. TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In the course of transnational cooperation the project carries out activities in partnership with three other similar projects: Interprepa (Paris), Motiva (Madrid) and TMD (London). To find out more about the partnership visit www.4inclusion.org.

- a) **Transnational seminars and reporter exchange** around the following four themes, with the participation of case workers and homeless people.

Paris – 2005.10, theme: New ways to the labour market, addressing employers

Madrid – 2006.05, theme: New ways to social activation

Budapest – 2006.10, theme: New approaches to people facing multiple disadvantages

London – 2007.04, theme: Empowerment and participation

Concrete result: 150 participants – 50 Hungarian participants (among them 8 homeless people)

Concrete product:

- ★ Four themed seminar reports in English and in Hungarian
- ★ Presentations, description of good practice

- b) **Staff and beneficiary exchange**

- ★ Staff visit to London (10 participants, 3 days)
- ★ Participation in the Ten Feet Away Homeless Artist Festival in London (2 homeless artists from the VAGYUNK Homeless Artist Association, 2 case workers)
- ★ Visit by London staff and beneficiaries (8 people, 3 days)

Concrete product:

- ★ 2 written reports
- ★ 2 presentations

- c) **Steering group meetings prior to the seminars** – one- or two-day meetings with two participants from each city

Concrete result: ★ 15 participants – 6 Hungarian participants, 6 meetings

- d) **Final conference, and Liberation Through Art exhibition** – a two-day final event in Budapest in November 2007, with the participation of social workers and policy makers, around a 100 people altogether.

Concrete result:

- ★ 4 good practice presentations
- ★ 6 plenary speeches
- ★ 2 round table discussions (1 open 1 closed)
- ★ 2 workshops
- ★ 1 exhibition by homeless artists
- ★ 1 opening of the exhibition

Concrete product:

- ★ Free-card campaign about the best photos and short stories exhibited
- ★ Final publication

- e) **Brochures in two languages** (Hungarian-English)

Concrete product:

- ★ “United Force” Brochure – an introduction about the project
- ★ BMSZKI – introduction of its services and work in English
- ★ English edition of Fedél Nélkül streetpaper
- ★ Good practice papers, reports in both languages

II. INTERVIEWS WITH HOMELESS PARTICIPANTS
– BY HOMELESS JOURNALISTS OF THE
“FEDÉL NÉLKÜL” STREETPAPER

“I SPEND ALL MY TIME WITH THE NEWSPAPER”

INTERVIEWER: CSILLA HORVÁTH

Imre O. has been homeless since the regime-change. He has been living in the Buda hills for four and a half years, in a public area. He is physically challenged, one of his arms has been missing since a childhood accident. Presently he is a distributor of the homeless streetpaper “Fedél nélkül” (Without a Shelter)*.

BECOMING HOMELESS

Imre O. was born in Western Hungary. He moved out of his parents' house at a young age, and he has never owned a flat. At the time of the regime-change, he was laid off (he worked as an insulator-measurer), and due to losing his income, he was unable to go on paying for his rent. He could not turn to his parents for help because of their spoilt relationship, and he found himself on the street. Since then – with little intermissions – he has been living on the street.

“I tried to go to work from the street. I found shelter in a staircase. There was no problem with me, I didn't mess up or litter the place. I could take a shower at my workplace. There was no place I could wash my clothes, though. I got fed up with that, I don't like running around in filthy clothes. It wasn't enough that I could wash my underwear and socks during taking a shower, when my overclothes remained dirty. That is why I chose coming up to Budapest.”

JOB

After the regime-change, he had tried many kinds of work, he had worked as a vehicle-cleaner for BKV (Budapest Transportation Company),

* www.fedelnelkul.hu

as an assistant at a buffet and then as a newspaper-distributor. In the meantime, he has been pensioned off. For a short time, he returned to his home-town, too. He was also subject to what many of his homeless companions, that they mostly get food and drink for their work. Presently, he is a distributor of the streetpaper “Fedél nélkül” (Without a Shelter). He gets the newspapers every other day for 15 Forints, and he is selling them at his usual place.

“When I came up to Budapest, I was a roustabout in Zugló, and then I was cleaning vehicles for BKV, and that is what I could do for the longest period of time. Later I was a maid of all work at a buffet, I had to take back glasses, collect litter and things like that. I had my food and drink, I didn’t get much money. Later I got pensioned off, that’s when I found the newspaper distributing job. I wasn’t yet selling ‘Fedél nélkül’, but newspapers and magazines. I went back to the countryside, and I kept on distributing papers. I had a salary, my allowance, and I also got a nice amount of tips. When I got laid off, I came back here, to Budapest, and I kept on with work at the Paper-Distributing Company. Unfortunately, this company also ceased to exist, the safe got empty, the company went bankrupt. That is when I started to quietly sit out somewhere, to have my own decent place.

I usually get up at around 6 o’clock, and I spend all my time with the newspaper. Every other day I get to go for the next ten pieces. Yesterday, as I had been going to Nagymaros, I asked for 30 pieces, I sold it all. Those having given money wanted the paper, too, only one or two people said that they didn’t want the paper. I always automatically hand over the paper as I take the money, it makes people see that I am a serious distributor. They see that I am dressed in a normal way, they don’t bother me. One acquaintance told me that somebody gave him 20 Forints for the paper, and he got mad, as he had given 15 Forints for it. I’m not like that. I take the money from those giving it to me, and I give the paper to anyone asking for it.”

FUTURE PLANS

The days of Imre O. are spent in a systematic way. He has found the people and organisations that can help him in his everyday life, and with the things needed for him to survive (blankets, clothing). The paper “Fedél nélkül” – along with his pension – minimally provides the cost of his living, and also gives meaningful activity for him. It is worth to place some confidence in the future, as he is conceived of giving alcohol up.

“In the beginning and at the end of the week I go to the Maltese Service, I wash my clothes, I wash and clean myself. Usually I get up at around 6 o’clock, and I spend all my time with the newspaper. I am starting to get out of alcoholism, the groove is not so important for me anymore as it used to be, I mean to stop myself.”

CSILLA HORVÁTH

“It was between 12 December 2002 – 23 February 2006 that I was homeless in the strictest sense of the word. Since then, I have been living in the flat bought for my daughter by her father, with the beneficial interest belonging to him. At the moment I am not actually homeless, but the situation might change any minute.



Since the 1st of July 2005, I have been working on the supplement of the streetpaper ‘Fedél nélkül’, full time since the 3rd of June in 2006. We have a lot of work with the newspaper: writing articles, recording and typing the interviews, editing, laying out and replicating the paper are all done by the supplement writers.

We participated in the conferences of the Equal program, Lajos Szappanos in the one held in Paris, Gyula B. Erdős in Madrid, Orsolya Szele, Gyula B. Erdős and myself in Budapest, five homeless persons travelled to London, Orsolya Szele and myself among them as supplement writers. We have also been invited to conferences of other Equal projects, one supplement writer represented the newspaper at all these

events. We also participated in conferences outside the Equal program, this summer I even travelled to a homeless art festival (Ten Feet Away) to London. We take part in programs of the Day of Solidarity.

The Self-Help Organization of Homeless Artists 'VAGYUNK' (We Are) has also been founded, of which I am a member; we had three exhibitions last year. As much as I can, I help out the chairman of the 'Esély az Életért' (Chance to Life) Association in arranging things, that is not much, but I am not really competent in this, so I can do little harm with little work. Previously I had been working at 32 places, I don't mean to list all of them, neither do I have any proof of having worked at all of them, since from 1990 to 1998 I had mostly been employed without a contract. The most important ones are:

- Library administrator at a publisher,*
- Registrar of fixed assets for the Cinema Works,*
- Administrator at a television service,*
- Staff-holder at surveyors.*

Administrator at the model site of the Research Institute of Animal Husbandry. (I had tasks like registering the livestock, and stock-taking of growth as part of it, which also included scalloping the ears of piglets and putting earrings in the ears of cattle and sheep.)

Maid of all work at a horse ranch (cooking, washing up, cleaning, washing clothes, feeding the animals, catching and taking home of runaway stock, taming rowdy billygoats, counselling guests having met with an accident, being drunk or simply abnormal).

Janitor at a students' hostel.

Superintendent and caretaker of physically challenged children.

In my spare time I like to read, make embroidery, sew (with a sewing machine), sometimes I draw, write something that cannot be published in the supplement, for example a tale, I yell at my granddaughter, play with her, or we may be yelling while playing together. We have a turtle, sometimes we play with that, too. Occasionally we go hiking, to a museum or to the zoo. I employ one of my colleague's dog as a fitness trainer."

“I LOVE TO TALK ABOUT MY STUDIES”

INTERVIEWER: GYULA B. ERDŐS

Laszlo R. is 38 years old, divorced, has been homeless for four years and is presently living at a rehabilitation hostel for the homeless. He has elementary school education, and he also acquired an accredited security guard qualification with the support of the EQUAL program.

BECOMING HOMELESS

He got married at 23, and three boys were born in the marriage. He and his family had been living in a subsidized flat of the local government for twelve years, when his wife and children moved out of the rented flat.

“That is when the incontinent consumption of alcohol entered my life. This took place a couple days before Christmas. I felt completely exploited in the soul. I knew nothing about my family until January. All that time I was intoxicated. I totally lost my personality, job and the rented flat due to my drinking. At no time since then have we been able to talk through our problems with my wife.”

After two years of tossing and increased alcohol consumption came the sobering up: Laszlo asked for help at the local family support centre, where he was advised a rehabilitation institute.

“I found myself in Budapest right on the 12th of December in 2005. I don’t know how I got to the capital. I entered the rehabilitation institute of ‘Emberbarát Alapítvány’ (Philanthropist Fund) of my own will. With the help of God, I spent nine months in rehabilitation. They helped me a lot and I have fond memories of that time. My personality developed a lot, my thinking became more positive and I started to see life in a more realistic way.”

He left that place after nine months, and since then he has been living at a rehabilitation hostel for the homeless, with no significant relapses.

EDUCATION

After elementary school, Laszlo R. acquired a forklift-driver's course, and he learnt by the side of bricklayers and painters. He also acquired a driver's license and learnt how to operate the computer. He applied for the security guard course started by the Job-seekers' Office of BMSZKI (Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions).

"I attended a preparational training before the course. Although many of us failed there, I was strengthened and helped by it to hold on. There were 36 of us at the beginning of the training, but only 16 of us made it through to the course. The main reason for this was alcohol. During the course, we got an allowance, which helped us in learning without any difficulty. We got a season ticket for public transportation, so as not to have any problems with transportation, not to get frustrated by it. We also got food tickets, which helped us in subsistence. For me it was enough, but many did not spend it on food. The most important thing, of course, was the 34 Thousand Forints of educational support. Sometimes, allowances came one or two days late, which meant a little difficulty, especially for those who were not saving any money.

I love to talk about my studies. An important part of the security guard profession is psychology, which I really like. Legal studies also interest me a lot. I can use them for my personal matters, too. I'm planning to widen the knowledge I've obtained in the future. I enjoyed both professional theories and situational exercises. There was one thing, though, I really missed during the three and a half months. I found the lessons in self-defence too few, although the average age of those attending the course was above 50.

The examination took place in January, it was contained of two parts. The written part seemed easy. I got a four in the end. I was much more nervous before the oral part. I drew easy questions in legal studies, I knew them very well, I got stuck, though, in the practical part, but I got playful hints, which helped. I got three and three for my oral exam.

I could prepare well for my exams, because it is calm at the abstinent hostel, which is even more so in our room. After that, we only had to wait for the certificate to arrive.”

JOB

Laszlo R. is looking for a registered job, he fared ill more than once with unregistered work. There were instances when he had not got paid, and also instances of him reacting inadequately.

“Before the Christmas Holidays I had a little time to complement my allowances with a little odd job. I started to work in a hypermarket at an exterior firm. In the first couple days we got our salary after the shift, but later it didn’t happen. I got in a desperate state before my third Christmas spent on my own. Once before the shift, the employer had come up with the idea that we were drunk and had to go home. Actually, they were owing us a couple days’ salary by then. I tried to ease my anxiety with a glass of coconut liqueur, and I also had a glass of bier at about midnight. I went in the hostel at four in the morning, where the blow-pipe signalled. I presumed that would happen. I was not sacked for my mistake, like it would’ve happened at another hostel, but advised going to the community of Alcoholic Anonymous. I’m doing that. I travelled home on the day of my mistake, to visit my children, which gave me great joy.”

FUTURE PLANS

With his freshly obtained qualification and sober lifestyle, he has all chances to get a job. This, however – partly for administrative reasons – does not happen from one day to another...

“The security guard certificate from the police, the papers of the Chamber’s membership and from the notary are still in delay after the exam. Obtaining these papers would take twelve Thousand Forints, but even our last allowance is late, from which we could pay for them. I can’t wait for the papers to get arranged, because there are three places I could go to work right now. I was interviewed at the well-known (...)

company, the (...) company from Zuglo and through an acquaintance I could go to work at the Technical University, too. Until I find a job, I go out charring for the Capital's Public Place Maintenance Company. The time of waiting is hard for me both psychologically and financially."



GYULA B. ERDŐS

"I was born in Budapest on the 7th of October in 1959. I became homeless due to my alcohol dependence on the 11th of July in 1994, and I have lived in eight different hostels since then. I also lived in Pécs for two years in a rented flat. Presently, I am a dweller of the abstinent hostel of BMSZKI (Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions) called 'Váltó-ház'. My contract, however, is expiring finally on the 14th of December this year.

I got in the Equal program as a scrub on the 15th of July in 2005, as a supplement writer. I wrote interviews, articles and reports in the supplement, and after I had learned using the word-editor program, I have been doing editing, too. I have also participated in replicating. In the meantime, I have also been personally propagating the program while distributing the newspaper. I participated in a couple of Equal conferences, one of which was held in Madrid, where I tried to advance the conference with my spontaneous remarks. I have written reports of all of them in the supplement. I took an active part in the meetings of the Development Partnership. I propagated the streetpaper 'Fedél nélkül' along with the supplement on 'Sziget' festival and in a high school. I also participated in the forming of the organisation 'VAGYUNK' (We Are). I coordinated the organisational work of the first three exhibitions. I have left the organisation for personal reasons for a half year. In the winter I applied to become a volunteer assistant on duty at the Kürt street day centre of Foundation 'Menhely'. It didn't happen because of the warm winter. I apply this year, too, hopefully this will bring a warm winter again

for homeless people. After an oral admonishment I quit the group of supplement writers on the 15th of August in 2007.

After graduating in a commerce school, I worked – with little intermissions – in my profession for sixteen years. The truth is, I had fifteen workplaces, owing to my alcoholism. After sobering up, I made work-excursions to healthcare, newspaper-distributing and back to commerce again. After getting a disability benefit, I went to Pécsvárad, as a therapist in a drug-therapy institution. After that I was trying to find opportunities as an unemployed person, until the coordinator of the streetpaper ‘Fedél nélkül’ found me.

Besides writing in the supplement, I served in the community of AA (Alcoholic Anonymous) along with my own sobering up. I edit and am a contributor of the magazine of AA. I wrote short stories about my alcoholism and sent them for competitions of ‘Fedél nélkül’, and they had been published continuously. I play soccer with my mates in AA, and play basketball with staff members of Foundation ‘Menhely’. I held lectures in schools and at festivals – I was a live book – about my alcoholism and homelessness. I keep distributing the streetpaper ‘Fedél nélkül’, as a senior distributor. I played as an extra in motion pictures. I went to the opera and to exhibitions.”

“COOK BELONGING TO THE MINORITY”

INTERVIEWER: ORSOLYA SZELE

Tímea O. is 36 years old, she lives in a tenement with her three children, formerly she had more than once been a dweller of mothers' homes and family hostels. She is graduated and is a qualified cook. Presently, she is trying to find a job in one of the Homeless Employment-seekers' Offices, which is hindered by her being a gipsy.

BECOMING HOMELESS

Tímea O. has moved to Budapest with her children after her divorce. At first day found shelter in a mothers' home, and then the mother gave her smallest child to day care and entered employment. She managed to collect enough money for the family to move to a tenement.

“...I know this is an unstable state. As long as I have a job, I have a place to live. (...) There are shortfalls in the catering trade, when business is very scarce, and at those times people naturally get laid off. At most of the times I had been employed illegally, which made me highly defenceless. Having gotten paid nothing never really happened to me, but it was also very rare that I got paid the full amount of what was agreed. That is why we had to move a lot, because there were times when I could not pay for the tenement. (...) I had to use all possibilities in the social supply system. Social support was only enough to satisfy our most basic needs, so there were times we had to spend some time in family hostels. Considering the circumstances, I was lucky that I never had to separate from my children, that is they never got in the state' care, not even for a short period of time.”

Tímea is presently living in a tenement, and, as she puts it, she doesn't think of herself as being homeless.

EDUCATION

She did a cooking course supported by the Employment Centre.

“I had been receiving an income supplement during the year of the training, and after the successful exams, as far as I remember, the restaurant hiring me had also been given an income subsidy for half a year. As it was expectable, when the subsidization ended, my employment also ended.”

JOB

Tímea O. has already got a profession, so now employment finding must follow. Perhaps it is not common knowledge that large financial resources are needed for finding a job itself.

“Most often I come here to the day centre of Foundation ‘Menhely’ (Shelter) in Práter street, where the Employment Seekers’ Office is operating now. For one thing, it is close to my present tenement, and for the other, I am in good relationship with those working here, and, last but not least, here I get efficient help in finding a job. I think we are all aware how much financial expenditure it is to get a job. Making phone calls costs the most, I put going after work to the second place. The reason is that the monthly season ticket is very expensive, I can’t really by it, when I don’t have a job, but four or five tickets a day costs even more, and you cannot find work without transportation. I don’t do any bilking, because I have to get to a place at a given time, so I don’t want to and can’t afford to waste hours quarrelling with the control people. Since I work in the catering trade, I need a certificate of virtue and a medical booklet, which both also cost money. Fortunately, the medical booklet is valid for one year, so this means the least expenditure in time and money.”

Even with the OKJ (National Catalogue of Qualifications) accredited cook qualification it is hard to find registered employment where conditions of employment are recorded in writing, and where the employer pays extra money for extra hours. With kitchen work there is another problem

for a single parent, namely that working hours end in the night. For Tímea O., being a gypsy is another hindering circumstance.

“It took a very long time and a lot of hard work for me to find new employment, and I have to admit, being such defenceless, I have to accept highly disadvantageous conditions. I belong to the gypsy minority, for which I am very unwillingly employed in spite of my qualification and the good references. The restaurant I work for now – although I think this is past tense – is not the ideal workplace. Although I earn 5000 Forints a day, I practically do a double shift, as I work from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m., fifteen hours a day. Naturally, I do not only have to do the work of a cook, but also that of the cook-maid and the cleaner. In return, however, the employer was willing to get me registered, though he doesn’t really risk anything as I do the work of those whom he couldn’t afford to hire legally because of the high social security taxes.

Now even my present workplace is at risk, because something happened which makes me feel that I can’t stay there any more. To make the thing understandable, I have to describe my workplace. The storage room, where the meat prepared for cooking or frying is kept, opens from the room used by the guests, which means that the person going to the storage room can be seen by the guests. This is not a restaurant with a scene-kitchen, so the cook works ‘invisibly’ in the separate kitchen area. When the waiter gets the order, she comes in the kitchen and gives it to me. And I tell her what I need from the storage room. Since the waiter is also the bartender, sometimes it happens that by the time she gets to the storage room, there is a line in front of the counter, so she first has to serve the guests and only after that can she bring me what I need. Sometimes it takes a while. Last time this is exactly what happened, and waiting took a real long time. I had already prepared the ordered plates, the dressing had started to grow cold, I felt I couldn’t wait any longer. I took the storage key and went to fetch the meat. In the meantime, the waiter came in, she grabbed the key out of my hand, and she snapped at me that I couldn’t go among the guests. Hearing the quarrel the owner came in and, naturally, found the waiter right. That means guests can’t see that there is a cook belonging to the minority working in the kitchen.”

FUTURE PLANS

“I can only think of myself working, preferably for a fair income, and living in a tenement as long as possible. I don’t have any chance for anything more. I don’t play the lottery, I will not inherit anything, raising two school-children I cannot save enough money to even think of buying a flat. More than once have I thought of applying for a flat here in the eighth district, but I never got any further than thinking.”

ORSOLYA SZELE

“I have been homeless since November 2002. Presently I live in the Dózsa György street hostel of BMSZKI.

I entered the program in the December of 2005 as a supplement writer. In 2006 I participated in the international conference in Budapest, I made interviews and wrote articles. I have been invited every third month to the meetings of Development Partnership. In 2007 I got to take part in the transnational conference in London. I am a leading member of the meanwhile founded organization ‘VAGYUNK’ (We Are).

Previously I worked in my profession as a sweets product-manufacturer, in the field of car-sale, tourism, catering trade, and as an administrator. After my marriage, I was compelled to work in commerce. Before getting to the streetpaper ‘Fedél nélkül’, I worked three shifts in a factory.

In my spare time, I make embroidery, most of which I have given away as gifts. Some of them were also exhibited. I like reading, getting mad from listening to the news in the radio, and once a week I go cleaning to satisfy my need for exercise.”



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