

Johnny and Theresa

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Johnny

Johnny ended up on the street after a failed relationship. He went along the classical path of Hungarian homeless services, a circle without an exit: street – night shelters – temporary accommodations, accompanied by some deep periods of alcohol consumption. The only thing that meant a way out for him was that with his helpfulness he stood out of his peers at the street paper called 'Without a Roof' (Fedél Nélkül). First he was engaged in our program called 'Firsthand Information on Homelessness' where after processing his own life story, he was charged with more and more small tasks and by now he has become a paid member of the editorial staff. He is primarily responsible for publication of the magazine that includes financial responsibility and countless contacts with his peers. Today he is in charge of organizing the stock of donations arriving to the editorial office. Knowing the needs very well, it is often him who brings personalized donation to his peers. He visits vendors when they get into hospital, he informs support workers, as frequently he receives information before they do. His presence and attention mean a lot of added time. Also he works as a very efficient puffer between service users and support workers.

Theresa:

She is a 75-year-old, illiterate widow who is extremely reserved. Throughout the 10 years spent at our organization, only three people have been honored with her confidence. Theresa is not homeless, she lives in a social housing unit as a tenant, but unable to maintain the household on her own. When we started to work on her case, she had extensive debts towards service providers. There were hardly any machines in her household that worked. There were problems with the water, electricity, locks and her brother, who moved in from time to time, he was loud and consumed alcohol. During this troubled period she lost weight to 40 kg and since she was living under constant stress, she got close to nervous breakdown.

With humbleness for trust

Johnny made a decision on his own to take care of Theresa. He bore distrust of the old lady humbly. He helps her in the life of the editorial office, organizes collecting donations for her, picks up and transports donations, visits her in the hospital and spends a lot of time fixing things in her rental. He changed locks, fixed taps, lamps and doors. Theresa always showed spectacular unwillingness to accept Johnny's help. Last time he worked on fixing the ceiling lamp from early afternoon until 10 pm and systematically let her often offensive sentences go by. And then the day came when Theresa confessed to the boss about Johnny: "Hats off to him! I didn't use to like him, but now he can also hear what I'm saying and he can have one of

my keys". The number of Theresa's confidants increased by one.

Creative and innovative problem-solving

Theresa, the 75-year-old lady gets into hospital and her brother and his drinking partner move in to her flat against her will. According to the law, Theresa can turn to the authorities (police in this case) in person or through her legal representative. But she is at the intensive care unit, not in a state to make decisions, unable to call the authorities for help. Her supporting organization is also powerless since it does not have the right to empty the flat, cannot even represent Theresa in front of the police. However the smart peer support worker takes care of everything. After he talked to Theresa in the hospital, he rings the bell of the flat, goes in saying that he would like move in, too, so basically he is artificially generating argument with the squatters. Later he calls the police saying that strangers want to evict him from his flat. Police officers arrive and it turns out during measures that none of the actors stay in the flat legally; thus police close the flat and expel parties. Problem solved.