

FEANTSA Zaragoza Conference, Friday 19th of October

**“Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment for People who are Homeless”**

Discussion Notes for Workshop 2:

**« When is a person ready for work and how to get there? »**

The workshop was chaired by **Andy Shields from St Mungos** in the UK and the two speakers were **Danny Lescrauwaet from Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk** in Belgium and **Teresa Soro from Fundacion Picarla** in Spain.

**Danny Lescrauwaet** made the Presentation “How to Get Homeless People in Motion”. You can access the presentation [here](#).

**Teresa Soro** then presented the work of Fundacion Picarla. The main points are below:

- She outlined the projects that are run by the organization for different groups. The work is in the context of prevention. The aim is training in order to access and retain work. The focus of the work of the organization is on socially excluded young people.
- They work with excluded young people to promote inclusion through work in the area of manual labour and also hotel work. The methodology is to get to know the young person and understand the difficulties that are in their background and what factors have affected them. There are often difficulties in the family relationship and problems with parents and school. There is a need to work with the family as a whole and recover the relationships that have broken down, so that it does not lead to social exclusion. Professional experience is a way of helping the people involved to develop a sense of responsibility. They work a lot with the employers and give a lot of feedback to the young people. They acquire a lot of experience and skills over the two years of the organization’s programme.
- The working involves really engaging with young people to try and generate enthusiasm and engagement and help them to see a promising future. There is about 90 per cent work insertion rate and another 5% that go back to the school system.
- There is also a programme for young people with learning difficulties who often have a hard history of school, professional and family failures. They engage with them and the team adapts the materials and tools at their disposal to their needs. They work also on developing social skills and also social participation and hobbies. It is also fundamental to work with the families. There is often a refusal to recognize the difficulties of the young people. The organization works with them through simulating a work environment to help them develop their employability and there is a system of grants to act as incentives during the training.
- The reinsertion rate for this group is about 30 per cent. They are a high risk group and there is a danger of homelessness, addiction and prostitution. They frequently don’t have family or social support and they need intermittent support throughout their lives.
- As regards job insertion for people who are street homeless, the shorter the time spent on the street, the better the chance. Health issues are also very important.

- The assessment of the organization looks at the capacities of the person and the aptitudes that they have.
- To conclude: prevention is key.

**Andy Shields** briefly presented the work of St Mungos as regards access to employment for people who are homeless:

- The organization runs training and employment interventions.
- It is vital not to try and separate the different sorts of outcomes that the organization achieves – housing outcomes, employment outcomes and health outcomes all have to be looked at together. St Mungos have to try to find funding streams to work in this way.
- The housing staff in housing projects take responsibility for a few people as key workers. They will sit down with a person and discuss with them what their aspirations are and what they want out of the involvement in the project. The aspirations may be simple – housing , work, relationships – but the discussion is vital and works out some achievable steps towards getting there, so that progress will be made. They make an agreement with each other on what each side will do and check back with each other.
- There is a menu of services to help them to achieve their aspirations – there are personal development courses to look at the areas where change is needed and this is linked very closely to resettlement so that when they move on, they will be ready to do so, and there is a little bit of conditionality attached to the services.
- There is a significant problem of lacking literacy and numeracy skills and there are classes to help get to grips with functional literacy and numeracy. There are also English classes for migrants. There are other key skills too: IT is absolutely vital and all hostels are equipped and there are tutors as well. There are also simple qualifications in food safety and health and safety that make people more employable and help strengthen their CV.
- Information, advice and guidance are available to help people to find a career path and area of work that will suit them going forward. Sometimes people can be orientated towards training that they need to find work.
- There is also job search support to help people with the daunting task of actually applying for jobs. We are starting to integrate a service now in hostels where there is a “job club”.
- Not every person can realistically move into work – but meaningful occupation and being busy and active is vital. It helps people to plan more for the future. For some it will be the ultimate outcome, for some it is the start of the journey.
- According to a survey carried out by St Mungos, about 77% of service users aspire to work, though only 4% do. 93% would want to work at some point – so clearly it is a vital area where a lot of progress is needed.

### **Discussion in the Workshop:**

#### **Debate with the floor:**

**UK Participant:** Is there a success rate from this work on labour reintegration of people who are homeless? And if so, is it a good measurement or is it rather a dangerous one, which would rate the success or failure of a project in terms of hard outcomes?

### Reponses from the Panel:

*Andy Shields:* About 20% is probably a realistic estimate of how many people now in St Mungos projects could hold down a paying job. There is the will and the capacity and we are failing our clients by not engaging with the employment agenda. After all, work is a good way to move on from homelessness.

*Danny Lescrauwaet:* There is a measured success rate in the social economy in the region of Flanders in Belgium. There has been a cost benefit analysis on this sector in the region of Flanders and it found about thirty per cent positive effects. But the research also demonstrated that staying too long in the social economy reduces the positive benefits and can even create risk of becoming homeless again. How to deal with this risk? There is often a lack of good management in those initiatives – maybe it could be improved by drawing on private sector expertise: there is need for further work.

*Teresa Soro:* Our experience of working with the social economy is that it is possible to move on from subsidizing social economy – it is a process of development over time. It involves diversifying the work and the groups involved.

### Debate with the floor:

*Xavier Vandromme, Emmaus France:* Emmaus is spreading in a lot of countries where the free economy is very strong – like the UK and Poland – which is not coincidence. It seems now there is a kind of crossroads, where there is a focus on real labour integration of homeless people. We have to ask ourselves are our current services and ways of working adequate to this task? Are new forms of training and ideas needed?

### Reponses from the Panel:

*Teresa Soro:* We have a clear concept for a long time: you need good professionals and they need to be educators and managers. We need the best people – the best of private sector experience needs to be brought into the social sector.

*Danny Lescrauwaet:* Over the last five years, we have invested a lot in initiatives to build the skills of social workers and it has had some results. But budget problems and lack of resources can mean that it is difficult to send staff for training. The availability is there, but not the time and money to avail.

*Andy Shields:* I agree that we are at a potential point of great change and one of the ways that inclusion is going to be increasingly promoted is through employment. We are looking at completely reworking the approach of staff – away from a problem-based approach to an aspirations based approach – so that the journey belongs to the individual.

### Debate with the floor:

*Steven Gamgee, Wallich Community, UK:* There was a comment today about the distance travelled and we are all obligated to stand up for it. We would like people to travel as far as they can – if it is employment, that's great, but their distance is valuable in itself. From the employer point of view, we want people to be employed and valued in the same way as every other person. Smaller companies are generally not a feasible option as they don't have the flexibility to accept vulnerable workers needs. Bigger companies are a better option.

*Ian Tilling, Casa Ioanna, Romania:* Casa Ioanna has a lot of success at integrating people into employment, but unfortunately there are more opportunities in the precarious informal labour market than in the formal labour market. The other major barrier is that it is not possible to access housing even with a working wage and there is nowhere for people to move on to.

*Vinciance Lenoir, Association des Maisons d'Accueil, Belgium:* I come from an organization in a small town which works with about 40 women and their children. We have been keeping stats for 6 years on labour reinsertion and work in this area is lead by a specialized worker. Every year it seems that there are beginnings in the group - informing about benefits, training opportunities, local initiatives, social economy etc. They are enthusiastic about getting involved, things go forward but there is a huge drop out rate. CVs are made, trainings and telephone contact work very well, as long as it is heavily supported, but once it becomes something that goes out into the real world, it all breaks down. A few take on small jobs or work for cheques services, but after a few times it always seems to break down and it seems that every year there is not more than 1 or 2 who actually take the project through to its conclusion - whether training or successful work. So is it really possible I wonder: the experience is perhaps more negative. However there are occupational activities (painting, drawing, renovation et.) which are very successful and which people often want to continue with afterwards.

*Marc Uhry, Alpil France:* What is work? The difference sometimes seems simply a legal definition (a parent looking after children, as opposed to a professional carer for example). So to some extent it is about extending the recognition of what constitutes work. In relation to the right to work: it is interesting to approach it through the idea of consumer rights.

#### **Reponses from the Panel:**

*Andy Shields:* there are some emerging points in the debate: it is clear that if we focus just on mainstream employment, we are failing for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways.

*Teresa Soro:* There is a need for flexibility and imagination to tailor the opportunities to the needs of people. It is important to be creative in finding the ways that will help people to advance. It is an area that is still developing and improving.

*Danny Lescauwat:* There is the right to work in Belgium: if you have no income, we have the legal right to social reintegration through employment and if you can't work you have social benefit. If you are young, you are a priority group. The government has to provide you with a job within three months of your demand. But the other side of the coin is that you can be sanctioned if you don't take up the offer and you can lose some of your social benefits.

*Andy Shields:* In the UK the government recently published papers looking at the demographic issues in the economy. A labour shortage is looming and the government is therefore looking at ways of getting the long term unemployed back into work. Sanctions create risk and that is something that we have to be aware of and wary of - it is those most at risk that will end up sanctioned. But nonetheless the approach would seem positive on the whole - it is just vital to work very closely with the government to ensure that the developments take account of the needs of people who are homeless.

#### **Debate with the floor:**

*Belgian participant, working in a Centre Public d'Action Sociale in Brussels* in the area of labour reinsertion: If work is a right, it doesn't necessarily have to be a duty and it is a delicate issue. I fear too that occupational work paid through informal means (vouchers etc.) is of limited value. There are other and better ways of contributing – like artistic expression etc.

#### **Reponses from the Panel:**

*Andy Shields:* I do agree with you – but work is a good thing and has a positive impact. Equally, truly meaningful occupation does have a massive health benefit and this has been clearly demonstrated by research.

#### **Debate with the floor:**

*UK Participant:* targets and measurement all too often lose the softer values around quality of life and participation in society. The terminology around “work” is not quite what I would use: rather the aim is to be productive and active people, through whatever means, and whether it is paid or unpaid.

#### **Reponses from the Panel:**

*Danny Lescauwat:* Some soft outcomes can be measured. Take for example client participation: it is possible to measure participation within homeless services – you just need the right tools (like the audit tool developed by the FEANTSA participation working group) even very qualitative outcomes can be measured.

*Teresa Soro:* I agree with much of what has been said. It is not a simple area and not always easy to see the possibilities for change, especially with older people, but it is a vital area.

*Andy Shields:* Distance travelled is an important concept. It is also hard to unpick which outcomes come from which services (as joined up working impacts across a range of areas) and it is all the more important to measure and include soft outcomes. There has been some positive developments in the UK, whereby there is greater value and recognition of volunteering for example.

#### **Debate with the floor:**

*Belgian Participant working in the CPAS de Bruxelles:* I would like to share some thoughts: I have been hearing here about homeless people and employment, hearing about volunteering and work for people in this situation – but from my own experience, for those with mental and physical handicaps, the forms of paid work or volunteering that are created can be problematic - is it not sometimes a form of exploitation of a fragile group for whom it is not a realistic option? I find it hard to relate to the experiences that I have heard over the few days – they don't concur with my own experience.

### **Reponses from the Panel:**

Andy Shields: Governments have to invest in enabling people to contribute to society – it is money well spent and saves money in the long run. Cost benefit analysis done by St Mungos shows this very clearly. Whatever about it being the right thing, it makes financial sense too.

### **Debate with the floor:**

*Dominic Williamson, Homeless Link, UK:* Dominic Williamson first told an individual story to illustrate the value of peer work of trained, formerly homeless, people – using their experience to help others in the same situation. It demonstrates the responsibility to put in places the services that can actually help people and meet their aspirations.

### **Concluding remarks from the panel:**

*Teresa Soro:* Services don't work together in a coordinated way – but this is the way forward. Joined up working that takes full account of a person's situation is vital. There has to be value attached to the social economy and labour reintegration needs to be a policy priority.

*Danny Lescrauwaet:* Service users themselves want to have opportunities and their demands need to be the basis of work in this area. The desire for employment reintegration is not imposed from the top, it comes from service users themselves.

*Andy Shields:* What is the function of government? If it is to protect the vulnerable, then investment must be made. Employment and meaningful occupation are a vital part of this and at the heart of helping people to move on. Aspirations and expectations have to be high.

### **Four Main Points arising from the debate and fed back to the plenary:**

- Regarding the issue of soft outcomes – how to capture and measure the distance travelled by a person and the changes in their situation generally and take account of it in funding and policy making?;
- Definition of work: what is work? What is meaningful occupation? What is economic activity? There is a need for greater clarity and shared understanding – something for FEANTSAs to work on and promote;
- Right to work Vs responsibility to work: it is an emerging theme in relation to the flexicurity model. FEANTSAs need to consider this – because as rights increase responsibilities increase and the danger is that sanctions will negatively impact on the most vulnerable;
- Joined up working: coordination across housing, health, education, training and employment is key. It is not always possible to unpick what positive outcomes come from which intervention – again this is an argument for looking at the whole picture in terms of measuring outcomes and personal development.