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Networking to fight Homelessness in Europe

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HOMELESS *in Europe*

Winter 2003



FEANTSA believes that cooperation across different sectors is essential to fight homelessness.



The articles in this edition of **Home/less in Europe** touch on different aspects of what it means to work together to fight homelessness. Defining networking is not necessarily easy, but all those working to fight homelessness understand the value of partnerships and cooperation.

Over the past year, **FEANTSA** has worked on the theme of: networking to fight against homelessness. Over the summer 15 national reports on networking were submitted by **FEANTSA**'s Administrative Council; these reports formed the basis for a European Report on Networking and were instrumental to our European Conference on Networking in Athens, on October 10, 2003.

The first section of this newsletter looks at networking in a broad – European – context. A brief report from **FEANTSA**'s conference in October underlines some of the findings of the national reports and the outcomes of the conference sessions. Following his presentation on behalf of the European Commission at **FEANTSA**'s conference, **FEANTSA** was able to put a few questions to Hugues Feltse. Mr Feltse offered some comments in general on networking in the framework of the European Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The Igloo programme has long been recognised as a 'good practice' on European level. This initiative brought together the voluntary homeless sector, the trade unions and providers of social housing at both European level and in the Member States. The Igloo programme will be familiar for many **FEANTSA** member organisations; several members are still involved in national Igloo platforms, and there are important lessons to be learned from this experience.

Several member organisations have contributed articles that reflect national examples of networking to fight homelessness. The articles from Spain and Denmark look at how networks have been built up over a period of time. In Denmark, governments and the voluntary sector have long been partners in fighting homelessness; whereas in Spain, NGOs are starting to explore how to work with different levels of government.

Two articles look at partnerships in the field of employment. Off the Streets and Into Work, a London-based **FEANTSA** member organisation, was built on the principle of partnership and brings together the expertise of different agencies from the not-for-profit, public and private sectors. Since its inception in 1999, OSW has expanded to cover the whole of London and has some key lessons to share from its experience. Petr Janousek Chairman of S.A.D. in the Czech Republic shares his experience of trying to network with the public authorities in Brno through an employment initiative with the clients of his shelter.

Networking with the health care sector is often vital for the provision of services for the homeless, but is not easy. Sue Irving, who coordinates Scotland's Health and Homelessness Action Plans, answered some of our questions in a telephone interview in November and confirms the importance of strong political support for networking to be effective.

The Relais Social in Belgium are often cited as a good practice when it comes to networking. There is strong political support for these networks, and **FEANTSA** went to visit one of the coordinators in Liège to ask some questions about how the Relais developed and about the nature of the cooperation among different partners.

The final article bridges the gap between this edition of **Home/less in Europe** and our previous edition on the **Right to Housing**. Kostas Kapellakis, a lawyer with the Marangopoulou Foundation in Greece, tackles the issue of access to rights and the difficulties that homeless people face when having to deal with the justice system. The Marangopoulou Foundation is attempting to lay the groundwork for better cooperation between the voluntary homeless sector and the justice system in order to ensure that the homeless enjoy their rights.

FEANTSA believes that cooperation across different sectors is essential to fight homelessness; of vital importance to this cooperation, however, is high-level political support for such endeavours. In countries such as Scotland, Ireland and Finland, governments have taken the initiative to sponsor integrated action programmes to combat homelessness and bring the relevant stakeholders together. As Sue Irving said about her experience in Scotland, successful and efficient networking means that 'you need to have the right people sitting around the right tables' and 'corporate (political) support is very important'.

FEANTSA welcomes your comments on the articles in this newsletter please send them to: samara.jones@feantsa.org •



FEANTSA's European Conference on Networking to Fight Homelessness – a brief report

The European Conference on Networking and Cooperation to Fight Homelessness, co-organised by FEANTSA and its Greek partner, ARSIS, was held in Athens on 10 October 2003. Over 90 experts in homelessness from 23 European countries attended the conference. The Networking Conference provided FEANTSA with an opportunity to raise awareness about how cooperation across different sectors can contribute to fighting homelessness. The conference participants took time to reflect upon the need to broaden our perspectives and to work together to deal with the needs of vulnerable people. The Conference was also an occasion to define the contents of the concepts of networking and cooperation, since the terminology varies greatly from country to country and in different sectors.

The Conference's aim was twofold: on the one hand, to bring together different positions and visions concerning cooperation and networking, and on the other to provide FEANTSA's members with a framework for discussion and sharing of ideas and good practices.

One of the speakers, Ms Catherine Kennedy (University of Glasgow), highlighted the need to further develop the links between the actors involved in the fight against homelessness. She also underlined the positive results of the "multi-agency working" to tackle homelessness which has been initiated and supported by the Scottish Executive.

The European perspective was presented by Mr Hugues Feltesse, DG Employment and Social Affairs, who was asked to describe how the European Commission supports networking in the framework of the European Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. Mr Hugues Feltesse clearly expressed the Commission's commitment to 'mobilising all actors' to work together in the context of the NAPsIncl, but did not go into detail about how to encourage cooperation between different levels of government, the voluntary sector, etc.

Mr Peter Fredriksson, from the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs, provided the conference with a national example of networking. He emphasised the need to link public, private and non-profit actors in order to improve the quality of service providers' work.

Calling on our Greek hosts to speak about cooperation at a local level, the Municipality of Athens (Ms Aikaterini Katsabe, deputy Mayor of Athens) stressed the importance of an intensified cooperation within all service providers; an area that needs continued encouragement and support.

An afternoon of four parallel workshops provided the participants with a unique opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences. Each workshop started with a short presentation of a key national example of networking in a specific area: housing, employment, justice or health and welfare services. In particular, the active participation of member organisations from Accession Countries broadened the discussions in the workshops and helped all participants to explore the issue from different perspectives.

A European Report on Networking was also presented to the plenary session. The report draws on 15 national reports prepared for FEANTSA by its members in the EU countries, and clearly explores the scope and nature of networking across the four areas concerned: employment, housing, justice, and health and welfare services. The reports show that networking takes on different forms in different countries, and that in some areas, more emphasis needs to be placed on cooperation.

The national reports are now available on-line at FEANTSA's website, and the European Report on Networking will be finalised soon. Please visit the site for more information: http://www.feantsa.org/mem_only/athens_october_2003/athens_october_2003_conference_networking.asp

To sum up, the Conference provided a good framework for dialogue and exchange of different views concerning how to work in cooperation to best meet the diverse needs of the homeless. •



The European Commission Comments on Networking to Combat Poverty

In 2000, the European Union established a framework under which to promote the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The heads of state and government adopted Common Objectives at Nice in 2000, which are seen to be key steps in making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty in the EU. The fourth common objective refers to the 'mobilisation of all relevant bodies' and calls for the promotion of dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, public and private, including involving social partners, NGOs and social service providers, according to their respective areas of competence, in fight against various forms of exclusion.

This fourth objective is particularly important for all who are seeking to work together with other partners to strengthen the fight against social exclusion and poverty.

In the context of FEANTSA's annual theme: networking to fight homelessness, we contacted Hugues Feltesse (European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs) to ask about the European Commission's role in promoting and encouraging networking in the fight against poverty in Europe.

FEANTSA was curious what role the Commission sees for itself in this process and asked Mr Feltesse how the Commission, promotes, supports and assesses networking in the combat against poverty. We were also keen to ask whether the European Commission had used any specific means to encourage Member States to work with various departments in their governments on the issue of poverty and homelessness. In our own analysis of the NAPsIncl, FEANTSA found that there are some Member States who have taken a political stance in terms of networking and actively encourage consultation across different departments. We therefore asked Hugues Feltesse whether the Commission planned to highlight this sponsorship of networking in its Joint Inclusion Report, which serves as an analysis of the NAPsIncl (2003-2005) and will be presented to the Spring Council in March 2004, or as part of the Peer Review process.

Mr Feltesse indicated that it is difficult for the Commission to play a political role, despite having a mandate from the Council of Ministers to implement the European Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. It would seem that the Commission does not want to use the Joint Inclusion Report as a means of comparing how Member States use networking to develop effective policies, but would rather rely on the Peer Review process to highlight good practices in terms of social inclusion policy.

Mr Feltesse addressed the issues in general, but seemed to restrict his comments on how a European network should function. Highlighting the need to focus on concrete common objectives and to strive to achieve something, Mr Feltesse indicated that European networks could enrich the policy debate surrounding the fight against poverty. Clearly networks like FEANTSA have a very important role to play in the process, and must be involved.

FEANTSA pointed out that some countries have established national integrated strategies to combat homelessness. Countries including Scotland, Finland, Ireland and France seem to believe that it is essential for different government departments to work together with NGOs in order develop and implement policies that have an impact on reducing the number of homeless people.

However Mr Feltesse emphasised that cultural differences between Member States often make it difficult for the European Commission to play an active role:

"It is important to remember that the fact that the Commission has to put things in a diplomatic way and not seek to be polemic has an important effect on our discourse and on the debate in general" – Hugues Feltesse

Mr Feltesse also commented that:

"the Peer Review process and the Joint Inclusion Report (the draft of which should be published in early December 2003) are the tools with which the Commission can comment on the work of Member States on social inclusion. But Member States have all made an effort because they do not want to look bad in front of their peers."

FEANTSA looks forward to the Peer Review process that should highlight at least one national policy to combat homelessness – please watch FEANTSA's web site for more information on this issue. FEANTSA will continue to ask that the European Commission take up a stronger role in encouraging Member States to work with all relevant partners in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

FEANTSA has learned that the Commission's Peer Review project has selected the United Kingdom to put forward a policy designed to fight homelessness for review. As yet we do not have many details, but FEANTSA hopes that the lack of networking with NGOs is one of the important issues raised through this process. FEANTSA looks forward to the opportunity to participate in this Review and looks to the European Commission to facilitate the cooperation between the Member States and relevant European and national networks. ●



THE IGLOO VENTURE Partnerships for sustainable networking

By Michel Mercadié, Vice-President of FEANTSA

Apart from their central merit - namely, as effective means for delivering inclusion in all respects for homeless people most out of touch with employment - IGLOO programmes exemplify the conditions needed for effective, sustainable networking.

But it is a venture in the fullest sense because, since first being launched at European level in 1993, the IGLOO programme has been run in national flavours in most Member States of the EU with varying outcomes. Even though now defunct for lack of funding, the European platform is still cited in EU and Council of Europe documents as an example of "good practice". But IGLOO is still going in six Member States. National platforms have been formed in Spain, France (with public partners on-board), Greece, Italy, Portugal and Belgium, and some have spun-off dynamic local platforms.

I shall first review the principles that underpin IGLOO and describe its constituent networks, then look at what made this innovative grass-roots scheme a success.

A PROGRAMME INITIATED BY CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL PARTNERS.

The IGLOO programme for "Global Integration through Housing and Jobs" was set up in 1993 through a partnership between three European networks: CECODHAS*, FEANTSA and the ETUC*. The three organizations set out their founding principles in an IGLOO Charter, namely national and regional partnership, quality labelling of projects, rules for project implementation (training or employment, social support, construction or renovation and evaluation), and following an integrated approach.

The key aim was to establish networking between the actors to:

- build or rehabilitate temporary or permanent homes adapted to those excluded from housing (including social housing) and jobs, while respecting the principle of social diversity in occupied areas and integration for the new inhabitants;
- develop adapted or consolidated jobs through professional training in construction or renovation trades; and
- provide social support systems adapted to the needs of the target groups involved in the project.

What helped national and regional projects to succeed was the policy of exchanging information and experience, building awareness among the three partners' national members, and between-network and -country transfers of know-how.

THE IGLOO EUROPEAN NETWORK

The IGLOO European network's main strengths were that the idea was right, and the partners were widely representative. In all logic, the only way to tackle a multifactorial problem was through a holistic approach. By bringing the networks representing all social housing providers (CECODHAS), all homeless service providers (support and integration), and trade unions together at the top level, the IGLOO network was delivering a ground-breaking and relevant response.

But a network must have funds to act with, even if not for project implementation.

The European platform first received funding from the "Foundation for the progress of humankind" (1994/95), then, with Commission support, from the European Social Fund (ESF) (article 6 "Sources of new jobs").

Networking keeps costs down, because each partner contributes the time of its own staff and management. But to do its job properly, the network still needs at least basic funds. The IGLOO budget for 1998 offers an example.

Staff costs:	117 000 ecu / 543568
Seminars:	146 000 ecu
Management and labelling:	23 400 ecu
Publications and information:	12 875 ecu
Consultancy funds:	165 780 ecu
Management expenses:	543 568 ecu.

Lack of core funding is why the network has been dormant for the past three years, after having helped implement projects in 10 of the 15 EU countries. Granted, it is still going in some countries like France and Spain, but it can no longer spin-off new platforms, especially in the countries poised to join the EU where there is a high level of interest in the IGLOO concept and achievements. Nor is it any longer capable of syndicating at European level what is still happening in countries where national platforms are still going. That shows where European funding through transnational programmes falls down. Three years is not long enough; two phases are not needed; and it is not just three or four but most member countries that need to be involved! The ESF must be sufficiently adaptable to ensure the sustainability of the "good practices" we hear so much about! What is the point of innovating if the good practices wither and die?

The IGLOO programme for "Global Integration through Housing and Jobs" was set up in 1993 through a partnership between three European networks: CECODHAS, FEANTSA and the ETUC.



A NATIONAL IGLOO PLATFORM: IGLOO FRANCE.

The partners in France: Obviously, these include the European members' French partners, FNARS*, the Union des Sociétés de HLM*, and three of the big French trade unions - the CFDT, CFTC and FO. These form the steering committee and work together under a cooperation agreement. For the first three years, IGLOO-France had the same funding as the European Network (ESF Article 6). Budgets:

The total budget was 2 145 400 €, broken down as follows:

- Research/piloting: (expertise, seminars, computing): 989 400 €
- Exchanges of experience (publications, seminar, computing, promotion): 558 000 €.
- Follow-up and evaluation (management committee and labelling, coordination): 306 000 €.
- Management: : 292 000 €.

The current budget is approximately 140 000 €, broken down into:

Secretariat and coordination	€62 000
Communication	€18 000
Seminars and working groups	€34 000
Engineering	€23 000
Support for local projects	€6 000

It is 2/3 funded by the partners. This under-funding is stopping new project promoters from being helped!

Objectives:

- To support project promoters, stimulate initiatives by spinning-off successful, IGLOO-labelled schemes.
- To jointly address institutional, legal, financial and educational issues.
- To raise awareness among officials of public agencies.
- To support voluntary sector training businesses.
- To frame policy proposals.

Evaluation:

Networking has helped increase the number of projects and actors liable to sponsor new projects while maintaining consistency of quality. It has built up a real project momentum from the initial concept.

Network expansion:

One final feature of the French national network must be underlined: the inclusiveness of the partnership, which has brought in public authorities and operational funding agencies like the Department of Construction, Social Welfare Fund and the Caisse des Dépôts* (CDC).

A REGIONAL PLATFORM: IGLOO Nord-Pas de Calais. (France)

The partnership consists of the regional correspondents of the national partners - Fnars (FEANTSA), 6 trade unions (ETUC) and a social housing provider (CECODHAS). But it also includes new public partners like two town councils, the county council, regional council and Lille metropolitan council, plus other voluntary organizations. This broad-spectrum partnership facilitates access to social welfare budget funds and gives the platform the firm financial and administrative base it needs.

However, its approach remains true to the IGLOO label. Each project is vetted against objective criteria:

- the engagement and sense of purpose of the individuals or families concerned, having regard to their social situation, skills and employment situation;
- the accommodation's technical specifications;
- the project's financial and economic feasibility;
- the social response it delivers;
- its practical implementation, including in particular integration clauses, coordination with the social housing provider, social support, sustainable development and the project group leadership.

These are all compelling arguments why FEANTSA wants to revive IGLOO-Europe with partners and countries that are interested in taking the IGLOO venture into a new phase. ●

* Explanatory notes:

CECODHAS: European Liaison Committee for Social Housing. 47 member organizations; 35 million social homes; 100 million tenants.

ETUC: European Trade Union Confederation. 59 national or regional trade union federations; 53 million members.

FNARS: Fédération nationale des associations pour l'insertion sociale (a federation of social welfare charities); 22 regional associations; 650 member associations, 1500 services; over 10 000 employees, more than 500 000 clients helped each year.



Networking in Spain to Fight Homelessness

By Antonio Rodríguez García, FACIAM



The services, centres and projects for the sector working with the homeless in Spain, are characterised by the following actions:

- A large part of the services and recourses are in the hands of the private sector (meaning the voluntary and not for profit sector) or as a result of social initiatives: only 15% is managed by the Public Authorities. If we take into account the number of emergency accommodation places, only 25% are in the hands of the various public authorities. Although there are differences between the different Self-governing Communities as to the degree of participation by the public sector, in most cases, the presence of the public authorities does not exceed 37%.
- Within the private sector, the presence of the Catholic Church is very important, amounting to 75% of the total. And within the church itself, the most significant involvement is that of Caritas, both in the number of services provided at local level, and its organisation at national level. In many small towns and medium-sized cities, Caritas is the main and at times, the sole organisation, both in terms of the services it provides and the campaigns it pursues to alert public opinion to the phenomenon.
- The public responsibility for the development of social services has been transferred completely to the Self-governing Communities. Each region has been enacting its own laws on Social Services and charting its own social policies on the matter. And although it is certain that the development has followed some more or less common guidelines set by the Spanish central government, there are important differences in terms of requirements, rights and social services. And this also affects the homeless: to be able to receive the Minimum Integration Income (known by the Spanish acronym RMI), one must have been registered for 5 years in the Basque Region and for 1 year in Madrid.
- State plans have been drawn up to guarantee, throughout Spain, certain homogeneous social services (Concerted Action Plan), but they have not functioned properly in the sector working with the homeless.
- In accordance with the legal rules in force, the services for the homeless are a fundamental responsibility of the local town councils and corporations. This has led into a wide variety of situations as to the provision of services and the sensitivity to the phenomenon: there are town councils with a greater sense of responsibility (generally large and medium-sized cities), and many others where the problem is ostensibly misunderstood and left to charity institutions.

In light of this, networking in Spain, in my opinion, has the following characteristics:

- In many small and medium-sized cities, Caritas is the only entity that cares for the homeless and handles the coordination, at local level, with the local authorities (which are often insensitive to the problem) and other sectors, where they exist. "Caritas Nacional" has been producing material on how to intervene in this sector, creating social action models based on social integration, and supervising the various local Caritas branches. These materials are very interesting, but often are followed up in unequal measure by local chapters of Caritas which are the ones entrusted with the implementation, persisting with highly assistance oriented actions in many cases.

- This strong regional identity and awareness of local bodies in Spain has a great influence on the difficulty of creating networks at the national, as well as the regional level, in my opinion. Although inter-regional platforms have been created (the Northern Platform, comprising private and public institutions in the north of Spain, were created several years ago), and we are exchanging information and pay visits on location, it does not function as an authentic cooperation network, although it is possible that we will make progress on this front.
- Conversely, networks do exist at local levels, and are successful to a greater or lesser degree, in which the public sector participates as well. In recent years, some cities have seen the creation of coordination models which are very interesting and serve as a model for other places.
- In some cities, like in Vitoria, there is a strong commitment on the part of the town council to create services and support for the private sector working with the homeless. In this case, it is the same town council that is promoting the creation of services and establishing the networking with private centres, characterised by strong public awareness and close coordination with the general public social services. Yet this is the exception, rather than the rule.

In what follows, I will expound some of the models operating in a local network in Spain that may prove interesting:

- **Madrid.** FACIAM, a federation that comprises a good part of the private institutions that provide housing or accommodation services, works in close cooperation with the Madrid town council, which also has accommodation services. Since 1998, there has been a system of referring people to each centre or hostel, so that a person that has been cared for in a centre, in general the person is referred to another service, to which he or she might not have thought to address themselves. When a person arrives at a service, he or she might be accepted even if the service does not offer a programme that is specific to his or her needs. The aim of this system is to avoid a rotation of people between the shelters, by having each centre proceed to full integration. This system has entailed the creation of a single database managed by Caritas and the recognition, with due respect for the differences between centres, of the social intervention processes. We are now revising this system, as there have been problems for so many years; and in many cases, there has been no adequate integral intervention. Yet everybody believes that the referral system is positive, because it has prevented indiscriminate rotation, in the same city, of the homeless among services and centres, and has assigned a social worker per person: before, certain people could have up to five social workers working with the same person, one for each centre.

In connection with the "cold campaign", a supervisory committee was created, composed largely of the private sector working with the homeless, as well as FACIAM and civil servants from the Madrid town council. Meetings are held frequently that deal with the problems facing the homeless and the institutions working with them. Recently, specific committees based on different aspects of service provision (shelters, canteen, street work, etc.) have been created to make proposals to the political authorities. A document entitled "Analysis and Proposals" was recently drawn up and we are currently presenting it to the authorities.



In spite of the progress made, however, there is a lot to be done and to be discussed as to the financing of the resources and services, the establishment of other new centres of more modest dimensions and low demands, the recognition of the social intervention processes, and the creation of resources specialised in housing and employment.

- **Zaragoza**, 1,500,000 inhabitants. **“Coordinator of centres and services working with the homeless.”**

This is a model that emerged at the end of the 1980s as a result of the concern of the centres that offered various services to homeless people in the municipality of Zaragoza. The lack of coordination tended to perpetuate homeless situations, did not promote any knowledge of the real needs of the person, and care was not optimal, as the same answers were geared to different problems. Although it stems from **private initiative**, the network inherently provides for continuous coordination with the various **public authorities**. Nine entities, including projects by the town council itself, form part of this network.

The stated **aim** of the coordinator is greater efficiency in actions with transients and the homeless. To this end, the **objectives** set are: collect and arrange personal data (always ensuring that the information is treated with confidentiality): diagnosing, anticipating and developing a follow-up of said data; specialising and focusing on specific sectors the services of each centre in the municipality. This process is not limited only to the need for housing, but extends to any area susceptible for action, such as training, spare and free time, nutrition, as well as the specialised centres and hostels, and residential models.

The working **methodology** comprises a series of minimum homogenous criteria (put down in writing) for carrying out diagnoses and charting and evaluating itineraries. This information is channelled by the Centre for Information and Reception of Transients (known by the Spanish Acronym **CIAT**), which receives, organises and provides codified information in a network, and provides technical support to the services. This Reception Team is the effectiveness channel of the “unitary processes.” The principle is conceived as rotating management by the members. During

the period that has been in operation, it has been managed by The Diocesan Caritas and located at its seat, although it can count on the advice and intervention of the various entities that are members of the coordinating body.

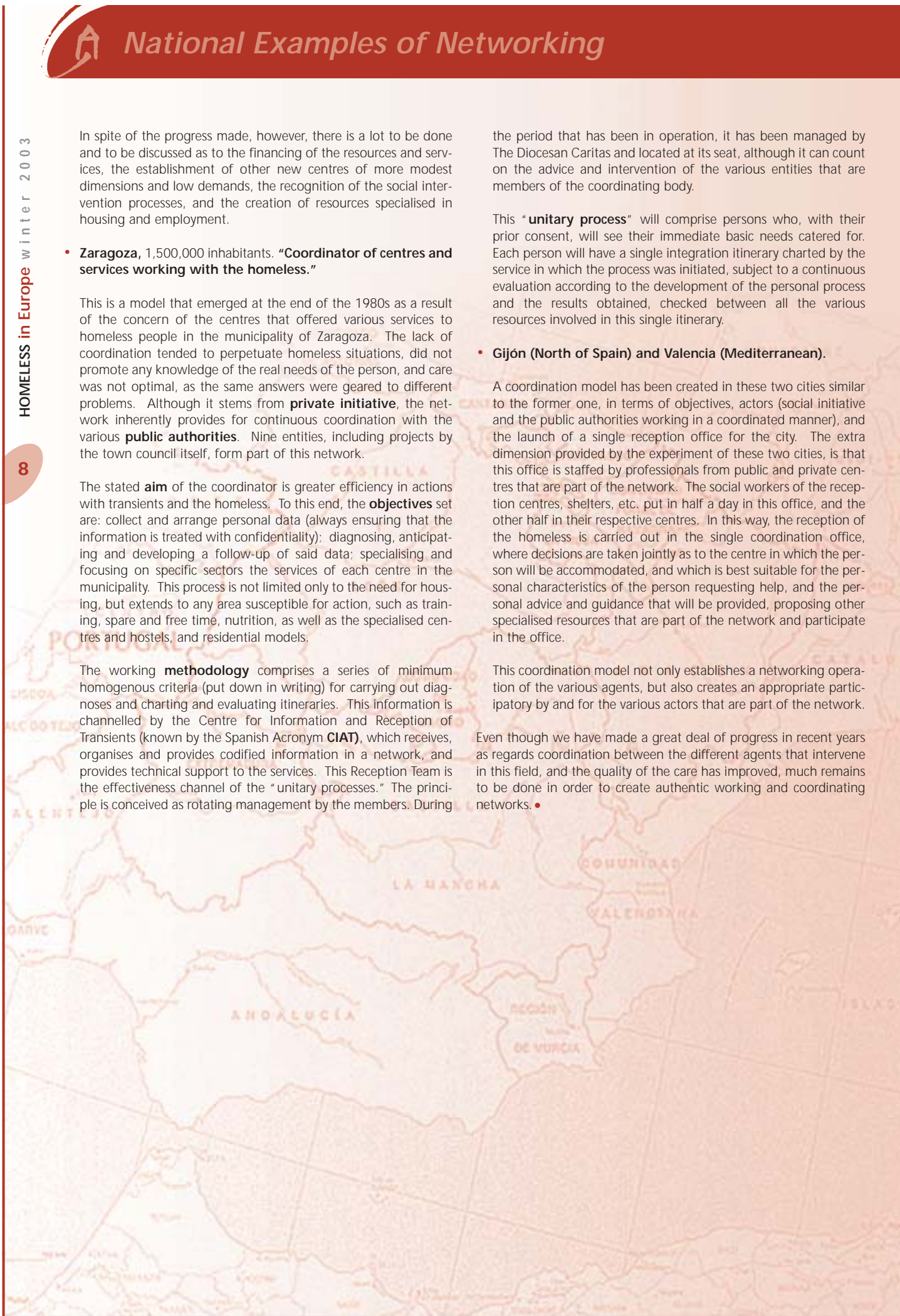
This “**unitary process**” will comprise persons who, with their prior consent, will see their immediate basic needs catered for. Each person will have a single integration itinerary charted by the service in which the process was initiated, subject to a continuous evaluation according to the development of the personal process and the results obtained, checked between all the various resources involved in this single itinerary.

- **Gijón (North of Spain) and Valencia (Mediterranean).**

A coordination model has been created in these two cities similar to the former one, in terms of objectives, actors (social initiative and the public authorities working in a coordinated manner), and the launch of a single reception office for the city. The extra dimension provided by the experiment of these two cities, is that this office is staffed by professionals from public and private centres that are part of the network. The social workers of the reception centres, shelters, etc. put in half a day in this office, and the other half in their respective centres. In this way, the reception of the homeless is carried out in the single coordination office, where decisions are taken jointly as to the centre in which the person will be accommodated, and which is best suitable for the personal characteristics of the person requesting help, and the personal advice and guidance that will be provided, proposing other specialised resources that are part of the network and participate in the office.

This coordination model not only establishes a networking operation of the various agents, but also creates an appropriate participatory by and for the various actors that are part of the network.

Even though we have made a great deal of progress in recent years as regards coordination between the different agents that intervene in this field, and the quality of the care has improved, much remains to be done in order to create authentic working and coordinating networks. •





Cooperation between the public authorities and NGOs for a common effort against homelessness in Denmark



By **Arne Jacobsen** (*member of FEANTSA's Administrative Council*)
SBS §94, Denmark

In Denmark the different political parties back up initiatives concerning actions against homelessness. Throughout the political spectrum it is agreed upon that the support of those who are worst off is important. At the same time there is the neo-liberal political trend which almost expects the tasks to be carried out by NGOs.

Concerning homelessness responsibility is divided between the state, the counties, and the municipalities. But also a wide range of voluntary organisations (NGOs) cooperates, because in Denmark it is a tradition that the public authorities have a written agreement to cooperate with the voluntary organisations (NGOs).

Through legislation the state sets the framework for the obligations the counties and the municipalities have to follow, and they themselves decide how to solve the problems - partly by making agreements with voluntary organisations (NGOs).

Besides, the state plays an economic role by the fact that the counties are reimbursed 50% of the money spent on the fight against homelessness. On top of this considerable financial support the state also contributes to the solving of specific tasks with funds.

The rapid development over the last decade to support homeless and marginalized people is mainly the result of action taken by the state and its financial support. The state has indicated priority areas where it was important to do something and it has supported these efforts financially. Following the announcements from the state, the counties, the municipalities, and the NGOs have subsequently applied for money from the Ministry of Social Affairs (the state) to meet the challenges, and the process of development started.

For the last decade the development has gone in the direction to create different ways of housing to meet as many different needs as possible. There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of the work, so that homeless people themselves become more active partners in dealing with the problems. Earlier the problems were solved for the homeless people. Nowadays the problems are solved together with the homeless people. This demands a change of attitude, and it demands higher professional skills among the staff. While users have become far more diverse (eg. more immigrants) the services have had to adapt to the ongoing process of development. The key words today are flexibility and continuous adaptability.

How do you find out how to improve the situation for homeless and marginalized people? This is a hard question to answer. Many partners have a say in this process. The press plays a part, public opinion, and also the NGOs have the possibility to influence how to define the tasks, and how the challenges are met. The counties and the municipalities have taken the initiative to create fora to allow the different partners to maintain a dialogue in order to discuss changing needs.

The role of the counties is to ensure that there is the sufficient number of services to fulfil the commitments set by the state. The counties pay the other half of the financing (50%).

The commitment of the municipalities is to help the citizens who do not cope themselves, offer them housing, and take care of ongoing case work.

Concerning the services the municipalities cooperate with the different social institutions in every single case, while the running costs of the institutions is equally shared between the state and the county.

The capital city, Copenhagen, is a special administrative unit. It is both a county and a municipality, and as more than a third of the homeless people in Denmark are concentrated in Copenhagen, this city has special challenges.

Earlier the problems were solved for the homeless people. Nowadays the problems are solved together with the homeless people.



To understand the reasons behind the current composition of services for the homeless, where the public organised social services and the social services organised by the NGOs are equally shared almost equally, it is necessary to go back in history. At the end of the 19th Century the commitments that the public authorities undertook towards the poor and marginalized were rather limited. The wide scale misery that could be witnessed in that period in the cities caused indignation especially among Christian associations who almost felt a vocation to solve the problems of the poor and alleviate the miserable conditions faced by so many people. Therefore people started helping in the context of the Christian associations. In that way a range of organisations arose: The Kirkens Korshær, Arbejdet Adler, Missionen blandt Hjemløse (the Mission among Homeless), Frelsens Hær (Salvation Army) etc. Also other associations are based on Christian thoughts, and they did not originally work among the homeless, some have integrated services for the homeless in their line of work, e.g. KFUM (YMCA) and KFUK (YWCA).

Originally the elements of religious revival in the work of the associations was evident, but over the course of the 20th Century these elements faded out. Today NGOs still acknowledge their origins, but none of them have religious revival in their programmes. Nowadays the work is more practically oriented and is aimed getting people back on their feet again.

If certain associations still have religious elements in their programme, it is optional for the users of the social services to participate.

The cooperation between the NGOs and the public authorities is based on an agreement in which the framework for the objective are determined. The authorities are committed to cover the costs. In this way the work is done by the NGOs, but the necessary financing comes from public money.

Possibly the reason why the NGOs contribute such large number of services in the homeless sector can be found in the fact that it is the public authorities who pay the costs.

Are there no problems at all in the cooperation between the public authorities and the NGOs?

The answer to that question really depends on who you ask: Some NGOs only reluctantly make agreements because by doing that they feel that they have given up the possibility of deciding themselves and instead have transferred it to the public authorities who because they pay the costs, have great influence on how the challenges are solved. But there are also NGOs who consider the financial ties relatively unproblematic, yet perhaps this is a way of making a virtue of a necessity?

It is a fact that in Denmark it would be almost impossible to run social services without the financial support from the authorities. The tax rate is so high in Denmark that it is acknowledged that financial support to the marginalized is a public responsibility.

Today in Denmark, it would be almost impossible to collect the necessary money to create acceptable services for the homeless on a voluntary/donation basis.

Another weakness concerning the financing of the services is that the state with its big share of funding often puts conditions on the local political authorities (county, municipality) to pay part of the costs. Typically the local authorities must put up 50% before the state (The Ministry of Social Affairs) gives its support. This means that the municipalities who give low priority to the work for the homeless have a tendency not to apply for the funding. In the long run it could result in the homeless and marginalized being offered very different possibilities in the various regions, even though Denmark is a very small country.

Nowadays there is a broad recognition that it demands many partners to stop the growth of the marginalized and the homeless populations. It is a utopian thought that within a short time, the need to provide services for this group of people will be eliminated; because of the macro-financial mechanisms in our society (on national, EU- and global level) contribute to marginalization even in a prosperous society like Denmark. •



Partnerships and Networking in the UK: FEANTSA member OSW

By **Linda Butcher**, Chief Executive Off the Streets and into Work (OSW), London

'...the disparate services in any local area, who are in contact with homeless people or those at risk of it, must work effectively together. This includes basic coordination of services to avoid duplication and the sharing of information about clients in order to address needs.'

(*More Than a Roof: A Report into Tackling Homelessness*, UK Government's Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002)

Background

OSW is a London-based not-for-profit organisation¹ that coordinates training and employment services for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; promotes and supports best practice; and develops cross-sector linkages. We are a unique agency – there is no-one quite like us in the UK, or even Europe. Our model, which operates through partnerships and networks, is one that has proven to be highly effective.

OSW was set up in 1995. There were already a lot of homelessness agencies in existence at that point – the UK, and London in particular, has a significant not-for-profit sector, with a great deal of expertise in homelessness. However, despite the range of support available for homeless people, there was a particular gap in services back then. While most homelessness agencies were not able to meet the training and employment needs of their clients, the education and training sector did not have the expertise to work effectively with homeless people.

We were initially set up as a small, time-limited project, which brought together the expertise of a dozen agencies from the not-for-profit, public and private sectors. All the sectors and agencies had their own specialisms and areas of expertise, and by bringing this diversity of imagination and commitment together, OSW created a 'joined-up' approach. The result was a programme that provided, for the first time, a range of coordinated training and employment services for homeless people in central London.

The project grew, and the approach was so successful that in 1999 we became a fully-fledged, independent charity, and our services were expanded to cover the whole of London. Four years on, our training and employment services remain London-based, but our strategic developments now

cover the UK and Europe as well. There are now more than 100 agencies involved on our board, working groups and projects. OSW funds and coordinates many of the training and employment services of 13 service-providers working with homeless people across London. The driving force behind the approach is to provide people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with a programme of services that meets identified needs and offers support to break out of poverty and exclusion.

Some of the benefits of working in partnership

The benefits of a partnership approach were, and are still clear:-

- It can ensure diversity, as there is no 'one size fits all' solution for the individuals we work with
- It recognises that no one agency or sector has all the answers
- It reduces duplication and competition
- It maximises resources and expertise
- It gives us a more powerful voice and evidence base

The OSW partnership has grown and evolved over the last few years, and we know that it is going to continue to do so. The UK Government has introduced a range of measures that have encouraged, urged or even required the not-for-profit and other sectors to work in partnership. Much of the statutory funding that is available to the public and not-for-profit sectors requires them to form active, practical or strategic partnerships.

With an excellent track record in creating and mobilising partnerships and networks, and delivering training and employment services that meet the identified needs of homeless people, OSW is well-placed to move forward within the current policy and funding agenda.

Examples of OSW's partnership working and networks

OSW services

Our services operate through 13 different homelessness and training agencies across London. OSW strategically plans and then provides funding for the services that are required in different 'sub-regions' of London. All of our services are integrated, to form a 'progression route' out of homelessness and into training or employment, or towards employability. Individuals can access different services, for different needs, and know that they are linked to provide a high quality and coordinated set of interventions.

OSW Link

A crucial part of coordinating and monitoring services is OSWLink, our on-line client monitoring database. It gives our service providers an effective tool to record and share vital information about the demographics of those individuals accessing our programme.

We now have database records on over 7,000 people, detailing what services they accessed, how they progressed, how long they were on our programme, and the outcomes that were achieved. OSWLink is central to our current research study, which is identifying more precisely the barriers to employment that homeless people face, which services can best support people to overcome these, the length of time they are needed, and how much it costs to provide them. This coordinated, partnership approach to recording and sharing data has clear and tangible benefits:

- for service users, because it helps us to identify what services make the greatest impact, as well as areas for improvement;
- for service providers, who can access a common client recording system, receive



training for their staff in how to use it, and be able to effectively monitor their own project within the OSW programme;

- for OSW, as the coordinating body, as it gives us detailed information to enable evidence-based programme planning and make funding decisions, as well as providing the core data for our research work;
- for policy-makers and funders, as we can make recommendations to them based on solid evidence and detailed programme data.

Making Links

We want to support our service users to move on from homelessness services when they are ready to, and to simplify routes into 'mainstream' (post-compulsory) education². Further education colleges recognise that they have less experience and expertise in working with socially excluded individuals such as homeless people. And the not-for-profit sector recognises that colleges offer homeless people greater teaching expertise in a diverse range of areas, and an opportunity to move towards more 'included' lifestyles. So we set up a project called Making Links, a strategic partnership between the homelessness and further education sectors in London. This has been highly effective in breaking down some of the barriers that have existed between the two sectors, and is making great strides in improving access to mainstream education for homeless people. Neither sector could have achieved that on its own.

OSW Online Employability Network (OEN)

Although our services operate only in London, our belief in information-sharing, and our role in supporting other agencies who deliver training and employment services to homeless people, has led us to develop online networking. We have brought together almost 100 agencies from across the UK and Europe into our OEN. It operates through email, and allows us to gather and disseminate information and ideas from employability projects working with homeless individuals. The OEN aims to enable agencies to avoid making the mistakes that others have already made, or steer their services towards methods that have been shown to work. It is impossible to measure how much time, energy, and expense has been saved by developing such a simple project.

For more information about:

OSW, please visit <http://www.osw.org.uk>

Making Links, please visit <http://www.osw.org.uk/capacity/makinglinks.asp>

The Homeless London website, please visit <http://www.homelesslondon.org.uk>

Homeless Employment, Advice and Training (HEAT) Directory/ Homeless London website

The HEAT Directory and the Homeless London website are key parts of the coordination and integration that are vital to providing joined-up, effective and lasting solutions to homelessness. OSW's HEAT directory gives people access to information on a wide range of training, education and employment services in London, creating greater choice for homeless individuals and better referral knowledge for those who work with them. Our aim in signposting *all* learning-related provision for homeless people, not just OSW's, is to ensure that people know what is on offer, and can directly access the services that best helps them to achieve their goals.

Indeed, part of the London Mayor's strategy for tackling homelessness in the capital is to ensure that information about services is easily available. The Mayor's office initiated and funded the development of Homeless London, a fully searchable website of all services available to homeless people in the region. We have worked in partnership with them to make the information in the HEAT Directory available on the Homeless London website. Again, the benefits of partnership are clear to us – joint-working in this way has resulted in easy access to relevant, comprehensive information, and the sharing and use of resources to greatest effect.

Some lessons we've learnt at OSW

There are many benefits to working in partnership – in particular for the individuals our services aim to support. However, there are certainly some potential drawbacks to working with other agencies, whether in strategic or practical partnerships or in less formal networks:

- Agencies have to be clear about their **reasons for entering into partnership** – will it further your objectives? Will it allow you to achieve something that you would not be able to do, or not do as well, in isolation?
- You only get what you put in. Working with other agencies or sectors requires real **commitment** and can be hugely resource-intensive. You have to put time and energy in. Creating partnerships is the easy part - maintaining and developing them can be harder.

- You have to appreciate and deal with the **different cultures** and ways of working that others may have.

- There has to be **equality** in the partnership. All those involved need to agree on what it is that they should put in, and what they can expect to get out of it.

- The **geographical dispersal** of any partnership calls for a great deal of organisational ability. Make time for it, plan it, communicate constantly.

- While there is broad agreement and support for the principle of partnership working, it is very difficult to get **funding** for what agencies like OSW do - being the partnership coordinator, whose role it is to maximise resources and generate something that is far bigger than the sum of its parts. Attracting resources for making partnerships work can be a real challenge.

- Although agencies will work in partnership, they may also compete with one another, as well as with a coordinating body like OSW, when it comes to funding. Although **competition** can militate against the spirit of partnership working, access to funding is such that there is no simple answer to avoiding competition sometimes.

- It is all too easy for a partnership to become a **cartel**, and lose sight of why it was actually formed. Partnership working can potentially distract your attention from what you are trying to achieve 'on the ground'. Paramount to your considerations of entering into any partnership must be the benefit to your service users. And you will need to regularly review your partnership arrangements to ensure that it is still meeting that objective, and doesn't become solely about servicing individual partners' needs.

And finally...

Despite the potential drawbacks, the case for partnership working is highly compelling. It enriches your services and your ways of working; it gives you more weight, because you have the backing of a wider network; it reduces duplication, therefore maximising your resources effectively and increasing your credibility; ultimately, and most importantly, it can enable you to make a greater impact on homelessness. •

¹ In the UK not-for-profit organisations are generally referred to as charities or as the voluntary sector.

² Post-compulsory education (PCE) in England ends at 16 years. Mainstream PCE providers include institutions known as further education colleges.



Work as a tool for building cooperative relationships in the Czech Republic



By Petr Janousek, *Chairman of Chairman of the Association of Hostels for the Homeless in the Czech Republic (S.A.D.)*

During the international conference on 'Building European Partnerships in the Fight Against Homelessness' last year, which S.A.D. (the Association of Hostels for the Homeless in the Czech Republic) prepared together with Nadeje (Hope) and Armada spasy (Salvation Army) we visited Barka Foundation for Mutual Help (also a FEANTSA) in Poland. This visit was an excellent experience for me. I found out that our way of helping the homeless providing accommodation and food in the first instance – is not always the best approach. During the visit to Barka, I realized that to provide work for those who are at the bottom of the community in fact helps them to find a purpose in life. So when I got back to Brno, Czech Republic I started to think, what kind of work we can provide for our clients?

We came up with an idea to clean the streets around our hostel. And I am not talking about one or two streets, but a whole area – about 10 streets. The only problem was, what to do with the garbage that we collect? In the Czech Republic the owner of a building is responsible for cleaning the sidewalks around the building and cities are responsible for cleaning the streets. So we went to the municipal office responsible for cleaning the streets in the area around the hostel. We came to an agreement that we will clean 10 streets once a week and the city will take care of picking up the garbage. It was very cheap for them. Our clients worked about two hours per day and we provided services like hot lunches, night shelter, free clothing, etc. Our clients were happy because they had something to do and it was useful as well. The work was not hard and they got some reward.

When I write it like this, it sounds easy, but there were a lot of problems and also a lot of benefits.

So, first of all it was necessary to convince the city office to co-operate with us. When we offered them this kind of contract, they were very suspicious. So we found an agreement by starting with just a one day of work. It was a chance for us to show the local authorities, that we know how to work with our clients, and that our clients are capable of achieving a great deal if there is proper motivation. That day was we were set to clean one particular place, which was in a big mess. Our task was to collect all the garbage in plastic bags and place them all in one spot. The city then sent a little lorry to take away the rubbish bags. Because of this one day of work, the city decided to start a work relationship with us and we worked out a plan for cleaning 10 streets during one week, so that every week all streets would be cleaned at least once. Our clients were provided with red vests with the Salvation Army's logo which signalled to the public that they were working with an organisation for the community, and which also served as safety vests as they were working on the streets.

Representatives of the city were glad because of the condition of streets but also amazed that homeless people can be very useful. Through time we developed a very good relationship with the public authorities and now the doors into their offices are wide open for us. There was also a positive effect in the community around the hostel. You know, it is not easy and pleasant when there is a homeless hostel nearby your home. People think that such a place causes many troubles and I feel sometimes like a director of a nuclear plant (!). No one would be happy to live nearby such a place and all you can do is to try to do something for the people around you and try to change their attitudes. Cleaning the streets around the hostel was one of those projects, which helped to build a good opinion of the hostel.

Another example is just starting to develop. To take advantage of public relations we asked a local railroad station for a space in their building to set up a stand about the services we offer, and to serve as a point of contact for the homeless who 'live' in the station itself. Because the station usually rents out spaces, we offered to co-operate with the station authorities. We will clean the sidewalk around the station and the station will provide us with a place to present the Salvation Army for free.

It has proved much harder to motivate our clients to work in front of their own friends, but we are working on it. I would like to write here that this project is successful, but we are just at the beginning. On the other hand, it would be a perfect connection between 'paper' presentation and 'real work' presentation.

So what to say in the end? I believe that in any city you can find an opportunity to build a good relationship with different people through working with and for the community. It can be cleaning, it can be delivering different things (advertisement etc.) to homes, it can be developing parks and planting trees and flowers. You can also produce souvenir gifts with a symbol of your city that the local authorities can present to important visitors. There are many important visitors at a local level (often even international guests) and the city spends large sums of money every year for such a gifts and most of the time it is made by a local advertisement companies. If you prepare nice collection of such a gifts, then the mayor or other local officials can present the city not just as a city of industry, business or whatever, but also as a city, which supports social services. Some tips: don't forget to make sure that each item has a little label with your logo, address and indicates that it was made by the hands of homeless persons.

I wish you all a good luck in developing good relationships with local, regional and even national authorities through work with your clients. ●



Health and Homelessness: a big step forward in Scotland.



Interview with **Sue Irving**, *Coordinator of the Health and Homelessness Action Plans in Scotland*

Sue Irving, the Health and Homelessness Coordinator in Scotland, took some time to answer FEANTSA's questions in a telephone interview in November 2003.

FEANTSA: *The Scottish Executive has taken a strong leadership role in the fight against homelessness over the past few years. What was the background to the drafting of health and homeless action plans by local health boards?*

Sue Irving: In September 2001 the Scottish Executive issued guidance to the National Health Services in Scotland that placed new requirements on health boards (15 health boards are geographically organised to cover the whole of Scotland).

The Executive Health department issued Health and Homelessness Guidance that said to the health boards that it was no longer acceptable to not address the health needs of homeless people. The Health Boards were now required to give priority to homeless people in the way they deliver their services.

The Health Boards were asked to first produce Health and Homelessness Action Plans that would outline the strategy at local level for the action required. The Guidance said that all Boards had to conduct a needs assessment and look at what services were being used, what was not being used and what the Boards were going to do about it.

FEANTSA: *How long were the Health Boards given to draft the Health and Homelessness Action Plans?*

Sue Irving: The plans had to be in place by April 2002, which gave the Health Boards about six months from the publication of the Guidance to do the work, which was a bit short.

FEANTSA: *Did the Health Boards take the task seriously?*

The reality on April 1, 2002, was that only one Health and Homelessness Action Plan was ready. As the Plans started coming in afterwards, what we found was that they were not of a particularly high standard.

The task of producing the plans and getting to grips with homelessness in local areas was a really big task for the health boards because they hadn't thought about homeless people before.

FEANTSA: *How did the Scottish Executive react to the rather low standard of the Health and Homelessness Action Plans that were submitted?*

Sue Irving: We returned the Health and Homelessness Action Plans to the Health Boards to ask them to fill in the gaps. We were focused on not accepting just *any* kind of Plan. It had to be the *right* Plan, because if it wasn't, we were not going to change anything. Some Plans were just a token gesture, and we were not going to accept that.

It was a tough process, but it worked. The Plans that are in place are of a good standard, based on identified local need, and in time they will start to make a difference.

The downside however, is that producing a plan shouldn't be the end result.

FEANTSA: *Is the implementation of the plans monitored?*

Sue Irving: That's the role of the Health and Homelessness Steering Group which has found that the actual monitoring of the imple-

mentation of the Plans is an equally tough process and is very time consuming.

FEANTSA: *How does the Health and Homelessness Steering Group work?*

Sue Irving: The members of the Health and Homelessness Steering Group (which includes FEANTSA AC member, Robert Aldridge) come from the statutory sector, that is local authorities representations, from National Health Service representations, from different departments in the Scottish Executive, and from the voluntary sector.

The Group monitors the Plans and visits the health boards on a six monthly basis.

FEANTSA: *How are the local Health Boards doing? Are they successful in the implementation of their Plans?*

Sue Irving: We find that progress is slow, and I think that is to be expected. Improving the health of the whole population is a very, very slow process. Improving the health of a very disadvantaged group – such a homeless people – is an even more complex and long-term process. There are no quick fixes.

But we've made a good start.

FEANTSA: *Who is involved in the process?*

Sue Irving: The Health Boards had to take the lead role, but we asked that the local authorities be involved, in terms of housing, social work, etc. Another key partner had to be the voluntary sector. Those Health Boards who had never thought about the needs of homeless people needed the expertise of the voluntary sector which is much closer to homeless people and is better able to reflect the needs of homeless people. The voluntary sector's role was crucial, and it is something that we're monitoring through the implementation of the Plans to ensure that the involvement continues.

The other key partner was homeless people. Involvement on that level has proved quite a major task. It is pretty hard for big administrative organisations such as the National Health Service (Scotland) to get close to service users; but the Health Boards are working on it, and most have involved the voluntary sector. I feel there has to be some reality checks with the people who are receiving the service to see if it is making a difference or not. If not, it is not being done properly.

Health sector, local authorities, the voluntary sector and homeless people; they all have an equal role.

FEANTSA: *Were all the partners enthusiastic?*

Sue Irving: No – that's the easy answer. Are they still enthusiastic? Not all of them. I think underpinning a lot of the barriers, there was some unacknowledged issues around the deserving and the undeserving. From discussions I've had with various people in the health sector, I think that they struggle to balance all priorities that come out from the Scottish Executive.

I think it's easier to justify priorities that are more socially acceptable – cancer services, children's services. For example, in Scotland we have a huge problem with coronary heart disease. Life expectancy



amongst men is the lowest in Europe; so we are the sick person of Europe. The National Health Service is fairly focused on the whole population, and the particular targets set by the Scottish Executive: for example: increasing life expectancy, reducing cancer rates, reducing coronary heart disease rates, etc.

So putting homeless people in the middle of all of these priorities is difficult. It's difficult for some health boards to give that priority and give the focus that this policy needs.

We've had to work hard to bring people's hearts and minds on board. That's part of my job as a coordinator. To sell the policy, explain why it is important, to work with the National Health Service to recognise that this is a very marginalized, excluded group of people who have very complex needs and whose homelessness we are not going to resolve unless we address their health needs.

We've got all the Health Boards involved now.

FEANTSA: Was there any resistance from the other partners?

Sue Irving: Some frustrations arose from people who had been working with homeless people for years, and who had approached Health Boards to talk about homeless people and not been able to get anywhere. And then suddenly the Scottish Executive issues Guidance and the Health Boards turn around to the voluntary sector and say we want to talk to you about homelessness... So there might have been some hard words around some tables about the lack of engagement from Health Boards in the past. But overall there has been recognition from all partners that it is important that we're all working together now.

The partnerships are effective, some are better than others, but all the right people are sitting around the right tables and all focused on improving the health of homeless people.

FEANTSA: Do you feel that the leadership role taken by the Scottish Executive has helped to make implementation of this policy easier?

Sue Irving: Absolutely. There is no doubt in my mind that if the Scottish Executive had not taken the lead this policy would not have happened. Thinking back to before the policy existed, there were people doing work with homeless people in the health sector, but they were very isolated, very uncoordinated. It was individual health professionals who had an interest in this area who were engaging with homeless people, there were no organisations giving priority to a group of patients.

With the Scottish Executive coming on board and saying you have to do this, there is no choice, it is a policy by which we are requiring you to address the needs of this group of people, is what brought it all together.

FEANTSA: Are there similar developments elsewhere in the UK?

Sue Irving: In England, the UK government and the health sector, are making some steps in the right direction. But the government has not come out as an administration and told their health boards to give priority to homeless people. So there is not as yet a coordinated approach. That is not to say it might not happen, but until it is a national high-level policy it is not going to make a huge difference. The leadership really has to come from government in my view; that is key to what made it work in Scotland.

FEANTSA: How is this initiative linked to the Scottish Executive's Task Force on Homelessness?

Sue Irving: A lot of our current approach came from the Task Force, for example in terms of the approach to housing, the legislative

approach to homelessness, our health policy. The health activity is one part of the homelessness approach. The Health and Homelessness Plans help to support the legislation because it does not matter how many houses we have if people do not have the right support services, and that includes health services.

FEANTSA: Have you seen concrete improvements? Can you provide examples of good practice? Or is it too early to say?

Sue Irving: I think there are lots of good examples. I always hesitate to say that we are improving health, because that is such a long-term approach, to change the standard of a population's health, but I think there are some very good approaches. For example, Lothian NHS (including Edinburgh) is one of the biggest health boards in Scotland, has a lot of homeless people that are within its boundaries, and at the very highest level, the chairman of the Health Board has said he wants to champion this policy. I think that having that level of corporate support is ideal. If you can take it from the top and let that priority and that thinking about homelessness run right through an organisation, then in time, you can start to make sure that the individual health professional who comes into contact with a person who is homeless knows that this person is really important, their health is a priority for us, and we have to give them the absolute best service.

That corporate support is very important.

FEANTSA: Are there any examples of initiatives at local level?

Sue Irving: At local levels we're seeing some interesting health services and innovations that are starting to develop all across Scotland. Our geography makes this a very complex policy to deliver, because there are homeless people throughout Scotland, but some parts of Scotland are very remote.

Inverness, the Highlands. The NHS Highlands area is the size of Belgium!

Within that area, there are only three or four main centres of population. For anyone trying to get health services, regardless of their housing status, it is very challenging. It might be a long way to get to a doctor. If you are homeless in that area, even getting identified as homeless is difficult; getting services to that person is extremely difficult. Areas like that have to be really quite innovative. For me, that means making sure that mainstream health care has an awareness of homelessness and the needs of homeless people, so when someone is identified as being homeless with specific needs the health service is able to respond to that person appropriately.

FEANTSA: Has networking between different kinds of service providers enhanced the services? For example between the health services and the voluntary homeless sector.

Sue Irving: The biggest challenges are actually in the remote and rural areas. That is where the partnerships are absolutely crucial that people talk to each other and understand what homelessness means in their area.

Before the Plans, many of the health authorities were unaware of the scope of the problem.

The process of developing action plans involved finding out what homelessness meant for them locally. That was a really important task for the Health Boards to go through so that they understood what they were dealing with.

In some areas, where the original statements or Action Plans said "we don't have rough sleepers", people are now coming back and saying that actually, now that we've done the work, we're horrified to find that people actually do sleep rough in this area.



People are recognising the problem and realising we have to do something about it. So those processes, working with local authorities, working with the voluntary sector, and having that reality check with homeless people has been really important.

But it hasn't been easy.

FEANTSA: *Can you provide some examples of innovative approaches?*

Sue Irving: In many cases, they've found that health isn't a major priority for homeless people. But if you can find out what their priority is, and use that as a hook and get people into services, then there's an opportunity to engage and address health issues.

For example: Perth, a large town

Perth had a surprisingly high level of rough sleeping in and around the town. The health workers who were trying to engage with homeless people found it incredibly difficult. So what happened - it's common sense - is that the health services worked with the voluntary sector in partnership to open a day centre and open it early in the morning and provide a healthy breakfast. That was all. And it was open at the right time, in the right place, for anyone who had been sleeping rough to think, "right, I'll go there: it's warm and there's food."

The service met those priority needs for homeless people, but the health workers, along with the voluntary sector workers, were able to form relationships over the course of providing breakfast repeatedly. The health workers gradually introduced health services in a way that was non-threatening to people with whom they had built up trust and a relationship. So they were able to do some very good health improvement - and all they were doing was providing breakfast at the right time and the right place.

In Edinburgh, the capital

There is a particular group of people who are homeless and who have dogs. People working with the homeless found a huge problem with skin infestations. They were treating people who were going back onto the street and coming back re-infected. It was because it was their dog that was the source of the infection. So the obvious thing to do was to treat the dog. And that is what they're doing. They've set up a partnership with PDSA - the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals - it is a non-profit veterinary service. The health board have set up the partnership whereby the needs of the dogs are met, and at the same time, there are health workers present who can meet the needs of the dog's owner.

For people who won't invest in their own health, they are prepared to invest in their dog's health. It is a window of opportunity when someone turns up to get their dog treated for a health worker to then build a relationship and start to respond to the health needs of the owner.

FEANTSA: *Have you had to work to change attitudes in the health sector?*

Sue Irving: It is necessary to change the culture of GPs...some doctors simply refuse to treat homeless people.

One of my tasks for the coming year is to develop a training strategy for the health sector. Whilst part of the training will inevitably be aimed at frontline staff who come into contact with homeless people, some of it has to be about changing culture. Some things need to change to make mainstream health care accessible to homeless people.

Some of that needs to tap into wider training programmes. I've spoken to quite a number of medical students, because they're the GPs of the future. It's important to try to change their opinions now.

FEANTSA: *How do you feel about the progress that's been made so far?*

Sue Irving: It is important for people to recognise that we've not got it right yet. But what is right is having a policy. It is key that we have the right statements about priorities and where homeless people fit in our priorities as a country, and how we want to meet homeless people's needs and change the face of homelessness in Scotland in the coming years. It is a slow process, however. We're getting it right at the top level, but it's going to take time to shake down and change people's lives.

There's still a lot more work to do.

A key to all of this has been the Scottish Executive making policy and not leaving it to locally developed policies so we've been able to set standards and be clear that meeting the health needs of homeless people is not a choice, it is a requirement. Giving those clear messages that are backed up by the health minister, who is both publicly and privately very supportive of the policy and very concerned about homelessness in Scotland. If the messages are coming from him, followed through by the Steering Group, then that is powerful. His commitment and the Scottish Executive's commitment are very, very important. ●



Social action units (Relais Social) - networked engagement



In November 2003, FEANTSA met coordinator of the Liège social action unit, Yvon Henry, to talk about the unit's set-up and what it does. Networking is a long-established part of the Liège (and Belgian) scene, and the social action unit is the product of a joint engagement by public agencies (CPAS-public welfare centres, hospitals, psychiatric institutions) and private welfare groups that do street and night work with different marginalized groups to work together to come up with more than "sticking plaster" solutions. But it was mainly public initiative driven by Walloon Minister Detienne that got the social action unit started, and public sector support that keeps it going. It sets out to develop socially supportive actions to help people break out of the crisis cycle of life and guide them towards social, cultural and occupational integration so that they move from being service users to taking their own destiny in hand.

Social action units have now become part and parcel of the Belgian social support landscape.

The idea of social action units dates back to 1999, when on a visit to the "SAMU Social" social mobile outreach unit in Paris, the Walloon Minister of Social Affairs, Thierry Detienne, saw that Belgium's marginalized communities needed services that went farther than just crisis care. Mr Detienne decided to set up panels of all the concerned actors to give thought to the concept. By 2001, two units had been set up - one in Liège, the other in Charleroi. The Minister's initiative has delivered results, and a series of others are now on the way. Social action units have now become part and parcel of the Belgian social support landscape, especially since Walloon government regulations were enacted in July 2003 giving them the legal framework necessary to take their activities forward.

But the partnerships have not all been plain sailing. Social action units are more than about just swapping ideas and experiences; setting up joint projects means that the partners have to commit practical actions, time and resources. To cap that, the partners come from all walks of life and philosophies (Christian beliefs and non-denominational, small and large-scale private and public organizations, professionals and voluntary workers, specialized and cross-cutting services), and can sometimes find it hard to pool their special skills.

What helps them overcome these stresses and strains, however, is their common cause: they all know that the social action unit enables them to do that "little bit more" than each could do alone. So each organization puts into the partnership the special kind of services that only it can provide. Their uniqueness is their strength. The activities run by the social action unit are mainly paid for out of public funds, and cut across such different issues as employment, health, housing, social and cultural integration, etc.

For more information, contact relaisocial@hotmail.com. The coordinator of the Liège social action unit is Yvon Henry, a former member of Minister Detienne's policy staff. •





Networking to Guarantee Rights – Greece takes first steps towards networking in the sphere of justice

The last edition of Homeless in Europe focused on the Right to Housing in Europe. During FEANTSA's European Conference on Networking to Fight Homelessness (October 10, 2003), a workshop was dedicated to learning about cooperation between the voluntary homeless sector and the justice system. Participants indicated that there is discrimination towards the homeless who find themselves in the justice system (e.g. ex-offenders) in general, and especially in terms of accessing their rights. Clearly this is a growth area for service provision for homeless people; though developed in some countries, in many Member States, there is no link between services for the homeless and the justice system.

NETWORKING ON JUSTICE ISSUES TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS:

The case of Greece

Kostas Kapellakis, lawyer, Marangopoulou Foundation

Homeless people confront many problems in all the fields of their life. The lack of permanent accommodation may lead these people to various penal law violations or to other forms of socially unaccepted behaviour. They may also face various forms of discrimination, because of their peculiar way of living, either by the police or by various public services.

Furthermore, homeless people might confront problems in the exercise of their civil rights. In civil code the residence is very important and it is related with the exercise of a wide spectrum of rights. According to the Greek civil code's provision nobody can have more than one residence, but in case somebody has not even one permanent residence many problems might occur. For example in the clause no 135 of civil procedure code, the document's notification to people, who have an unknown residence, is replaced by the publication in two daily newspapers, which does not guarantee the receiver's knowledge. This presumption of knowledge may deprive homeless people of the exercise of their rights.

In Greece there are not adequate housing provisions and social services available to people who are deprived of permanent accommodation. A limited number of organisations offer support and legal advice services for homeless

people. The Marangopoulou Foundation is one of them, offering legal advice for poor people, including homeless persons. Many of them are immigrants who in fact need also help regarding their legal documents. The Foundation provides a free service to those who need it and may receive referrals by other organisations. Legal aid on the other hand is not available by many organisations that provide health or social support services. Inevitably a co-operation is needed among public and non-governmental organisations in order to assist homeless people to tackle their problems with justice.

Recently, the Greek Ministry of Justice has drafted a bill concerning the legal aid for the citizens of low income, which is expected to affect positively homeless people. According to this bill's provision, a lawyer's payment will be covered by the state budget. This legal support will concern civil and penal cases. The above measure of welfare legislation has as a purpose to secure that citizens with low income will have a legal defence and whichever necessary support they need, in order to exercise their legal rights.

As a conclusion, it is clear that homelessness is a problem, which has significant impact to the legal status of homeless people. Apart from the various measures that have to be taken in order to assist homeless people to overpass this problem, their legal status has to be taken into consideration and has to be well protected. Undoubtedly legal aid will improve their legal status but this is not enough. The co-operation among different agencies in order to provide proper legal support and the elimination of any discrimination against homeless people as a priority for the legislator, are the challenges for our society. ●