

WORDS FROM EXPERIENCE

THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Today, I work as a professional helping people who are experiencing homelessness. I have been there myself; homeless, unsafe, and feeling that I was not part of society.

I moved into a housing unit that implements the Housing First model. The model unconditionally provides an independent rental flat with its own rental contract for a person experiencing homelessness and support if needed and wanted. The time I moved in, I didn't even want to belong to society or even be a part of it. Back then, I found living that way easier because society didn't treat me very kindly. After doing a lot of work on the road to recovery, I realized that the housing unit had a big impact on my life and who I am today: an adult who pays taxes and is interested in social impact. It was not realistic that I would have been jumping for joy involving myself in social impact immediately, right after getting my own place. This road to recovery, my personal growth, has happened slowly. It has taken its own time.

Building a long-term hope and motivation that has been done with me, has been crucial to my path. It hasn't been done by force, but by giving me an opportunity to enjoy and the possibility to influence my own environment.

I started my community work by cleaning and planting flowers in the housing unit's front yard. Doesn't sound big? For me, the experience was extremely meaningful! It was easier to do things for the common good than thinking about myself first. Only later I learned how to put myself first. And that's how I ended up leaving my earlier life, into a new and scary world I didn't know much about.

In Tupa, our organisation's temporary accommodation unit, the residents participate in environmental work to maintain the neighbourhood clean and safe, not only for themselves but also for others. Environmental work includes meeting and talking to neighbours, collecting drug paraphernalia and other trash, taking care of plants etc. I started doing small tasks myself in the housing unit to benefit the other residents, and I believe that the involvement and participation benefitted me, the residents of Tupa as well as everyone else in the society.

EDITORIAL



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Everyone has the ability to involve themselves; sometimes the complicity is visible even by sitting quietly in group activities. This may look minimalistic, especially from the point of view of measuring effectiveness, but for a person quietly participating in group activities just saying “Good morning” or asking for a cup of tea can be a big leap in involvement as well as in participation.

Nowadays, workwise, I try to motivate people so they can be active individuals in their own lives and in communities rather than being passive bystanders. In our organisation we have started group activities for women who have experienced homelessness. These women have participated in planning and organising the things they want to do with us for their own well-being, for example, beauty care, art classes, and cooking together. It is important for each of us to be able to be a part of deciding on things that concern us.

For many years I have wanted to help people who are still living the life I have lived. I feel that nowadays I am doing something meaningful for people who are experiencing what I used to. Their needs and voices should be heard and taken into account. Each of us should have a place in society, and the society needs all of us. After falling from the path, hope is the only thing that takes a person back on track.

