

Help the Man on the Street - Tools for Dealing with Homelessness

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Most homeless people live in Budapest, a city with more than 73,000 uninhabited dwellings. Homeless people usually support themselves from casual jobs, with only 10 percent engaged in begging, or garbage collection. Sixty percent of those who live permanently without home live in shelters, and only 23 percent live a completely 'vegetative lifestyle'. The change of regime in 1989 brought not only political but also social change: democracy expects people to invent themselves. Today's homeless people are clearly the products of democracy, a system in which a new life strategy is already needed. Oltalom is the flagship of homeless care in Hungary and they developed their own training program for the social care of the homeless in this present project. The program itself became an accredited training program available for social workers in Hungary.



The majority of homeless people have been living on the streets for 5-10 or more years, so their way of life has become "habitual", which is more difficult to move out of, and their level of demand has also decreased. The homeless face an enormous variety of difficulties on a day-to-day basis, from which it is difficult to break out because the problems are causally related to each other, forming a "vicious circle". Unemployment causes money and housing problems, which result in

poor mental and health conditions, i.e. **cumulative disadvantages**. Thus, these can only be helped and eliminated with complex assistance. At the forefront of the Society's care work is saving lives, turning to homeless people, and organizing the widest possible assistance.

We have recognized that in order to improve the quality of life of those receiving care, it is also necessary to raise the quality of the services provided by the association. Expand interdependent forms of care towards complex rehabilitation, employment and housing solutions.

As the homeless are not able to use public education services, participation fee courses, they have little information, they are weak advocates in the labour market, and their ability to adapt is low. Therefore, it has become necessary for care institutions to expand their services, to provide more and more than what is required by law as a basic service. Needs are also opportunities for **an organization to further build its activities and develop its human resources.**



Oltalom Charity Society and the John Wesley Theological College have jointly launched a further education program for those working in homeless care institutions.

The training program was implemented within the framework of the “OUR VALUE THE HUMAN, HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM”, with the support of the EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND. The program was implemented under the title “Help the Man on the Street”.

Oltalom Charity Society operates with **a very extensive support network and institutional system.** The **professionals** are social workers, social caregivers, mental health professionals, a significant part of them belong to the young age group, and **have a higher education degree. There was also a need for them to acquire new knowledge and to work professionally for homeless people.**

Homeless women, men, torn-up families, refugees, people in need of social assistance using the institutional services of the Association, inhabitants of the Magdolna quarter in district 8 of the capital **contact us with diverse problems.** We thought that help could only be complete if our staff was prepared and up to date on **personal assistance, community care,** employment, and protection of rights. In addition to general information and knowledge expansion, we also considered it necessary to get to know the **employment and social care opportunities** in Budapest.

The Association has gained a lot of application experience over the years in grant applications, but it was our first program supported by the EU, offering a lot of lessons in this field. During the planning of the application, we counted on the involvement of 51 professionals, and we thought that roughly 10% of the students would drop out, which meant 5 people, and we took into account the gradual expansion of the organization.

In January 2005, we were able to start the program. After a staff meeting with the instructors, we sent a circular to each institution of the society, on the basis of which we offered all our employees to participate in the training. In the meantime, the course was accredited for 40 credit points through the College, so the institutions could include education in their annual training plan, and at the same time it became more attractive for professionals. 57 people applied for the training, of which 29 men and 28 women.

The specific goal of the project was to increase the knowledge, preparedness, relationship building and conflict management skills of service professionals.

The project provided an opportunity to expand knowledge in several directions, it covered several topics comprehensively.

- In the course of personality psychology theory and practice taught by psychologist Éva Kovács, our goal was to teach students to analyze the backgrounds of different life path choices, to get acquainted with the psychological concepts and methods of fear, addiction, defense mechanisms, problem solving processes and hospitalization,
- Györgyi Kiss undertook to help our employees to develop their skills in conflict management, based on what they have learned in the framework of problem-solving communication,
- Pastor Gábor Iványi taught the subject of helping and healing conversation, which revolved around students with the process of helping relationships and speech, trust, opening, empathy, identification, unconditional acceptance, evaluative behavior, and healing conversation,
- Sociologist Tibor Bors Borbély helped the employees to get acquainted with the employment opportunities, labor services, the causes of unemployment, the employment programs, the methods of motivation for work and training, to learn the job search techniques,
- Social politician Ibolya Kovács taught the students what are the basic human and civil rights, what are the rights of those in need in connection with benefits and what are the means of their legal protection, and she was also the professional leader of the training program,
- Erzsébet Donkó assisted our employees in the framework of psychologist supervision, emphasizing the role of the helping attitude, the personality and competence of the helper, self-image, self-esteem, self-knowledge in processing the results, failures and discussing problems related to their direct work,
- Social politician Györgyi Kiss organized the internships and institutional visits of the students, so that the participants of the training got to know the tasks of the institutions related to the field and the work of the people working there.

The proximity of **John Wesley Theological College** provided an opportunity for our staff to establish direct contact with the instructors, and they could request help for their daily work in addition to the program included in the training program. The program was divided into two parts. The second training block was completed by 60 students, of which 26 were men and 34 were women.

At the end of the course, we requested a **dissertation** from each of our students, in which we expected a case report and its processing, as well as an analysis of its solutions. Based on the completed dissertations, we can say that we see that our employees have managed to utilize the knowledge acquired in practice during the training.

The topics and experiences of the training and the dissertations evaluated with a good mark were published in a methodological publication, which is available not only to the employees of the society, but also to the College and other interested professionals through our Bookstore.

We wanted to go beyond the day-to-day practice that claims that a night shelter, temporary accommodation for the homeless, a day warmer, mean a less demanding helping job, “a preservation,” or “life-saving” were enough for our homeless. **In our opinion, if those working in social care are not sufficiently prepared, the recipients of care are less likely to change their life situation and participate actively in society.** That is why we wanted to take every opportunity to bring up-to-date and ever-expanding knowledge to professionals, to develop their attitudes and practical work, and to help homeless people solve their problems more professionally and confidently.