

HOUSING FIRST IN ICELAND

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The Dayshelter for homeless people in Reykjavík has been operated since 2007, with an increasing number of visitors each year since opening. As a captain in the Salvation Army, it has been my responsibility to manage this facility, since 2009. The shelter started with serving people who had a drug or alcohol problem, or psychiatric or social problem. Today, social workers employed by the municipality work among us, and support our initiative. Increasingly we have offered our visitors daily activities while staying at the shelter, (football, crafts, art exhibitions, a day's work). Generally we serve them by providing their basic needs such as food, sanitation, clothes and a resting place.

We, employers at the Dayshelter, see that their pattern is often the same; so in the beginning of the month they have enough of money and no need for visiting the shelter to the same extent as they do at the end of the month. Then their money is finished and they are usually in a bad state, both because of debts and abstinence from their drugs. Many of the clients go to rehabilitation for 10 days detox, others take the longer rehab which can be up to 4-6 weeks, and after that they can go to a further rehab' away from the city for another 4-5 weeks. Following are ideas on a housing provision for the homeless in the spirit of housing first and rehabilitation. There is also another offer to take the rehab' up to one year. This is a place outside town and with a programme which is very effective and has shown good results (Krýsuvíkursamtökin).

IDEAS ON IMPLEMENTATION

The goal, step by step – housing first:

The thing we want to improve is to ensure our clients a place to stay when they come out from rehabilitation. I want to see that the procedure starts already when the client is in the rehabilitation place. The client will already then get a contact person who will be his “mentor” along the way for a period of 3-5 months.

The “mentor” will have to prepare a place to stay for his clients. All his economic benefits have to be in order and a workplan has to be worked out between the client and his “mentor”

When the client comes out of rehabilitation, the day starts with all its routine and obstacles. The workplan between the client and the menthor has to be clear, though not too detailed, and it has to be easy to implement. F.ex. Monday plan: meet at nine, go to the store, prepare dinner, talk about dreams. Tuesday plan: meet at nine, do the laundry, prepare dinner, go to coffee shop. Wednesday plan: meet at nine, put up an economic scheme over the month and talk about responsibility for money and savings, prepare dinner. Thursday plan: cleaning day. Friday plan: doing fun things such as swimming, cinema, visiting friends or family. These are, of course, things they discuss together and prepare together.

At first they will meet every day but this will decrease to twice a week. During this time the client is responsible to go to AA meetings or other meetings which can help him work out his issues. The client will also gradually start to work in a protected environment where he can feel supported and secure.

If the client should fall while he is in the programme, he will get a few chances to work himself up again, either by going in again to the rehab' or to do it on his own with support from his mentor. We will try many things to try to uphold his sobriety and all the work he and the mentor has been doing so far.

This offer I am mentioning here is for a person who wants to be sober. I know that the municipality is working on another project where they want to support people who are actively using alcohol and drugs.

I do not know yet how to provide the places to live in - whether it shall be free market apartments, rooms or municipality apartments. At the present time it is very difficult to find apartments which are not too expensive. It will take several years to wait for an apartment from the municipality because of the many applications from their citizens, single mothers, disabled people, elderly people etc.

These "dreams" are, thought to be realised in the city of Reykjavík, but not necessarily. They will also work outside the city on a farm. The same project but in another environment.

OTHER OPTIONS FOR THE HOUSING FIRST DEVELOPMENT

One other option is to initiate a housing cooperation project in the greater metropolitan area with the Reykjavik municipal authorities, on the behalf of the Salvation Army. Another is suggesting an involvement of other municipal districts such as Mosfellbær, Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær og Kópavogur. ***This may well gain support from the Reykjavik municipality for it is one of their objectives to involve other municipalities in the matter of the homeless.*** Up till now it has been their sole responsibility to supply service to the homeless, as discussed in the report.

This might involve that the municipalities supply a building suited for this project in one or more districts, and The Salvation Army would operate and oversee this provision. The goal would be to eliminate homelessness for a group of people with long term secure housing and long term goals in their recovery and overall rehabilitation. This could be viewed as an aspect of the prevention strategy on behalf of the municipality, which they intend to increase with regard to homelessness. The project would involve research, and an evaluation of its potential success. A similar project would be initiated in Poland.

Another option would be cooperation with the state welfare authorities with the support of the Reykjavik municipal authorities in a similar project. This would be in line with the state's objective in overall welfare, with equality and housing as vital aspects of the welfare.

