

Humanity – a global perspective on social work.

Social work is based on humanity and is a fundamental part of the society. Therefore it is important to remember humanity in our social work practice. Humanity is also the most important perspective in social work and a perspective we all share globally. The way we perceive humanity is also reflected in our social work practices!

How do we perceive humanity in social work?

Is it to hold a stranger's hand?

Feed a hungry man?

Improve conditions in society for the excluded people?

In project outside we help people who are, for some reason, not able to take care of themselves. Our main target group is the homeless people with mental health problems. We give assistance based on the individual need of the moment with no strings attached. We do not demand any particular behaviour, nor do we expect any specific results from our users. Project Outside is a non-public, non-profit organisation established within an altruistic European-humanistic tradition.

As a street level worker and socialworker in project OUTSIDE I do not make distinctions based on nationality. We consider it not only our duty to help, but also our responsibility to ensure each individual's right to a dignified life, as it is described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In these years an increasing number of migrants, especially from Eastern Europe, from Romania, Poland, are coming to Denmark trying to make a life, looking for work and a place to live. Some of them end up on the street. Therefore project outside

in cooperation with other organizations opened up a shelter in the three coldest months for homeless people from Eastern Europe. We experienced that this group of people were marginalized in the Danish society. The Ministry of welfare and Social Affairs would not take action to help this group of homeless people. The people from Eastern Europe don't have rights in Denmark if they are not employed. In my experience this group is in no man's land; no rights, no help, just ignored. Because this specific group of homeless don't have rights in Denmark it is even more important to help them. It can be difficult to help because what kind of help can we offer? We can offer them contact, a hot meal from our Mobile cafe, clothes, sleeping bags.

Our strategy is humanity.

I believe that we have a responsibility to try to help people in need in one way or another regardless of their status as migrants.

It is important to maintain that every individual that we help has the right to a standard of living that ensures his or her good health and well-being, as well as access to food, safety, accommodation and other basic necessities. Furthermore, we are always critical of injustices done against individuals or particular groups of people, and we maintain that each individual's basic human rights should be regarded as sacrosanct. We write articles about this vulnerable group of homeless from Eastern Europe and publish the articles on our webpage in hope of creating awareness of this challenge in the Danish society. It is very easy just to ignore people's problems when the problems are complicated. But who want to be ignored??

I think that nobody want to be ignored or to be treated as a non existence. We are all people in this world and especially in this time of globalization I think we are all citizens in the world!

How is humanity reflected in social work practice??

Projekt outside carries out practical street-level work and one of the methods to do this is The Mobile Cafe.

The Mobile Café project is a meals-on-wheels project which provides free food, clothes and sleeping bags for homeless people. The project is mainly carried out by a number of volunteer helpers. They deliver the food from a van, which the homeless are familiar with. The van follows no specific route but stops at selected sites, where the homeless usually come. The intention is a cafe where you can go and talk to the volunteer helpers and still be outside. The Food is of proper quality that gives better health, better resistance to infections, and more energy both physically and mentally. At the same time, food is a wonderfully effective tool for creating and maintaining contact. The contact that is established through the daily ritual of sharing food and conversing with each other can become a way to improve lives in a positive direction. Through the Mobile Cafe we have learned that by lending a hand and making someone's life a little easier, the homeless people will often find the strength to take up the challenge and try to make improvements on their own.

Some years ago the Mobile Cafe discovered a man living under one of the bridges in Copenhagen. The volunteer helpers tried to make contact to him by offering food and coffee, but he refused them. Every evening they still went out to him under the bridge delivering a hot meal but without talking to him. After a while he began to eat the food and one day he started waiting for The Mobile Cafe to come. A contact was made on his terms. One day he needed to go to the doctor and one of the street level workers helped him. At the doctor he was offered to be admitted to the psychiatric hospital and he agreed to that, still on his terms and without forcing him. To day he lives inside in an apartment and has been living there for some time now and is

doing well. In this story the most valuable was the contact that was made which led to other things like going to the doctor, getting an apartment and so on.

The street work is always carried out by both professionals and volunteer helpers. The teamwork between professionals and the volunteer helpers is very important because then there are more resources on the street.

Like the shelter for homeless people from Eastern Europe; we have also a new project coming up. This winter we are opening a contact centre for the people from Eastern Europe who are homeless. At this contact centre they will get information about their rights and there will be social workers who they can talk to. The contact centre will collaborate with various partners. The intention is to create a place for them where they can meet others in same situation and get help for their situation.

Our basic objective is to carry out tasks to the best of our abilities, to try to do the right thing and to never give up. Our street work initiatives seek to alleviate conditions, and, where possible, to improve living conditions for those who are homeless and/or marginalised. We believe that contact and human relations are the most important in social work practices. If we get a contact and start up a relation we are successful!

A man once asked me: “Are you an angel”?

No, I said, I am not an angel. You must be he replied. I told him that I was a person of flesh and blood and had no wings. He then said: “You are an angel – Your wings are just invisible.

The man was a foreigner, a homeless, living on the street. He was blind and in need of medical care. We spend all day at the hospital.

What he needed that day was someone to hold his hand.

What he needed that day was human compassion!

Thank You.