

Developing the knowledge of deinstitutionalisation in Serbia

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Deinstitutionalisation in Serbia

- The main trigger for deinstitutionalisation was the Mental Disability Rights International report *Torture not treatment* in 2007 and the beginning of the negotiations for the entrance in the European union.
- After the reform of the child care system and the reduction of residential facilities for children by 58 % in 2012 the reform of adult institutional care system started.
- Serbia has 12 care homes for adults with intellectual and mental health disabilities. Altogether there were living 3691 adults under the age of 65 in this institutions (Republički zavod za socijalnu zaštitu 2015).

The Open Arms project

- The Open Arms project funded by the European Union started in 2012. A team of expert has been established to support the process, additionally there were smaller grants for institutions and other care providers to develop they own community care projects.
- The expert team developed a map of institutional care and other providers, analysed the stakeholders, funding in Serbia, assessed the training needs and activated the directors of institutions.
- The first phase was to develop relationships with the stakeholders, training and mobilisation of the professional public (mainly directors of the institutions) for deinstitutionalisation.
- After several attempts and resistance after showing the directors the experience of the Check Republic their attitude changed and some directors became ambassadors of deinstitutionalisation.
- The other factor that changed the views of the professionals was intensive training in methods of deinstitutionalisation. The staff of the institutions has been trained in transformation planning, personal planning, normalisation, risk analysis, team work and establishing new community services. The effect of the trainings was not only the knowledge in the methods but also the creation of an deinstitutionalisation ethos. Some of the participants of the trainings started functioning as an movement and established a national association for deinstitutionalisation Deinstitutionalisator.
- As the project went on two pilot institutions have been selected – **Veliki Popovac** and **Čurug** – which are the first ones that will be closed.
- In order to support the transformation of Čurug the Faculty for social work of the University of Ljubljana (partner in the project) together with its students organised two three weeks camps in the institutions.

Organising the project based practice and study with students of the Faculty of Social Work Ljubljana

The organisation of a camp within the University firstly requires a change in relationship between teachers and students. Especially working on deinstitutionalisation the relationship need to be totally democratic and the work should be based on democracy of direct action. Already in preparing the camp the students and the institutional staff and users should be involved. Joint planning of the activities was essential so our work could really respond to the needs of the users and the institution in transformation.

The purpose of the camp organised in Čurug was on one hand to *vitalise the life within the institution* and on the other hand to *promote the resettlements of the users*. To do so we on one hand performed some new activities in the institutions and on the other using the methods of deinstitutionalisation together with the users and staff.

The students, staff and users *organised normalisation, risk analysis and personal planning trainings* and then they performed the methods. This made it possible for this methods to be in common use in the institution. The methods also supported the people that resettled in group homes. For the democratisation of the relationships *inside the institution users assemblies were organised*. This made it possible for the users voice to be heard and to create a bottom up collective power.

The students also organised activities in and outside the institution to connect the users with the community and to sensibilise the community for deinstitutionalisation. A concert in the institution has been organised which was attended also by the people from the village. Four manifestations of freedom happened where the users were able to publicly speak about the intolerable conditions that they are forced to live in.



Effects of a project based practice placement

For academics

- Collaboration with practice
- Creation of theoretical and practical knowledge

For students

- Intensive work and more possibilities to develop emphatical relationship towards the users
- Partnership working relationship with staff
- Testing innovative methods of social work in practice

For employees

- Belief and statement changes
- Naivety of the students opens new possibilities
- Small changes towards normalisation

For service users

- Improving the life in the institution
- In the long term a change in the way the staff works
- Advocacy and empowerment

Further information

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