

The Taastrup Experience

What we are

What we are doing

What we have accomplished

The Blue Cross boarding house ("Blå Kors pensionatet") is situated in the Western Copenhagen suburb of Taastrup.

It provides 19 living accommodations in the boarding house.

It has a staff of 12.

People in distress are always central to us

The needs, wishes and potential of the individual resident are at the heart of everything we do. This means working to develop the sense of personal responsibility, the personal relationships and the social responsibilities of each of them.

Personal responsibility

We are convinced that a homeless person's road back to society is made easier if he or she becomes able to take the responsibility for their own life and behaviour.

For that reason as far as possible we involve the residents in all decisions concerning themselves as much as possible - a policy we are constantly evaluating and developing further.

Personal relationships

Homeless persons are often marginalized and cut off from basic human contacts because their relationships with family and friends have been damaged by psycho-social problems.

For that reason we work intensely on the resident's personal relationships and on his or her network building.

Social responsibility

The boarding house is a meeting ground for the individual resident and the public service system. We aim at making this liaison as human as possible.

We do so by training the residents in how to live and function with other people within the framework of society generally.

We are human beings engaged in helping other human beings in distress

Our values:

We help homeless persons to take responsibility for their own lives and to change their behaviour making it possible for them to function better and improve their living conditions.

Our main aim is to enable individual residents to move on into broader society by providing them with effective and fast-acting opportunities for self-advancement.

We believe that good and safe housing conditions are a necessary framework if the resident is to be rehabilitated and capable of stabilising his or her life.

Our skills

We are professionally educated and skilled

- social workers,
- social education workers,
- social health workers and
- people with other skills such as cooking and office work

and we work to maintain our professional abilities with supervision schemes and supplementary training.

Our knowledge:

Every day we gain new knowledge and experience in our work to rehabilitate vulnerable people.

The boarding house is not only a residence, it is also a social housing project providing experience in how to assist people getting out of real or functional homelessness.

The fund of knowledge we have accumulated is not only used by ourselves but put at the disposal of others working in this area.

What we are doing

We help people get back on their feet again

We make people in distress take responsibility for their lives and improve conditions by listening, monitoring and talking.

Listening

When we welcome a new resident, we begin as a kind of receptacle for his or her problems. We allow the resident to pour out his or her frustrations, sorrows and problems without making any judgement.

Monitoring

The very day a new resident moves in he or she is awarded a personal contact at the boarding house. The resident and contact later meet at least every fortnight.

Talking

When the time is right to take matters further we discuss the problems more constructively so that the resident may come to terms with them and possibly proceed to a new phase in their life.

A home with much support and simple rules

Days with fixed routines

The daily schedule has the common meals as its natural backbone.

Participation in the meetings is compulsory unless residents are prevented from attending by a job, public activity training or other contacts with the public service system.

Regular meetings:

- Every morning: Residents registers for meals and consider possible problems in the days schedule.
- Thursday evening: Next week's practical doings are planned and allocated after dinner.
- First Wednesday of every month: Residents' meeting.

A home free of intoxication

An environment free of alcohol and drugs is necessary for the well-being of the residents' community. All residents are obliged to assist in keeping the boarding house free of intoxication of any kind.

It is the home of all residents. In order to make the community workable a set of simple rules have been laid down:

- Residents must stay sober through their residence - both inside and outside the house.
- Residents will attend to cleaning or other communal activities arranged at the thursday evening meeting.
- When residents need individual attention they are encouraged to discuss them with staff members.

Community through activities

An active community is the key to promoting feelings of self-confidence and general contentment.

For that reason we arrange tours and excursions on a communal basis.

These include:

- Fishing trips
- Canoeing trips
- Holiday travel
- Summer and weekend excursions to:
 - soccer matches and tournaments
 - concerts and theatre events
- Communal meals with former residents on the last Friday evening of every month

What we are doing

Relationship training makes people stronger

We train and motivate residents to form relationships with other people. This is done in three phases:

The start

From the very first day a resident is made to feel welcome and accepted and is given a tour of the house by the residents' council chairman.

It is important that new residents feel at home and among people who want to help them adjust. This can be attained through meeting and shaking hands with others in the house as well as by reassuring the newcomer that he or she is in safe and reliable hands.

Most residents initially lack the ability to build relationships so at the outset staff members serve as "containers" for new people - i.e. they pick up everything the resident wants to get rid of and return it when he or she is ready to talk about it.

This process of absorbing the new resident's confessions of past behaviour and present problems can impose a heavy burden on the staff member.

In order to compile a personal plan of action, resident and contact have an introductory talk at the beginning, clarifying the resident's life so far and the main problems requiring attention.

The middle

The plan of action is worked on later, during the middle phase, when other professionals like municipal caseworkers become involved.

At this point we may try to clarify specifically how the resident can improve his or her life.

At the same time we begin work on post-residential development, taking into account the resident's need for networks and for the re-establishment of contact with family and friends.

This middle phase presents the resident with possibilities of testing different reactions on the contact.

It also provides an opportunity for assessing the impression given by the resident thus far.

At least once every fortnight the resident and contact have talks focusing on support, future developments and problem-solving.

The end

The end is quite as important as the start. It is not necessarily the end of help for the resident, but just the completion of residency at the boarding house.

By this time many residents will have left behind them unfinished relationships involving private as well as public persons. Most of them have changed caseworkers several times, often without ceremony.

There is a major difference between cutting off a relationship and formally terminating it. If we are careful to finish our relationships, we may avoid them becoming another cut-off and another letdown.

If the resident so wishes, this relationship training may continue after departure from the house. All residents are offered a continuation of fortnightly meetings with their contact once residence has been completed..

What we are doing

We help people through social rehabilitation

The overriding theory behind residency at the boarding house is "social impact treatment", which we practise in two areas:

Treatment of resident

In this area staff members can commit themselves to a closer contact with the resident, producing pictures of how events are seen and perceived inside and around the resident.

At the same time we may challenge the resident, criticizing and expressing disagreement.

Procuring of resources

We communicate our knowledge of society's laws and assist in obtaining housing, work, funds etc. for the resident.

We also help the them re-establish contacts with family and friends and form new relationships.

The contact stays

The resident's original contact during the stay at the boarding house is still available when she or he moves into a flat-sharing community or into an independent home.

What we have accomplished

Personal contact key to rehabilitation success

Meticulous analysis of the background of boarding house residents and what our treatment of them accomplishes is essential to the work with homeless persons and the development and upgrading of our work.

An analysis of the effect of our work for the residents was carried out in 2005:

What they were

Residents of the boarding house are persons with quite challenging problems in areas like housing, alcohol and drug abuse, work and social networking.

55 persons (95%) came because of homelessness and/or abuse as the whole or partial reason for asking for residence.

47 persons (86%) had an active abuse at the time of entering the boarding house.

32 persons (55%) reported an abuse for more than 10 years.

More than half lived on entering time on some kind of public transfer payment.

What they became

An analysis made in 2005 involved two groups of former residents, one of whom left the house in 2003 and the other in 2002.

The findings were quite clear: major changes had occurred to the involved persons!

- 76% had housing of their own three years after moving out.
- 29% have an abuse problem compared to 88% at the time of their moving in.
- 94% has re-established contact with their families.
- 75% are either "more" or "much more" satisfied with their life.

Our findings

An aim of the analysis was to determine which parts of the effort are helping.

The findings indicate that establishing a relationship between resident and contact was successful and had contributed to changes.

Users are quoted by the analysis as saying, that the experience of the boarding house had contributed to changed circumstances.

They pointed especially to the role of the contacts as being crucial. Regular talks with contacts and the latter's ability to listen were particularly important.

The analysis also showed that the boarding house does not mean that all will change for the better. Not everybody gets a home. Not everybody gets rid of their abuse. And not everybody gets a job.

In short, the boarding house will have to keep developing its services and provide it to still more distressed persons.

Need for long-term support

The effect analysis shows that some residents need more than one residency – or one that is prolonged - at the boarding house in order to maintain changes in life conditions.

There is clearly a group of vulnerable and exposed persons in need of support for several years after their residence. The analysis shows that long-term aid in such cases does pay off.