

**European Community Organizing Network  
(ECON)  
Collection of Community Organizing Best Practices  
July, 2009**

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- **Introduction**

The purpose of community organizing is to actively engage large numbers of people to powerfully solve community problems. Community organizing follows a three-step process of a. Systematically listening to residents and citizens in order to select and prioritize problems and visions, b. Research to identify potential solutions, and c. Solve these problems and achieve these visions through self-help approaches and engaging key government and other institutions.

Community organizing can be done in a large number of contexts and with a variety of constituents: individual members, organization of organizations, neighborhood or issue based, with religious congregations and/or secular groups, tenants, seniors, youth, etc.

The goal of the European Community Organizing Network (ECON) is to develop an ongoing network for the promotion, support, and expansion of community organizing in Europe. The ECON network is guided by the values of justice, compassion, democratic participation, and appreciation for ethnic, racial, and spiritual diversity. It promotes community organizing in a variety of forms. ECON activities include local, national, regional, and international trainings; site and consulting visits; outreach; joint projects; translation of materials; and a website.

ECON grew out of two-five day community organizing trainings and meetings which occurred in December, 2006 and November, 2007 involving 24 and 30 participants from 8 European countries. At the November, 2007 Meeting a Planning and Joint Fundraising Group was formed to further develop a vision and plan for common work. This Group met in January, 2008 to develop ECON's initial mission statement, goals, and future plans. Currently, ECON has partners the following countries: Albania, Austria, Bosnia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the Ukraine. ECON is also affiliated with the Central and Eastern European Citizens Network.

We hope you will enjoy reading about best practices of community organizing occurring in Europe. For more information about ECON, contact Rev. Paul Cromwell ([PaulAllanCromwell@hotmail.com](mailto:PaulAllanCromwell@hotmail.com)) or Chuck Hirt ([chuck@cko.sk](mailto:chuck@cko.sk)).

29.10.2008

## **ECON best practice: Malstatt - actions in order to save a pedestrian bridge**

### **Context / Problem to be solved:**

**„How can we save the *Wilhelm-Meyer Brücke*?”**

Neighborhood: Malstatt (about 10.000 person)

City: Saarbrücken (about 160.000 residents),  
Germany – Saarland

Leading community organization:

Stadtteilbüro Malstatt – a neighborhood center  
of the Diakonisches Werk an der Saar (the  
welfare organization of the protestant church)

At the end of 2007 it became known that the city council - in the financial draft 2009 - is planning to tear down a pedestrian bridge – the Wilhem-Meyer-Brücke in Malstatt, which is a vital connection between the two parts of our neighborhood with no replacement.

### **Actions taken and levels of citizen participation**

Both – our organisation and the city department responsible for (traffic) infrastructure -counted the users of the bridge and realised that 1.300 pedestrians per day use the bridge. A group of concerned residents (about 8-12 people) took the initiative (supported by CO-activities of our organisation). First they gathered information in order to overcome the feeling of being upset and to realise the facts. Next steps were to get in contact with the city department responsible for the bridge and responsible members of the political parties and to organize a lobby group in order to save the bridge. Thirty business people of Malstatt, more than a dozen associations, churches, initiatives and every political party of the neighborhood signed to support the lobby group. More than 2.900 residents signed lists of the action group to give to the politicians in the city council.

115 people came to a public meeting April 23, which was very well prepared by the lobby group. Active residents handed the lists with the signatures to officials of the political parties and ask them if their party will do everything to save the bridge – only *yes* or *no* and a brief statement of one minute was accepted. Each of the politicians signed a public declaration that their party was willing to save the bridge. Meanwhile the financial committee of the town suggested that the city council reserve money for planning (in 2009) and all in all about €1.1 million for construction of a new bridge (in 2010). The city council decided in Sept. 08 to provide the suggested sum of money. The lobby group will now monitor the progress of the planning and rebuilding and eventually remind the politicians on their promise.

### **Results: problem solved and effects upon the participants and residents**

- residents of a poor neighborhood persuaded the city to invest €1.1 million for the reconstruction of a pedestrian bridge
- the vital connection between the two halves of our 10.000 person neighborhood is supposed to be rebuild
- participants learned that they are able to stand up for their own interest and to be successful with it
- residents learned that they can change things if they stand together
- politicians learned that they can follow peoples interest without being blamed
- professionals learned to trust in peoples power and abilities.

### **Contact Information for further Information on this best practice**

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## Community Organizing in the town of Cantemir

*Town of Cantemir, Republic of Moldova*

The Community Organizing has been conducted by the Association of Citizens with Initiative (ACI) from the town of Cantemir, Republic of Moldova.

The main problem identified in the town was **improper garbage collection units, which have become a continuous source of environment pollution in the town.**

The Community Organizing exercise in the town of Cantemir started in August 2007 and was conducted in three phases: (i) listening to the people's needs; (ii) the research of possible solutions; and (iii) the action

ACI has selected and recruited for the CO process 15 volunteers – people of different social categories, all residents of the town Cantemir. The volunteers have been trained in order to be able to communicate with people and identify their problems and personal interests within the Listening Process. They have developed an action plan of the CO Process taking into account the realities of the town, the CO concept and the volunteers' capabilities. In order to



do the "one-to-one visits" as coherently and efficiently as possible, a questionnaire- guideline has been developed. Thus, the 15 volunteers have paid visits to 210 residents of the town.

The analysis of the 210 questionnaires has revealed that the main problems and concerns of the citizens had to do with improper garbage collection units, inappropriate supply of the people with drinking water, poor lightening of the streets and of the residence buildings, poor

condition of the roads and the vagrant dogs.

### *One-to-one visit*

In January 2008 the people in the town gathered at a meeting during which they had to prioritize the problems identified during the listening process and select one to embark on its solution. From the multitude of the problems, the participants in the meeting chose to start with solving **the problem of garbage collection units** in the town.

Following the meeting, the people involved in the process being guided by their community organizer have created a Research Committee (RC), composed of a Small Group (11 people) and of a Big Group (35 people), which together had to organize the CO process with a view to solving the problem selected. The members of the groups have developed Regulations for both groups in order to make the work of the two committees as efficient as possible. The above-mentioned structure allowed for involvement in the process of as many people as possible as during the listening process only 20 percent of the respondents mentioned they would get involved in the claiming and solution actions.

So, the researches have started. Each member had his/her tasks and thus, after 8 weeks, they all had a clear picture of the problem and its aspects. The members of the Research Committee have visited all the 9 garbage collection units from Cantemir. They studied their location, the frequency of the garbage evacuation and took pictures. The Research Committee has also spoken with the people residing the area and listened to their comments on the issue.



*This is how the garbage collection units looked like*

The research committee wanted to know who was in charge of the garbage evacuation and cleaning of the town and found out it was the municipal enterprise „Gospodaria Locativa”, whose founder was the mayoralty.



As part of the solution research process, several members of the Research Committee, paid a visit to the neighboring town to study their successful experience in garbage collection and evacuation. Back from the study visit, they shared the information with other people involved in the process.

During the meetings in two residential districts, the people have been informed of the problem and ideas and proposals have been collected from them as how to organize better the garbage collection and provide for a cleaner town.

*This is how the garbage collection units are in the neighboring town of Leova*

Within the CO process, the RC has unfolded a comprehensive ecological educational campaign in the town. It produced four leaflets and one informational bulletin and it conducted 50 lectures on ecological education in the schools of the town. An initiative group from one of the residential districts have developed a project proposal and submitted it to the Moldovan Ecologic Fund.

To be more efficient in the problem solving, the RC searched for allies and found them in the person of the Prophylactic Medicine Centre and the Ecologic Inspection. The latter knew the problem very well and were glad to support the RC in the discussions with the main stakeholders.

The most difficult for the RC was to decide on the most appropriate “action” in influencing those responsible for the solution of the problem. It considered two options: (i) a citizens’ meeting with the mayor and the enterprise in charge of the garbage collection and (ii) negotiations with both stakeholders and signing of an agreement. The RC has finally decided that the second option would be more favorable as it implied more concrete actions in the form of written commitments while the meeting could have finished with sheer promises. Thus, the volunteers have been trained during a simulation exercise how to act and be as efficient as possible during the negotiations. They have prepared very seriously for the negotiations and in May 2008 they had a meeting with the mayor and the municipal enterprise.



The negotiations were not an easy process for the simple fact that the mayor has never before had such open discussions with the citizens. Nevertheless, the citizens succeeded in signing an agreement with the mayoralty, which provided for the building within one-year period of 8 garbage collection units in conformity with the sanitary norms and for the revision of the service-contracts signed with the residents of the town.

The following month, the RC got involved in the monitoring of the agreement implementation. Unfortunately, the mayoralty was not observing its commitments, thus the RC decided that there was need to give more legal power to the agreement, that is to obtain a decision of the Municipal Council on the issue raised by the citizens. The leader of the RC Mocanu Valeriu, who is also a counselor in the Municipal Council developed a draft decision which was submitted to the Council. In advance, the volunteers tried to co-opt as many counselors as possible on their side to provide for a successful adoption of the decision. The decision which was examined in details has finally been adopted and it is now under implementation.

In conclusion:

1. Through CO techniques, the citizens in Cantemir have succeeded in influencing a decision in the citizens' favor.
2. In 2008, there will be re-built 2 garbage collection units from which circa 800 people will benefit directly
3. The people learned how to exert power and influence the government to respect their rights. They learned to promote their interests, fight the fear and submissiveness to their benefit.
4. The people learnt that together they represent a power in a position to move the things into the right direction.

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**Svenska kyrkan** 

NORRKÖPING  
S:T JOHANNES FÖRSAMLING

# The Parish of S:t Johannes Norrköping Sweden

## Visiting project

September 2005 – May 2007

# Executive summary

## Background

The Parish of S.t Johannes had a vision of deepening the voluntary commitment in the parish and decided to invite Reverend Paul Allan Cromwell who has worked with faith-based community-organizing in United States for 25 years. Today he is working in Europe and has Germany as his base.

## Aim

To strengthen the inner life of the parish as well as strengthen the relations to and in the local community.

## Theology

By inspiration from Rev. Robert Linthicum how a parish can see its task as a church. There are three different approaches and all of them are necessary for being a church committing and concerning people. Based on the foundation of relations.

To be a church **in** the community is to walk with God by having different services. As a sign of walking with God.

To be a church **to** the community is to take action when people or organisations ask for the knowledge and action of the church. As a sign for love and mercy.

To be a church **with** the community is to ask those who live in the parish what we can do to make our church a better place to live in. As a sign of justice in the world.

## Three keys in building relations that can lead to a change

- There must be some kind of self-interest for being participating as well as having a relation to someone that is already joining the activities. We have learnt how to practise one to one's to make new relations and to know other people or new persons for us.
- The view what power can do – If you are many persons to bring an issue forward you are much more successful than being a few.
- It has to be a concern of the whole parish. That's why it is important with the church board's approval to create legitimation.

## What did we do?

Spring 2006 we had a period of interviews when 11 persons interviewed persons we already knew or were aware of in our parish. The aim was to see what improvements they suggested when it comes into the parish as well as in the local community. 37 interviews were done in lent time.

Several proposals were proposed and we invited all to a Big meeting. We encouraged people to commit themselves and join a group which aim was to work with the change they were

mostly interested in. Everyone decided if they wanted to join in the group for the inner life of the parish or in the local community.

In the meeting after the Big meeting three action groups took place after everyone's choice: the Partygroup, the Visting group and the Youth group.

The participants have been working together in their own group and also been a part of the larger group to receive knowledge and to strengthen each others work. By choosing the same date and time for the groups this has been possible.

**The Party group** carried out an appreciated International party the 23 th of November 2006. They also did the lunch after the service on Easter Day 2007 together with the international group of the parish.

**The Visiting group** made a study visit to the neighbourhood parish and decided to have a study group and used a study book as a model for being a visiter. They had six meetings from January til March 2007. The 10 th of May 2007 we officially started the visiting group of S:t Johannes.

**The Youth group** with 8 participants implemented interview's with key persons that represented 8 different youth groups located in our parish. These interviews were followed up by interviews with four youth groups. Everyone was then invited to a Big meeting where we told what we had found in the interviews. We also asked for commitment and engagement among those we had interviewed. The few numbers that appeared were already committed in the parish work. We got the knowledge how important it is to have a current relation and that building relations take time. We also found that it is not actual to make improvements even though we had a lot of expectations.

### **What did we learn?**

This is the outcome from the meeting with all voluntarily committed persons in the visting process with Paul Allan Cromwell in May 2007.

- It's been stimulating with all contacts.
- I have got to know a lot more persons in the parish and I feel we have a lot more in common now.
- To find knowledge where it already has been found and used - dont invent the wheel again.
- It's funny to work practically together.
- It takes TIME to build relations!!!
- This is a parish work and not a private project!
- New angles of approval as a visiter has been enriching.
- Mutual exchange of language and that has been useful to get to know.
- Trust the process, appreciate what has been done and work with your own expectations.
- I didn't believe we would go this far!
- I have become strong in myself and also in the small group!

- My self confidence has grown.

#### Update 2007-11-09

- On 24 th of november 2007 there will be a new parish party named as "The blue party".
- The visiting groups work is now a part of the ordinary activities in the parish. The participants continue with visits and have meetings with supervision led by a deacon or a minister.
- Most of the participants in the Youth group, have said they are to join the parish activities when it comes to youth group as contacts in the local school. Just become they love young people.

We can see a lot more people coming and participating in the Johannes service on Sundays at 11. We do not really know why but we believe that the crucial ingredient is conscious awareness of building relations.

We can now see that those who just came for activities in the parish hall are now joining in the services of the church. We can also see that it is a blessing that the gospel reading every Sunday is done by two languages. Always Swedish but also common languages as Arabic, Finnish, Russian, Spanish, English, or another language. This a token of S:t Johannes parish.

During the coming year we have set up an aim to make an action and policy plan for the voluntary workers in the parish of S:t Johannes. The coordinator is in charge for this work together with the church board and the staff group. The the time schedule tells it will be done til the budget process in May 2008.

/Maria Bard, deacon and coordinator

### **Reflections over theological aspects of the Visiting project**

#### **"In a meeting something holy is taken place"**

Something happens within ourselves, when another person takes time and listens to our own unique story. We all wish in some ways to share what we have gone through in our lives combined with sharing the story of people who have meant something for us. The need of personal meetings between people, is maybe even more important in our post modern society when so many things are measured in achievements. Despite of the increasing communications few have time to hear and listen to the basic "How are you?"

We live less in social cohensions like family and relatives. Nevertheless is longing for significant relations not less today. The parishes have had a given roll of being a carriers of traditions. In the parish of S:t Johannes we also have started to reflect of the need of being a carrier of relations, a meeting place in a fleeting world.

The goal of the working method of the visting project has been to set certain times to visit and listen to another human beings, to listen to her/his story and by addressing

personal questions, and in this way to walk a little passage of the road with her/him. The simple working method gives also tools and opens possibilities for the unexpected and practical consequences of the conversation.

In the Bible maybe the story of the Emmaus walk is the clearest picture of what can happen when people talk about what is concerning them and burning in their hearts. The conversation becomes a meeting point and the meeting leads to recognizing the one that has been so close to oneself. The bread is shared in the hunger. A short while together can lead to great consequences. At the Emmaus walk you don't just talk with a co-walker, although it would be good enough, but in the meeting with another human being you also in some sense meet Christ. He is a co-walker in everyone of us, and he can be recognized in the faces of strangers. When a meeting takes place, something holy is taken place. The paradoxes are there as well, the one who gives receives, and when the human life is shared, it opens a room for concrete possibilities that you couldn't see before.

According to the working method of the visiting project, it is not possible to decide the consequences of the meetings in advance. You have to learn to take just one step at the time and you can only listen and practice presence. Together with the one you are listening to you may find very concrete questions that you choose to work with. To this kind of work you gather together all existing forces in the community. The listening can also be compared to the sourdough that effects everything – you don't need to divide the reality to the spiritual – and to the community part of life. Everything is about the same bread and about the same people.

In the meeting you can look at the shared situation with the eyes of “resurrection” and the experience of the recognition gives power and courage to act according what you have seen.

/Anna Toivonen, minister parish of S:t Johannes, Norrköping

## Community Forum for Refugees in Munich, Germany

### I. Context

Please tell the name of the neighborhood, city, and country where this Best Practice occurred. Name of the community organization or agency leading the efforts? What problem was to be solved?

In seven neighbourhoods in Munich, Germany where refugee camps are located the Caritas Counselling and Service for Asylum Seekers and Refugees reached out to recruit and train volunteers and to activate professionals to speak publicly and to represent the interests of refugees who exist on the edge of Bavarian and German society and have no political representation or lobby.

The problems to be addressed included:

- **1) The drastic living situation of refugees, asylum seekers and other foreigners without permanent residency status who frequently have experienced serious trauma:**

Required by Bavarian law to reside in “Gemeinschaftsunterkünften” or “Sammelunterkünften”, new words coyly skirting around the expressions “Lager” and “Sammellager”, they live 5 to 15 years in camps usually built from construction containers, in cramped living quarters with up to four residents in 12-16 square meter rooms, with no right to self determination or privacy, excluded from society by laws refusing work permits and restricting mobility, their access to health care limited to acute problems and required by law to subsist from in kind welfare delivered to the camps as food and “hygiene” packages.

- **2) The exclusion of refugees from the political process and the lack of public consciousness about them:**

All non-German citizens may not vote or hold public office. Depending on their residency status they may be organized in committees that local government consults with. Refugees and migrants without permanent residency status remain outside even this process and are wholly dependent on others to speak for them.

The degree of public awareness is further hindered by the fear of camp residents that complaints could lead to retaliation. The threat of isolation by a forced move to a distant village or even deportation is very real. In addition, their lack of German language skills and knowledge about German society and laws prevent them from reaching the public.

Because they are not allowed to or cannot speak for themselves, it is necessary to develop channels of information and forums to represent their interests.

- **3) The degree of commitment to counselling and care of refugees in state and regional government agencies and in welfare or service organizations:**

The German federal and Bavarian state governments seek explicitly to isolate refugees from the population at large and to obstruct their integration with budgetary and legal measures. For example, state funding for camps in which the refugees are obliged by law to live as well as for staff in the counselling offices is inadequate to provide humane and dignified conditions or adequate support. Due to the political climate and the lack of public awareness about living conditions and the reasons people seek asylum, there is resistance within some social institutions to raising and investing funds sufficient for effective counselling. Furthermore these agencies are subject to the same racism and prejudices that society holds about refugees. These prejudices may justify the inadequate funding, can lead to bad practice or pejorative statements about refugees or condone limits on access to counselling and care. The self interest of bureaucracies and social agencies dependent on public funding can lead them to downplay the problems of this numerically small group and to hope no storm of public protest will develop to demand systematic change. It may also restrict and even prevent internal and professional debate about adequate or innovative counselling methods and concepts.

There are, nevertheless, opportunities at the local government level to engage the public in discussions about the situation: Bavarian law limits the influence of local politicians, but in part because they can see the camps with their own eyes and the refugee children in their neighbourhoods and schools but also as a result of the liberal policies of the SPD and the Greens in Munich city council, city and neighbourhood district councils are very active to improve conditions, where possible. They are a source of support for social and structural change and are important allies of the refugees, the counselling offices and the volunteers.

#### ● 4) Blaming the victim:

In classic “blame the victim” style, government agencies claim that the run down state of the overcrowded camps built 20 years ago - as provisional, emergency housing designed to last just a few years - is a result of deliberate abuse by residents. Furthermore, representatives of the government spread the blame for the state of the camps around, calling on the Caritas Counselling Office to offer courses in housekeeping or to teach residents to close their windows or the kitchen doors to prevent rats from entering.

In addition, some social workers belittle the degree of difficulty of functioning in a foreign country without language and cultural skills, by saying that helping asylum seekers to make doctors’ appointments or other phone calls for which they have no money is “babying” the refugees and that the first priority is teaching refugees to be “independent”. Since federal and state laws and government regulations deliberately hold refugees dependent by forcing them to live in camps, not allowing them full access to the labor market and not providing them free German language courses, it is reasonable to ask, if it is the refugees or the government that is creating the problem. Ironically, the subjects of this discussion are people who with perseverance and the desire for a better life have braved unspeakable difficulties and dangers to arrive in this country. The very real concerns of the refugees, who may have no other person they can trust and may be in constant fear of deportation, are often denigrated by statements to the effect, that the refugees are just dropping by

to chat or pass the time – and by implication are wasting the time of the social workers who could work more efficiently, if access to counselling were changed by removing it from the camps to a central office.

## **II. Actions Taken and Levels of Citizen Participation**

How was the problem discovered (listening process, etc.)? What research was conducted? Were allies involved? What actions were taken, when, and how many persons were involved in these different actions?

### **● 1) and 2) Living situation and exclusion of refugees**

These problems were obvious to all counsellors with offices in the camps. The effects became clear in the counselling work, in appointments at schools or day care and talking with doctors. Caritas Counselling and Service Office staff repeatedly found themselves explaining the refugees' situation, clarifying behaviour that seemed inexplicable to neighbourhood institutions: Why for instance were refugee children unable to concentrate in school or had behaviour problems? Frequently, no one else seemed to know why, or think it was a problem that deserved to or could be dealt with.

As a result, our staff have researched restrictive public policy and they regularly attend courses on the legal restrictions and rights of asylum seekers. Staff have also written articles and enabled refugees and volunteers to speak for themselves in interviews with newspapers, television and radio, thus opening new channels of information.

Staff have themselves experienced - in the daily counselling of sometimes desperate and severely depressed clients, as well as in mediation with agencies and bureaucracy - the repressive and exclusionary measures and seen the effects, especially on children. They have been joined for 20 years by volunteers helping with homework or childcare programs in the camps and by local parishes who have opened their doors when there were housing shortages. These concerned citizens and churches have seen the misery and the unfairness and they have donated hundreds of thousands of Euros for bus fare, entrance to public swimming pools, cinemas and theatres, school supplies and excursions, Christmas presents and parties, pampers, common room equipment as well as for staff time.

As counselling staff strove to improve their networking in the community and to reach out to other professionals and politicians, they began to practice "one on one" listening with Paul Cromwell as trainer and strategist. Staff went out to interview and talk to teachers, pharmacists, pastors and others to hear their views of the problems and to ask about their self interest in their work with refugees and then to invite them to meetings in the camps with the goal of building "community forums" that could speak to the public about living conditions and the isolation of refugees and perhaps initiate measures that would change these structures. No formal organization has yet grown out of this work, but staff hope eventually to develop the community forums into a "friends of refugees" organization with the goals of securing staff through adequate financing, representing and lobbying for the refugees to ameliorate living conditions and loosen the restrictions to access within Bavarian society.

### **● 3) and 4) Commitment to counselling and care / blaming the victim**

These problems proved in many ways trickier and more frustrating and the energy expended in addressing and solving them have often kept staff and volunteers from their basic work directly with refugees and their children. Solving **3) and 4)** is, however, clearly part of the struggle to improve the lot of refugees and help them to their rights and to a perspective for the future. Therefore, staff and volunteers have been willing to devote time and resources to this highly political struggle, at, as it turns out, not inconsiderable risk to their own positions and careers.

Individual groups associated with each camp that had developed, either to offer assistance in the camps or as part of the community forums, were regularly informed by staff of government restrictions and of plans to cut funding or staff.

Annual and semi annual events to celebrate successes, to thank volunteers and donors and to update volunteers' information with lectures and discussions with lawyers or therapists brought these diverse groups together. Here they exchanged ideas and found that others had the same concerns about adequate care and staff funding for work in the camps and suffered the same disappointment and anger about planned changes in counselling priorities.

Upon learning in 2003 that staff would be cut by 30 % and as a result the Caritas was planning to withdraw counselling hours from the camps and to set up a central counselling office, some 25 delegates of these volunteer groups met and decided to unite in raising money to ensure enough staff to keep the offices in the camps open for counselling. Reaching out to their contacts in their parishes, schools, businesses, families and friends, they personally contributed or raised money by selling calendars, cleaning neighbours' garages, auctioning pictures, holding Christmas bazaars and much more.

Annual Christmas giving from a mailing list has proved singularly effective. The strength of donors has continually surprised the Caritas executive. Most importantly, the volunteers contributed their enthusiasm and their commitment and talked to others about the plight of refugees and the importance of the work, many out of their religious faith, others out of personal experiences, all touched by feelings of solidarity and recognition that "we" are lucky and have more than enough to share with others who have much less.

A significant number of these volunteers and donors are themselves migrants, some even refugees who have achieved residency status. Organized within their own communities and churches they have proved to be powerful purveyors of information and successful fundraisers with creative – and fun – ideas.

### **III. Results**

What solution was found to the problem? What changes occurred in persons' lives who were involved in solving this problem?

- **1) and 2) Living situation and exclusion of refugees**

We are still trying for workable solutions to these problems. The Community Forums are not nearly strong enough to make structural changes. It is a slow step by step process. One step, for example, is getting information to teachers, inviting them to the camps, offering seminars so they can

understand why refugee children cannot concentrate or why they behave disruptively, writing in professional journals about why these children cannot participate in ordinary school excursions and why their parents do not show up for teacher – parent evenings.

- **1), 2), 3), 4)** The one on one “listening work”, that started as outreach, changed staff’s relationships with volunteers and allies. Staff report enjoying the new rapport and find themselves consulting in a different way with volunteers. The resulting mutual respect cemented the commitment to change, improved strategy discussions and probably provided the backbone for the powerful protest that volunteers have mounted against the executive director’s decision to centralize counselling. Since March 2008 this has resulted in one tumultuous meeting between 30 volunteers and parish representatives on one side and the executive director and his staff on the other. In addition, countless letters from individuals and Catholic organizations to the Caritas hierarchy at many levels **and the formation of a committee of five volunteers to meet periodically with the executive director and to transmit volunteers’ opinions and experiences.**

Demands at the core of the meetings and letters are that the Caritas not move counselling out of the camps and that the hierarchy listen to the concerns and experiences of volunteers and evaluate and reflect on the work of the professional counsellors – **with their input**. However, it is difficult for the volunteers and donors to demand yes or no answers. They have the fate of the refugees in the back of their minds and they fear that if they are “too demanding” services in the camps could be further reduced, leaving the refugees essentially alone or needing to travel – without a bus ticket to the central office. Crucial to the volunteers’ strength are their roots in their parishes and their strong relations with pastors, which traditionally are the backbone of the Caritas, but have been increasingly held at a distance, as Caritas moves to become a “modern” and “businesslike” agency.

- **4) Blaming the victim**

Blaming the victim remains divisive and destructive. Internal discussions among counsellors and within agency hierarchy have made the divergent sides into entrenched opponents. The hierarchy defends its position with constantly changing and time consuming bureaucratic structures, questionnaires and statistic gathering that remain just that and never lead to real evaluation of the work. Decisions and priority setting are based on the need of the hierarchy to maintain power.

Counsellors in a second team have long since accepted the cuts and changes and moved to a central office. Since then the executive has directed new projects and additional funding and staff to them and not to us.

Moreover, our team experiences a fundamental change in the attitude of the colleagues in the other team toward the refugees. In their writing and in meetings they emphasize the care and counselling of refugees who may or do achieve residency status rather than working with those at the bottom of the social ladder, who have the fewest opportunities. Some colleagues speak of the educational value of allowing clients at first to fail in their dealings with bureaucrats before intervening to smooth the way. They say that in their central office counsellors deal with real or serious, not trivial, problems and

can work without interruption. They have publicly and internally downgraded the work in the camp offices as unprofessional and as not insuring confidentiality. They say openly that contact with refugees in the camps takes place at chance encounters in corridors. By contrast the central office offers “professional private sphere counselling”. This unfounded criticism has bolstered the efforts of the executive to move counselling out of the camps. It would seem that the distance between them and the refugees resulting from their new location outside the camps has changed their perceptions. But what of the clients who cannot afford the bus fare to the central office and what of those too culturally shy, too frightened, too untrusting, too ill, too traumatised or too preoccupied as single parents with organizing life with children to seek help outside the one place they have come to feel familiar with? Or what of those who because of language and cultural exclusion do not learn that there is help elsewhere? These are the ones that worry the volunteers and lead them to protest to the Caritas agency about the centralized counselling and to raise money to keep counsellors in the camps.

- **3) Commitment to counselling and care**

The efforts to secure funding for adequate counselling have been a success. Active publicity and committee work have made funds for projects available from the city and European funding agencies. These have funded training workshops for refugees, opened three new staff positions for each of the teams and November a new two year project with paid staff will open. Our team was not alone in working for these goals, but its position papers and outreach work were an essential contributing factor.

Furthermore, starting with the year 2004, ***one to two full time staff out of a total of 6 ½ counselling positions in our team have been secured through independent fundraising by our volunteers and staff together with matching subsidies.*** Yearly totals of 25,000 to 50,000 Euros for staff did not – as many expected - diminish the donations for bus fare, childcare projects, free time programs and equipment. On the contrary, ***donations for them increased.***

The outreach work necessary for fundraising, actually solidified the position of the counselling offices in the camps, by increasing public awareness of conditions. New volunteers were activated for work in the camps or for outreach, thus enhancing the services to the refugees, despite some staff cuts.

The process forged new alliances, strengthened the team, taught us new skills and has given a new and important role to volunteers and donors. ***But it also brought down the wrath of the agency hierarchy, which saw itself thwarted in its decision to use sparse funding and the resulting staff reduction to justify cutting counselling hours in the camps and to place new emphasis on teaching refugees independence - through travel to the new central office.\****

Staff, who financed themselves, were viewed by the executive as having resisted authority and to be acting outside the “Dienstweg” or hierarchy.

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\* This is neither irony nor exaggeration, but based on remarks made by the executive director.

Donations for staff time were perceived by the executive as neither helpful nor a way to expand services at no further cost to the agency, but rather as intervention in personnel decisions.

At a meeting in September 2008 between staff and the executive, the director made clear to staff that their fundraising amounted to defiance of instructions and that if they did not like his decision to centralize the counselling services, they have one alternative, they can resign from Caritas and they could tell volunteers he had said so. How staff and volunteers will react to this statement remains open.

#### **IV. Contact Information for Further Information on This Best Practice**

Please list your organization's name, mailing address, website, e-mail address, phone number, etc.

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## **Rebuilding a Community House in Okučani, Croatia**

### **I. Context**

Please tell the name of the neighborhood, city, and country where this Best Practice occurred. Name of the community organization or agency leading the efforts? What problem was to be solved?

- CROATIA, Okučani
- Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights Osijek; Association “Duga” Okučani

### **Problem:**

Okučani is a war torn community. After the military reintegration of the area (Western Slavonia), peace-building efforts started, using community organising as one of the primary methods of building peace and trust among the people from both sides of the war line.

In this community there was a Community house that was partially renewed by the local government after the war (one big room on a main floor, which was before used for weddings, church mass and community celebrations). Building didn't have any further infrastructure solved (no toilets, showers, top floor was not useable, roof was leaking etc.) and some of the activities that this object was serving were transferred to other locations (et. Church). So the building didn't have any practical usage and it was deteriorating year after year.

### **II. Actions Taken and Levels of Citizen Participation**

How was the problem discovered (listening process, etc.)? What research was conducted? Were allies involved? What actions were taken, when, and how many persons were involved in these different actions?

Problem was well known in the community (building is on the main road) but there were no resources, money and people who were determent to tackle this problem. After founding the core group from “Duga” volunteers we organised/lobbied for a meeting with mayor of Okučani and other responsible municipality staff. During the meeting several ideas were brainstormed about what this space can be used for in the future and how to get needed recourses for reconstruction. Basically, municipality agreed that if this citizen's initiative get some basic funds and gather volunteers who are willing to participate they would fund part of the project and running cost of the building. The idea to transform this object into a small hostel got most of the votes and fired up the people.

Hostel would solve chronic problem with accommodation of guests (especially for the groups which are visiting the area). There are no hotel in Okučani, just in Nova Gradiška which is 20km distanced. Also, nearby (5km) there are large Rehabilitation Centre for drug addicts and many of the parents who are visiting had a problem to stay over 2-3 nights. Okučani have a long tradition of preserving local and Croatian folklore culture and during the year there are

several events when different folklore groups present their work. This space could be also used for accommodating them.

After the meeting information was communicated and discussed further with several groups who had the interest to participate in this project (Folklore groups, Rehabilitation Centre, several other NGO's). They communicated further to their members to see if they are ready to volunteer for this project.

### **III. Results**

What solution was found to the problem? What changes occurred in persons' lives who were involved in solving this problem?

1. Centre for peace helped the group to find the funds (they wrote project proposal by them selves) and 60.000,00kn was fundraised for the project
2. Municipality donated half of this amount 30.000,00kn for further reconstruction of the object
3. Group of 10-20 volunteers (from different NGO's and Rehabilitation Centre, also some of the members of municipality participated) were constantly engaged for different jobs around and in the building.
4. In one month they had managed to reconstruct the top floor, to fully furnish with 32 beds, complete reconstruction of the bathroom, toilet and showers were done.
5. Grand opening was on December 05. 2007, on World Volunteer day, because of the great effort of many volunteers who participated in the project.

The main change was understanding that civic initiative have a capacity to start and conduct some of large community projects. Also, relations between NGO's and people of different nationalities was deepened and developed. Gap between Rehabilitation Centre members and local citizens was narrowed. Community now have a useful space for accommodation and various different activities that can be useful for better life of all of the citizens.

### **IV. Contact Information for Further Information on This Best Practice**

Please list your organization's name, mailing address, website, e-mail address, phone number, etc.

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# Unemployed Workers Self Organizing in Stuttgart, Germany

## Modelle der Selbstorganisation am Arbeitsmarkt mit Hilfe von CO in Stuttgart

Informationen zusammengestellt von Dr. Walter Häcker

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### I. Context

Please tell the name of the neighborhood, city, and country where this Best Practice occurred. Name of the community organization or agency leading the efforts? What problem was to be solved?

#### **Der myself-Verein zur gegenseitigen Förderung am Arbeitsmarkt**

Im Herbst 2004 gründeten in Stuttgart 200 zumeist arbeitssuchende Männer und Frauen diese Organisation, um sich solidarisch in gegenseitiger Unterstützung am Arbeitsmarkt zu bewegen und mit den persönlichen und familiären Problemen der Erwerbslosigkeit fertig zu werden. Inzwischen hat der Verein über 400 Mitglieder.

Dieses erfolgreiche Beispiel von Selbstorganisation hat befreundete Gruppierungen ermutigt, solidarisch organisierte Wirtschaftsunternehmen zu gründen bei deren Aufbau sich myself-Mitglieder engagieren:

Anfang 2008 wurde die **Gemeinnützige Treuhandstiftung „Stiftung + Arbeit“** gegründet mit dem Ziel als Stiftung und mit Hilfe einer noch zu gründenden Aktiengesellschaft öffentliche und private Gelder zu bündeln, Arbeitsplätze besonders für ältere Menschen zu schaffen oder zu erhalten. Eigene Aus- und Weiterbildung gehören zum Programm.

Im Juli 2008 gründete sich die Genossenschaft ARBEIT ZUERST als Personaldienstleister. Ziel ist es, Menschen, für die Zeitarbeit fast nur noch die einzige Chance am Arbeitsmarkt ist, eine solidarische Organisationsform zu schaffen, in der sie sich als Genossen selbst vermieten können, statt einen Großteil der von den Firmen, bei denen sie arbeiten, ausgegebenen Lohnkosten mit einem privaten Zeitarbeitsunternehmer teilen zu müssen. Eine Generalversammlung am 12.7.2009 erweiterte den Geschäftszweck auf "die Abwicklung von Projekten und die Bereitstellung von Dienstleistungen, zusammen mit Selbständigen. Damit können sich auch Existenzgründer innerhalb der Organisation gegenseitig unterstützen.

### II. Actions Taken and Levels of Citizen Participation

How was the problem discovered (listening process, etc.)? What research was conducted? Were allies involved? What actions were taken, when, and how many persons were involved in these different actions?

Viele der Gründungsmitglieder von myself e.V. waren von einer einzigen IT-Firma auf den Arbeitsmarkt getrieben worden, hatten sich aber eine Transfergesellschaft erkämpft, in der sie 2 Jahre lang (unter Fortzahlung von 80 % der Bezüge) Zeit gewonnen hatten, sich neu zu orientieren. In dieser Zeit haben sie gute Erfahrungen mit den Werkzeugen des Community Organizing gemacht: Beziehungsaufbau pflegen, Arbeitsgruppen gründen und selbst leiten, politische Verbündete in Sozialunternehmen suchen am Wohlergehen der Menschen sich orientierende Weiterbildungs- und Vermittlungsprofis finden und so, nach regelmäßige und gut vorbereitete Treffen, zu Aktionen kommen.

### III. Results

What solution was found to the problem?

Als am Ende der Transfergesellschaft klar war, dass insbesondere die Älteren (über 50-jährigen!) in die wirkliche Arbeitslosigkeit (ALG I oder II) eintreten werden, wuchs der Wunsch, das aufgebaute Sozialkapital, die Organisations- und Beziehungsfähigkeit zu erhalten. In Workshops, Zukunftswerkstätten, Trainings von Schlüsselpersonen wurden die Organisationsformen des Vereins entwickelt. Heute gibt es viele Aktionsgruppen, ein eigenes Kontaktbüro, eigene Einkünfte (4 € pro Mitglied und Monat), eine sozialpolitische Arbeitsgruppe, Job-Coaching auf Gegenseitigkeit, eigenes Fortbildungsprogramm etc.; Regionalgruppen existieren auch in Nachbarstädten von Stuttgart. Unter den 400 Vereinsmitgliedern sind 100 aktive Personen regelmäßig an den Aktionen beteiligt. Etwa im Jahresabstand werden große Aktionen veranstaltet oder gefördert, in denen das Thema Erwerbslosigkeit mit politischen Forderungen verbunden und so die öffentliche Diskussion darüber wach gehalten wird, aktuell ist < <http://www.idee-in-kopf.de>>.

What changes occurred in persons' lives who were involved in solving this problem?

Menschen haben erfahren, dass sie trotz Arbeitslosigkeit (oder gerade wegen des Fehlens eines mehr oder minder guten Jobs) wichtige Aufgaben in der Gesellschaft erfüllen können. Nicht wenige der myself-Mitglieder sind auch außerhalb des Vereins bürgerschaftlich engagiert, z.B. in der Hausaufgabenhilfe ausländischer Schulkinder. Sie sind zu Recht stolz darauf Mitglied einer Organisation zu sein, die 2007 den "Stuttgarter Bürgerpreis" erhalten hat.

### IV. Contact Information for Further Information on This Best Practice

Please list your organization's name, mailing address, website, e-mail address, phone number, etc.



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## **City Council Transparency: Community organizing in Katowice, Poland**

The project was realizing in Katowice (Poland) by Bona Fides Association. In May – August 2007 period the association made a survey in the City Hall of Katowice concerning the system of information for citizens, public finances and possibilities for citizen's participation in the decision making processes. As a result of the monitoring realised, a report "The Cooperation of the City Hall of Katowice with the citizens" was published.

The next step was initiating actions aiming to enforce the changes in local law and practice, which were demanded in the report. We choose two problems which we decided that should be solved at the beginning: the citizen's legislative initiative and personal voting of city councillors.

In order to implement these two changes the Statue of Katowice had to be changed so on October 2007 we wrote the proposal of changing the Statue of Katowice and we sent it to the city council. The proposal was considered by the committee for changing the Statue of Katowice. The committee consisted of 9 councillors and we decided that they will be our target.

At the beginning of our action we asked every councillor from committee if she/he is for or against our proposal. 2 of them were for and the rest were against it. So we decided to write open letter to the mayor of Katowice and all city councillors. After few weeks we gathered more than 300 signatures. At the same time we discussed with other ngo's from Katowice which could support us and we set up a Coalition of Watchdog and Anticorruption Organizations (SCYTHE) consists of 4 local organizations.

Besides those activities we also checked which big cities in Poland have citizen's legislative initiative and personal voting of city councillors and we sent those informations to local media and to all councillors.

A week before the voting we asked again all councillors how they wanted to vote. 3 of them were for our proposal, 4 were against and 2 did not know how to vote. We sent this information to all local media and we also published it on our website and in the most important local forums. Many people who read about it started to laugh, especially from those councillors who did not know haw to vote. People wrote that they lost their heads and so on. The same day both councillors called a leader and informed him that they thought about it and decided to vote for the proposal. So our chance for winning our campaign was bigger and bigger but we still were not sure about the result of voting.

2 days before voting we published the correspondence from before 3 years between the mayor of Katowice and the prime minister and between the mayor and city councillors which we received at the beginning of our campaign. Three years ago some organizations from Katowice wanted to implement the citizen's legislative initiative in our city. Because Katowice has more than 300 thousands inhabitants every change in the statue of the city has to be agree by the prime minister. So our mayor asked the prime minister if the citizen's legislatice initiative is according to the law. The answer of the prime minister had 3 pages. On first 2 pages the prime minister wrote that Polish constitution and any other acts do not regulate this issue.

On last page he wrote that in spite of that fact it will not be problem if our city implement it.

When the mayor of Katowice received that letter he wrote a letter to all city councillors. He pasted first two pages of the letter of the prime minister without third the most important one. Instead of it he wrote that because of the fact that no Polish act regulates that issue it is not possible to implement it in Katowice.

After publishing those informations we asked again all councillors how they want to vote. 7 of them were for our proposal and 2 of them were against. A day before voting we published it on our website and we sent this information to all local media.

There were journalists from 2 local televisions, 3 radio stations, 4 newspapers and more than 30 inhabitants during the session of the committee for changing the Statue of Katowice. We also took with ourselves a camera in order to record the voting and publish it on our website. During the voting 8 councillors from 9 were for our proposal and 1 abstained.

Next day every local newspaper wrote about it. Some examples of headlines from the press:

“ The citizens can change the law”

“The city councillors give a little bit power for citizens”

“ The citizens have won”

“ The inhabitants of Katowice can pass the resolutions by themselves”

“ The Resolutions of folks”

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