

## Šumperk, CZECH REPUBLIC

### We Want to Live and Work Like You, Šumperk

The ERDF-cofinanced project 'We want to live and work like you', based in the small city of Šumperk in the Czech Republic, enabled the establishment of a new centre providing innovative social services for persons with mental and combined disabilities. The centre includes daycare services, protected employment and facilities for protected housing and respite care. Social rehabilitation is being achieved by a method of supported employment.

### WE WANT TO LIVE AND WORK LIKE YOU, ŠUMPERK

The 'We want to live and work like you' project converted an old school building in the city of Šumperk, in the remote north-east of the Czech Republic, into a new centre which provides severely mentally disabled people with daycare, a protected workshop, protected housing, respite care and social rehabilitation. In addition, the method of supported employment for persons with mental and combined disabilities plays a central role. The project was implemented by an experienced and dedicated local NGO, the Society for the Support of People with Mental Disability.

There are two main outcomes: new social services that were badly needed in the region are now available, and the beneficiary's innovative up-to-date approach ensures that the employment opportunities and quality of life of the disabled people and their family carers have started improving. In this way, the project fulfils the city's community social services plan as well as the regional and national social inclusion and employment strategies.

The project provides an example of a dedicated NGO, which teamed up with public and private partners in its region and managed to open a brand new and sustainable social services centre serving the citizens of a significant area – with the help of the ERDF.

## **WE WANT TO LIVE AND WORK LIKE YOU**

### *Care for mentally disabled people thanks to ERDF*

The Cathedral of the Holy Ghost and the mediaeval town hall are only two of the historical monuments in the 700-year-old city of Šumperk, a small town with a long and varied history in the Olomouc region in the north-east of the Czech Republic. The beautiful city is located in a remote area of the country. One of the main social challenges in this region is the social inclusion of people with severe mental and combined disabilities. After years of desperate need for state-of-the-art social services for these persons, a new care centre opened in 2012 with the support of the European Regional Development Fund. It marks a significant step forward, as people with handicaps of all kinds, and mental disability in particular, had been ostracised under the socialist regime for several decades and the sphere of care for these people has been slowly developing since then, in different ways from region to region.

A project called 'We want to live and work like you' (*Chceme bydlet a pracovat jako vy*) helped a local NGO which brings together persons with mental disabilities, their family members, carers and experts, to rebuild and refurbish an old building into a new centre for daycare services. These services include protected employment workshops and facilities for protected housing and respite care. The social rehabilitation method of supported employment for persons with mental and combined disabilities has been implemented too.

The project was carried out by the Society for the Support of People with Mental Disability (*Společnost pro podporu lidí s mentálním postižením o.s.*), an NGO with rich history since 1992 and with wide experience in caring for mentally disabled children and adults and their family members. It worked in partnership with the City of Šumperk, the Olomouc region and an elementary and high school for children with mental disabilities in Šumperk. Thanks to the ERDF, one of the old buildings on the school site, which was in an extremely bad physical state and could not be used any more for the school, was completely renovated. A barrier-free space for new social services has been created. Such a service has long been urgently needed in the region.

The main objective of the project is to support social inclusion and employment opportunities for two main target groups: mentally disabled persons and their family members and carers at the same time. Inclusive growth should be achieved by eliminating the main problems of the target group in the region through the project activities and through innovating and enhancing social services provided in the region. This objective becomes especially important when viewed in the context of social services for mentally disabled persons. In the Czech Republic deinstitutionalised care is still an exception, and services that support and emphasise the autonomy of the client are essential. In this sense Šumperk was an important centre for establishing such services, given its position in the region.

### *Accommodation, respite care, daycare and work integration*

The new centre has provided various social services since the completion of the project at the end of February 2012. They serve a target group of 20 clients in the daycare centre and eight people in protected residential housing.

In addition to consulting services and legal advice, the project supplies five main services. The first is protected housing, a service providing residential accommodation for persons with severe mental disabilities (usually combined with partial or full physical disability). This service includes 24/7 personal assistance. Alongside this there are respite services for persons caring for people with severe mental disabilities: this service offers housing for mentally disabled persons for a limited period of time in order to give their carers some much-needed time off. This service includes 24/7 personal assistance and can be used for periods of several hours or days.

The third service offered is a daycare centre for persons with severe mental and combined disabilities, which provides social, educational and therapeutic services. The aim is to develop new and sustain the already acquired skills of clients and develop their personality in the long term. The service also aims to help families who are taking care of the mentally disabled person. The centre integrates its clients into society and offers them useful ways to spend their free time, with the aim of avoiding their becoming isolated.

Fourthly, the centre carries out social rehabilitation through the method of supported employment, which comprises a group of related activities aiming to train mentally handicapped persons to help them become as independent, self-confident and active as possible, in the light of their unfavorable health conditions. The ultimate goal is to find a permanent job for each client, the type of work depending on their type of disability and on opportunities provided by local employers.

Finally, there is a protected workshop, which helps the clients to acquire and sustain the habit of work and to maintain contact with the world around them. The protected workshop does not deal solely with the work of its clients, but it also helps them with free-time activities, which are an extremely important part of the social dimension of the service.

### *Good planning as a prerequisite for sustainable success*

The project was thoroughly planned in order to achieve the best possible results and to avoid risks. All the important stakeholders such as public authorities, members of target groups and local businesses were involved in the planning.

The project is also consistent with the city's community plan for social services, the regional development plan for social services and the regional and national social inclusion and employment strategies.

Thanks to careful planning and a strictly designed system of project management, the project has not encountered any serious problems during its implementation, and both the construction works and the co-operation with target groups is going well.

An important part of the planning process was dedicated to preparing the project to be sustainable. A needs analysis, required by the ERDF call, including a survey among target groups (family members and carers of mentally disabled persons) and an economic study were carried out to provide data regarding all costs and revenues of the centre after its completion. All available public and private sources of funding were taken into account. This was an important step which established a real and persistent need for the services that would be provided at the completion of the project.

The project results seem to be sustainable because of:

- good planning
- the demand for social services for mentally disabled persons that exists in the region
- ongoing support from the region and the city
- the Society's experience in supporting people with mental disability and providing social services to specific target groups of mentally disabled persons and their family members

A main point for the success of the project is the triangular co-operation between the city, the region and the NGO. This kind of partnership is still quite rare in the Czech Republic and thus makes this particular project noticeable. The support of the local and regional authorities, and cooperation between a devoted non-governmental sector organisation and a committed public sector social services organisation, in a region with a demand for such services, are the key to a successful and meaningful project.



**Figure 1 Completed common room prior to opening**



**Figure 2. High quality construction standards**

### *A big step for a small city in a remote region*

Before this project's implementation, there was no institution offering protected housing to severely mentally disabled persons, respite or other services to help their families, or services to support their personal development as individuals. Institutions for mentally disabled persons have limited capacity and are often located far away from home. Thus in remote regions care for these persons is restricted to homecare with an extremely limited amount of help from professional carers and the community – all of which exerts immense pressure on their families. Through the project's implementation, a large part of the care was transferred to the Society as a community-based provider of social services according to the principles of deinstitutionalisation.

Thanks to the project and the newly reconstructed building, all these services are provided in one centre together with a protected workshop, which provides social rehabilitation through supported employment. This is a unique opportunity for the region and its inhabitants. Such facilities are rare even in the largest cities in the country, which makes them even more significant when found in the regional cities.

The principal outcomes of the project are that new social services that were badly needed in the region are now available, and the beneficiary's innovative up-to-date approach ensures that employment opportunities and quality of life of both the persons with mental and combined disabilities and for their family members-carers are dramatically improving. The project has also directly created 15 new jobs within the centre itself, in a region with high unemployment, and provides space for at least nine protected jobs for persons with a mental disability.

In order to provide the above services, it was necessary to complete a wide range of construction works to change an old school building that was no longer suitable for teaching into a modern, barrier-free social care centre.



**Figure 3. Kitchen area for cooking meals with clients**



**Figure 4. Common eating area for residents**

The whole building was completely changed, meaning everything from the outer shell, windows, doors and roof to the inside walls, electrical wiring, air-conditioning and healthcare networks and interior equipment. When building a centre for disabled persons, construction plans must be extremely well prepared in order to avoid any possible barriers, especially when dealing with residential housing and protected employment, where the clients are sometimes on their own.

### *Amethodology to learn from*

The project was successful thanks to a combination of many related factors, of which five stand out. In first place, a sound needs analysis was carried out, which demonstrated the genuine need for the project from target groups in the region. Secondly, it was undertaken by a committed and experienced NGO, which since 1992 has brought together persons with mental disabilities, members of their families and experts. The Society has a long-term commitment to and activity in social services, which provided credibility and helped to acquire political support for the project. In practical terms, the project depended on financial support from the ERDF and local public authorities – as well as banks, which covered prefinancing and cofinancing. Fourthly, success depended on the selection of the right partners and contractors, who stuck with the contract despite the conditions required by the nature of the project (such as four-month payment terms). The final success factor was the high quality of project management due to the presence of a high-quality project team during the whole project cycle.

The project would not have been realised without the financial support of the ERDF. However, the added value the ERDF brought also consists of the education of applicants and beneficiaries. The regional council now educates beneficiaries in project planning and thinking and in long-term strategic planning throughout the process of project development and implementation.

Right now, the project is too new to be transferred to other cities, but new social services could use the experience and the system of work that has been applied in Šumperk. However this would be subject to several basic conditions. It is important that the city or region supports such an approach and is dedicated to the working and living situation of mentally disabled people. A strong and experienced NGO is needed to implement the project successfully. Informal partnerships should support the approach, and funding schemes must be available.

The project provides an example of a dedicated NGO, which teamed up with public and private partners in its region and managed to open a brand new and sustainable social services centre which serves the citizens of a significant geographical area – with the help of the ERDF. This is why the experience and this method of project development, implementation and sustainability could be transferred to other cities throughout Europe.



Fig. 5. Clients working in a workshop



Fig. 6. Acknowledging ERDF support



Fig. 7. Protected employment



Fig. 8. Clients working in a workshop

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