

Institutional forms of assistance for homeless males

"We cannot admit that out of us the whole of the human mass wreathes in heating systems, leads an almost animal existence, slowly excluding any other awareness besides hunger and fear(...)! "

Karol Wojtyła (1979, p. 124)

For ages, the custom of supporting those who ask for help has been known. One notices the great problems amongst the poorest individuals and particularly those deprived of a roof over their head. In Poland for very long time there was no organised system of social philanthropy, as neither an effectively working "law for the poor". This has resulted in churches and monasteries being simply besieged by beggars (Ihnatowicz, 1979, p. 314). Initially assistance was rendered mainly in the form of alms. In the course of time the problem took over also tutelary institutions like: almshouses, hospitals or hospices, institutionalised social initiatives, controlled by the Church confraternities¹, unions of mutual aid, etc. In the course of time one tried to solve the problems by establishing legislative regulations. From the beginning, all endeavours had in view the appeasing of the negative effects of poverty. The basis for this activity was the emotional response to somebody's needs and a sense of solidarity. This feeling of social solidarity was comprehended in particular by Adam Chmielowski (Saint Brother Albert). In the 19th century he inaugurated in Poland a great deed of assistance for poor and homeless people.

¹ By the term "confraternities" one understands brotherhoods, guilds, associations. These organisations devote much attention to the existential matters of their members. There existed the obligation to look after old or sick members, and also to take care of their widows.

This modest, yet great man understood that one has to enter into poverty in order to restore people's dignity.

Like in previous ages the modern world is also full of human dramas. They also are subjects of social resonance. The dramas arise as an effect of poverty and indigence. The homeless belong to the people most injured and experienced by fate. Not only the homelessness is written into the life of people. This accompanies extreme poverty, the impossibility of appeasing basic existential needs, social exclusion and helplessness. This brings negative consequences for homeless individuals as well as for society. Therefore, there is placed before society an obligation to undertake various forms of care and assistance.

In connection with the increasing scale of the phenomenon, Kielce Caritas established A Polish Data Base on Homeless People within the Phare 2001 Programme "Civic Society Development". The data base already contains four thousand people. The data comes from about 60 outposts. Estimations on the scale of homelessness, usually fail to include, however, people living at stations, wintering on allotments, in heating system pipes, on gate steps, etc. A great part of homeless persons effectively eludes all kinds of statistics. Such a state of affairs means that it is difficult to precisely estimate the scale of the problem. And consequently it is also difficult to establish what financial sources are needed to provide homeless people with help in the form of a place to sleep, food, and clothing. A knowledge of the scale of the phenomenon and its dynamics might contribute to professionalisation of the service provided for homeless people. This helps to develop adequate – institutional and non-institutional – forms of support and programmes realized within a widely comprehended social policy, one directed at solving homelessness problems. This could serve as a tool to create individual programmes on homelessness, and also to provide special support for this purpose.

The increasing and worrying problem of homelessness that can be noticed at present was, during the communist period in Poland, viewed with limited interest on the part of government and public opinion. This was a time when the homelessness problem in Poland was negated. The phenomenon was hidden by including this category with other subjects of social welfare. Work with homeless people appeared to be fiction. In Poland, at the end of the 1980s, together with policy changes, one started to perceive problems of homelessness as well as the homeless themselves. The first step in the direction of eradicating the negligence that had arisen during the period of the Polish People's Republic was the Act of 29 November 1990 on Social Assistance. The implementation of this act meant giving homeless people rights to temporary sleeping places,

clothing and food, and also to subsidies and other forms of assistance. In the course of time, the regulation started to be put into practice, besides social welfare centres, an increasing number of non-governmental organisations started to organize shelters and other centres for the homeless. The assistance rendered for this category of the needy, in accordance with traditional models of help, incorporates state, church and social institutions. Therefore, the help is granted on the level of all three sectors: governmental, local-governmental and non-governmental.

The principles of giving support to homeless people are regulated by the Act of the 12th of March 2004 on Social Assistance. Homelessness, as a defined life situation, constitutes one of the reasons for the receipt of support within the frame of social welfare (art. 7 law. 3 Act on social welfare). According to the act a homeless person is a person not living in a dwelling apartment as defined in the provisions on the protection of tenants and housing resources of a commune and not registered for the permanent stay according to the provisions on population records and identity cards, as well as a person not living in a dwelling apartment, being registered for the permanent stay in an apartment in which living is not possible (art. 6, p. 8). The Department of Help for the Homeless functions within the organisational structure of the Municipal Social Welfare Centre. The aim realized within this type of activity is an answer to the specific problems which homelessness brings, enabling homeless people to function and exist in conditions of suitable human dignity. As a consequence it aims to encourage a way out from the state of homelessness. Besides, homeless people are included in various forms of material and service help, in analogy to the assistance provided to all clients of social welfare. In granting support it is assumed that the proper unit to grant this help is the place of residence or stay of the person applying for help. Mandatory own tasks of a commune shall include, among others, providing shelter, meals, and necessary clothing to persons deprived of those (art. 17). The funds for providing this and other forms of assistance come from local government budgets and are expended through social welfare centres (Kulka, 2003, p. 51). Everyone asking for help will receive it. Almost never, however, can one rely on long term assistance, particularly when the recipient does not demonstrate any activity or will to change their lot. Due to limited financial resources, assistance to those who do not cooperate with social workers is usually given on the spot.

Work with homeless people is individualised. This is accomplished in two ways. Initially it appears to be the essential preserving of basic social needs, such as: shelter, meals, medical help, hygiene, the ensuring of necessary

and appropriate clothing, and financial help granted in accordance with specific needs. Social work and specialist assistance (legal and psychological), understood in a wide sense, is also undertaken. The purpose of these forms of activity is to stimulate homeless people to self-reliant acts having as their aim an improvement of their personal situation, and, what is connected with it, to allow them to become independent and to remove themselves from the condition of homelessness.

According to the *Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy* of the 11th of November 2001, a programme for getting homeless people out of the state of homelessness has been developed. This programme 'Homelessness'² is a long-term undertaking. Its realisation has to be performed in annual stages. This has been supported by endowment from budget reserves, which were divided among the voivodeships. The help, to which the funds were destined, had to fall within activities of a prophylactic, protecting or activating character. Every organisation taking part within the project is obliged to create detailed reports from the realisation of their programmes, which when collected at the level of voivodship became the basis for the preparation of reports from individual voivodeships. On this basis, and on the basis of unit controls, the ministry specifies the needs and verifies the amount of the donations for the next year (Jankowski, 2001, p. 5). From an analysis of the applications submitted in 2004 to the Ministry of Social Policy it results that assistance centres applied for at least three times more subventions than were finally given to them.

According to the Programme "Homelessness" activities should be concentrated around such forms of activity like: granting universal help to people who for various reasons are endangered with homelessness and are homeless; organising and running – shelters, dorms, canteens, points of material, medical and sanitary assistance; granting legal, psychological and organisational help, particularly having as their aim making the people protected by the welfare programme self-reliant, and also organising and rendering (on the basis of exclusively their own material base) cheap or free services for poor people; the obtaining and distribution of food free of charge for homeless and undernourished people; granting help in temporary shelter to people who find themselves in a critical situation.

² Detailed information about the principles of the 'Homelessness; programmeme can be found in social policy departments of local government offices or in Units for Cooperation with non-Governmental Organizations at the Department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of the Economy, Labour and Social Policy.

Individual programmes of extracting oneself from homelessness as an instrument to overcome the homelessness problem is regulated by art. 49 of the Act of the 12th of March 2004 on Social Assistance. According to the act:

1. "A homeless person may be covered by an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness, consisting in the provision of support for a homeless person in solving his/her life problems, in particular family and housing ones, and assistance in gaining employment.
2. An individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness shall be developed by a social worker from a social assistance centre in cooperation with a homeless person involved, subject to the approval of the manager of the centre.
3. If a homeless person stays at a shelter or at a house for homeless persons, an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness may be developed by a social worker employed at that establishment, subject to sec. 5.
4. The entity in charge of the implementation of an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness, in the case referred to in sec. 3, shall be the relevant shelter or the house for homeless persons.
5. Where an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness exceeds the limits of assistance resources being at the disposal of the establishment, or a need arises to cover a homeless person with the health insurance, such programme shall require the approval of the manager of the social assistance centre. Should that be the case, entities in charge of the implementation of particular provisions of the programme shall be indicated therein.
6. An individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness should take into account the situation of a homeless person and ensure particular support for a person actively participating in working his/her way out of homelessness.
7. An individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness, in accordance with the needs of a homeless person, may take into account all assistance resources being at the disposal of the social assistance centre implementing the programme.
8. The social assistance centre shall pay contributions to the health insurance according to the principles specified in the provisions on the general insurance with the National Health Fund for any homeless person covered with an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness".

In practice, with the purpose of granting the best support to homeless people, a programme of correction- therapeutic entitled 'GWAB' – Group of Support for People Extracting Themselves from Homelessness (Grupa Wsparcia Osób Wychodzących z Bezdomności) is put into effect. The recipients of the project are homeless people, of productive working age, capable of working, mentally healthy and somatic, not addicted to alcohol and drugs, expressing a willingness to participate in the group. The aim of the project is the integral development of a homeless person, with the active cooperation of the therapeutic group members. The realisation of the programme brings with it such advantages as: improving new working methods with homeless people; diminishing the effects of enlarging the number of homeless people, and, additionally, the possibility rationalisation of spending grants for help for homeless people. Finally the purpose of the programme is:

- extracting the homeless person from social marginalization,
- a change in attitude from being anonymous and backward into a self-reliant functioning member of society,
- finding the purpose, sense of life on the basis of selected, commonly assumed value systems,
- the re-building or building of family relationships,
- activation in the labour market,
- undertaking work and keeping down a job,
- financial self-reliance,
- renting a flat – self-reliance.

As far as possible people on their way out of homelessness secure temporary residence place in hostels. These are units where correction programmes are conducted with the aim of adapting the individual to a self-reliant functioning in a wider social environment. These individuals are helped to find employment. Social welfare centres or non-governmental organisations conducting professional and social reintegration for people who are the subject of social exclusion can:

- organise public works,
- run social integration clubs organising legal assistance, activities of a therapeutic, employment and self-help character (within employment, housing and social matters) (art. 18 Law of the 13th of July 2003 on social employment.)

"The social assistance centre shall pay contributions to the health insurance according to the principles specified in the provisions on the general insurance with the National Health Fund for any homeless person covered with

an individual programme of working one's way out of homelessness" (art. 49). Moreover a person who requires 24-hour care due to age, disease, or disability, who may not function independently in everyday life, and who may not be ensured necessary assistance in the form of attendance services, shall be entitled to be placed in a social assistance house. According to the *Act of the 12th of March 2004 on Social Welfare*, a financial grant may be also given to a homeless person, to satisfy any of the requisite living needs. The earmarked allowance may be awarded in the form of a credited ticket (art. 39, law. 3 and 4). The homeless can make use of such institutions as:

- shelters for the homeless,
- places to sleep in and warm shelters,
- environmental clubs,
- the MONAR association,
- soup kitchens for the poor,
- social points, immediate help,
- medical points,
- bath houses.

In bigger Polish cities, the assistance base for homeless people – in the form of kitchens for the poor, shelters, places to sleep, and public baths, is very well developed. The facilities offered by these centres is designed chiefly for those who are registered or were registered within the local administrative area where the given centre is located. Given sufficient justification the head of a given centre in consultation with the Department of Help for the Homeless can agree for the temporary stay in such a centre of a person from outside of particular administrative area. In such a situation the help is given in accordance with the possibilities of the given area. Such a policy of help for the homeless has as its purpose the reduction of mobility amongst homeless people, as well as providing indispensable support for the needy inhabitants of a given parish, so that they – with the limited financial resources available for social welfare – are not forced to look for help elsewhere.

According to the act, some services are provided in the place of residence i.e. in the place where the given person is residing at a particular moment. This type of service can utilized by individuals who from time to time change their place of abode and are not looking for stabilisation (Kulka, 2003, p. 69). The services which an administrative area is obliged to provide a homeless person with include:

- shelter,
- necessary clothing,
- meals,

- social work and specialised guidance,
- credited ticket,
- organisation of a funeral,
- assistance in kind, including assistance to reach financial self-dependence (art. 17, art. 36, Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance).

The winter period, the so-called protective period, in a time when assistance for homeless people is given unconditionally. In most cities, in as far as resources allow, every homeless person who needs shelter and help is furnished with the said. Due to the unfavourable weather conditions there are, as a rule, more guests than free sleeping places. When there is a shortage of beds in a shelter mattresses are provided in the rooms, and in exceptionally cold winters also in the corridors. This situation can however, undergo radical change, because on the 29th of April 2004 there came into force *The Act on Financial Support for the Creating in the years 2004 – 2005 of Social Apartments, Places to Sleep in, Houses for the Homeless*³. In the long term it intends to create an apartment base, indispensable for securing shelter for all homeless and poor people in need.

Homeless people often do not wish to use of dormitories in shelters or other forms of temporary accommodation. Some because they do not accept the rules and regulations in force there, asserting that these limit their freedom, others because they are addicted to alcohol and chose the possibility to drink and independence instead of a warm bed. People in such situations can sleep at a station, gate steps, in a garden shed on allotments or other forms of makeshift accommodation. Everybody who lives in such places is exposed to countless injuries and illnesses. The most serious danger is drastic falls in body temperature. Often this can result in permanent invalidity or even death. Therefore, there are organized actions targeted at the places homeless people stay in the winter period. These activities are designed to protect homeless people from life and health endangering situations. They are conducted by social welfare centres in cooperation with the municipality guard and the police. They take place at stations, in warm pipeline junctions, barracks and derelict properties, on deserted allotments. Homeless people who express a willingness to make use of a hostel bed to stay in are taken there. All of them are given leaflets with information about the functioning of the care support system for the homeless.

³ The content of the act can be found on the Internet page:
<http://www.abc.com.pl/serwis/du/2004/1533.htm>

Despite the concerted efforts of the above one can often observe deaths amongst the homeless during the winter period as a result of hyperthermia. Incidents of frostbite, which are the result of the slow healing of wounds, are common. An uncured wound can lead to the amputation of the affected limb. An inability to protect oneself from the effects of the cold results in illnesses associated with the kidney, the urinary system and rheumatic disorders (Jankowski, 2001, p. 9). In Poland the association Doctors of Hope provide medical care for the poorest. Clinics are run in Krakow and Warsaw. In 2001 in Krakow alone were registered 2700 persons. Besides medical doctors, nurses and health protection workers are also active within the association. All the personnel are volunteers. People who ask for help can take advantage of medical consultation, receive advice on personal hygiene and obtain medicines free of charge. One can also make use of social assistance. In chemists working under the auspices of the association one hundred thousand prescriptions are issued annually. These are gifts from foreign humanitarian organisations. Particular care is devoted to children from deprived backgrounds and the homeless. Within the framework of its activities the Association is also involved in medical help abroad, participating in humanitarian relief work (Jankowski, 2001, p. 9).

The health problems of homeless people often result from alcohol abuse. This is a serious and widespread problem which relates to most homeless people. Social welfare within the framework of its activities provides help for homeless people who are addicts, this encompasses:

- ensuring the basic needs of homeless people who are undergoing addiction therapy,
- contacting homeless people and enabling them to use the facilities of therapy centres for the addicted,
- enabling homeless people access to substitutional programmes (involving the issue of methadone, synthetic substances, thereby eliminating the necessity to take psychoactive substances).

Self-governmental institutions which work on behalf of homeless people are supported by non-governmental organisations. Within the non-governmental sector, activity on the behalf of homeless people is performed by secular as well as ecclesiastical organisations, and also congregations. The most active church organisations include: the Albertans Congregation (Zgromadzenie Albertynów), the Catholic Community “Chleb Życia” (Wspólnota Katolicka „Chleb Życia”), the Congregation of the Sisters Missionaries of Love (Zgromadzenie Sióstr Misjonarek Miłości), the Congregation of Sisters of Divine Mercy (Zgromadzenie Sióstr Matki Bożej

Miłosierdzia) and Caritas. The most active secular organisations active on behalf homeless people include, among others: St. Brother Albert's Aid Society (Towarzystwo Pomocy im. Brata Alberta), the 'Monar' Association – The Youth Movement for Counteracting Drug Addiction (Młodzieżowy Ruch na Rzecz Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii), The AIDS Solidarity Association (acting in conjunction with the Ministry of Health), The Association for Aid for the Homeless (Bartosz, Błażej, 1995, p. 18 - 19), The Polish Red Cross (including the collection of clothing and food), the Association Doctors of Hope, The Self-help Bursa Association (Stowarzyszenie Samopomocy Bursa) and the Barka Foundation for Mutual Help. Below, I present the characteristics of the given organisations in slightly more detail.

The 'Caritas' Organisation is a charitable institution of the Polish Episcopate. The tasks that result from the organisation's statute are realised by individual dioceses (39), Caritas of the Boniface's Order, the Field Bishopric and Greek-Catholic Church. The help is directed to all in need including homeless people. 'Caritas' institutions chiefly provide on the spot aid, by:

- organising medical and nursing care,
- running soup kitchens for the poor,
- running social points,
- the distribution of clothing collected by parishes,
- individual aid in difficult life situations.

They also take part in the organising shelters, places to dorms and baths for homeless people which is run by local Associations of Brother Albert (Wielgos-Struck, 1997, p. 9), through their making accessible to them of their buildings or the implementation of frequent or occasional material measures.

The 'Barka' Foundation is a non-governmental organisation. It looks after people who cannot find their place in society, who are forgotten and not wanted. By elaborating and applying for the programmes of mutual help they attempt to secure for them a chance to rebuild their lives. The founders of the "Barka" Foundation for Mutual Help were two psychologists, Mr. and Mrs. Tomasz Sadowski. They established the first house in 1989 in Władysławowo. By 200111 'Barka' communities existed, in which lived and worked about 300 persons. The houses do not have a paid administration. Everybody is responsible for his stay and development. The inhabitants base their everyday life on the basis of multi-generation family, and everyday problems are discussed at common meetings around the table. The purpose of the Foundation is:

- securing shelter, meals and support, help in returning to society and making education accessible for those who need it,

- supporting individual ‘Barka’ communities up until the point when they become independent,
- developing plans of improving social conditions in Poland through the involvement of the Polish government and foreign organisations.

The Foundation implements long term complex systems of activity, of which the following programmes are representative:

1. The community programme– these are self-sufficient households developing on the basis of self-help ideas and cooperation with the neighbourhood and local communities.
2. The socio-educational programme– consists in linking social welfare with education, consists in improving the professional qualifications of people, to enable them to become self-sufficient and socially integrated.
3. A programme for the obtaining and creation of new work places for the long-term unemployed – particularly the so-called second labour market, meaning, for instance, second hand shops, workshops, households, etc.
4. A programme of cheap social building– which presupposes the involvement of grants and the individual work of those in need. (Jankowski, 2001, p. 6).

The H. Ch. Kofoed Self-help Association “Bursa” is a non-governmental organisation. It started its work in 1998 on the basis of many years of experience gained as part of the social welfare performed in the H.Ch. Kofoed School and in the Danish Institute of Social Aid in Copenhagen. The headquarters of the association is the Warsaw –Targówek Parish. The aim of the organization is work towards changing the way lives of people with a sense of hopelessness, who are addicts, helping the victims of violence, the unemployed and the homeless. The Association’s principle is ‘help for self-help’, assisting the needy with the aim of developing those strengths in an individual which are indispensable for a reasoned and independent sense of directing of own one’s life. Support is administered in the form of assistant work, educational, therapeutic, re-socialisation, formation, social and educational – through the organising of professional courses. It provides immediate help by running canteen and safe housing developments (Jankowski, 2001, p. 9).

The fruit of the cooperation of various institutions, secular as well as ecclesiastical, governmental as well as non-governmental, has been various kinds of initiatives whose purpose is help for the poorest. These include various kinds of occasional celebrations and social actions. For instance in Krakow, there is a tradition to organise an annual Christmas Eve Supper, for

about 800 homeless persons. The Supper is organised in the parish of the Franciscans Church. The task was performed in cooperation with Municipal Social Welfare Centre, the Krakow Archdiocese Caritas, the Congregation of the Order of Friars Minor, the Merchants Congregation in Krakow, Radio Plus, the Małopolski Voivodeship Office, St. Brother Albert's Aid Society. All poor or/and homeless people who attend the supper get festive food packets.

Non-governmental charitable organisations are maintained mainly by the volunteer financial support of private individuals, companies and other organisations. They make use of donations from Polonia. This is financial and material help – in the form of clothing, food, medicine. Other source of income include payments from those under care themselves, chiefly from those of them who have some form of financial income. Non-governmental organisations also have the rights to subsidy and other forms of financial and material support from units of public administration at various levels. To Summarise, it follows to emphasise that the activity of non-governmental charitable organisations is extremely important and they include:

- help for the most needy, securing them a place to sleep and meals,
- securing clothing, footwear and underwear,
- securing medical care,
- ensuring possibilities to maintain personal hygiene (by running bath houses and anti-deloousing centres),
- help in obtaining financial grants,
- help in finding a place in a House of Social Welfare,
- help in administrative matters,
- legal assistance,
- help in finding a job and a flat,
- psychological assistance (Bartosz, Błażej, 1995, s. 20).

Within the framework of its statutes the activities of non-governmental institutions, secular as well as ecclesiastical, provide, among other things: shelters for men and women, places to sleep in, baths and canteens. Undoubtedly it is this form of help that homeless vagabonds utilise the most willingly. At present there are a large number of non-governmental centres providing help for homeless people. Despite many attempts to enumerate Polish nongovernmental institutions that provide services for the homeless, their total number is not known. Information about the activity of these organisations has been provided by the Association of Homeless Assistance as well as the data assembled by the Self-help Information Bank 'Klon' (Fiejdasz, 1994; and basic statistics concerning the activity of non-governmental organisations in the field of social welfare - fieldwork KLON 1992/93; from:

Wielgos-Struck, 2000, p. 6). These estimations actually only concern a number of the institutions which organised shelters and places to sleep⁴.

There prevails within the structure of acting assistance institutions both material help and psychic support. The task of social help usually provides all homeless people with food and temporary accommodation. And in practice the homeless are mostly the guests of places such as: shelters, dorms and soup kitchens for the poor. The most important task is however, depending on possibilities, help with a return to an independent life, protection and re-socialisation. This might be possible due to support, the effect of which will be the reintroduction in people of the values of self-help and a responsible moulding of one's individual life.

At present, every homeless man can find support in the formal institutions and associations established to provide aid. Formal institutions have taken over the obligations for natural systems of social support and have finally liberated the natural system of its obligations, which once was chiefly created by the family and the local environment. The task of these institutions is exclusively excluded in the natural system of support, but if, however, social policy does not create real chances for demarginalisation, then they will chiefly perform a function of social control.

⁴ there is also available on the Internet a Polish data base of organisations acting within the social help system: <http://www.pomocspoleczna.ngo.pl> (headword on the page: CIS – base of institution of social help)

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