

## Psychiatric Mobile Team – Samusocial din Romania

SamusocialdinRomania is a Romanian NGO working upon a methodology based on an emergency system designed to get in touch with the most dissocialized people, since January 2004. Indeed, due to the social-economic transition of these last years, many people have become vulnerable to the extent to lose their house and to live in the streets. Official estimations state the existence of **15000 homeless in the country, of which more than 5000 would live in the capital**. Living conditions of these persons expose them to a multiplicity of diseases (dermatologic, breathing, digestive, psychic psychiatric). Every year, almost 300 persons die in the streets of the capital.

SamusocialdinRomania conducts its main missions with a focus on:

**1. Outreach : Complementary day and night mobile teams** - 2 days and 6 nights a week, two night mobile teams, one day mobile team and one psychiatric mobile team go through the town in order to bring help to the most endangered people who do not ask anymore for help. When possible, the medical care (dressing or treatment) is provided directly in the street. If necessary, the team accompanies the beneficiary to the hospital. During the four months of winter, the volunteers of the Red Cross participate in the Samusocial night mobile teams. They distribute sleeping bags, hot beverages and take the beneficiaries to the night shelter.

**2. Offering shelter** - Taking into account the evaluation and also the wish of the person, the night mobile team offers a place in an emergency shelter. The General City Hall placed to the Samusocial din Romania's disposal a land located between Gara de Nord and Orhideea Complex with a view to build a 30-bed night emergency shelter. The opening of this centre is expected for the last trimester of 2008. For the time being, until the centre is finished, SamusocialdinRomania has established a temporary 10-bed shelter in Bucharest, opened every winter, from November until February.

**3. Care and recommendation** - The adult homeless people can go by themselves to the medico-psycho-social cabinet opened each morning from Monday to Friday from 09.00 to 13.00. They can meet there, without appointment, a physician, a social worker or a psychologist. According to the Romanian Law the medicines are distributed by a pharmacist on the basis of a medical prescription. Starting from 10.02.2007, the cabinet is located in a new, specially refurbished building on 82 bis, Sos. Grozavesti.

#### **4. Making a network for taking over the adult homeless people in Bucharest -**

The teams of Samusocial collect the data about the cared persons, analyze them and publish regular surveys about the evolution and needs of these persons. These surveys are distributed to the public authorities and partner associations. On the other hand, Samusocial constantly publishes articles in the specialized and general press in order to increase the awareness of the public opinion. Finally, Samusocial organize regularly meetings involving representatives of associations and public authorities in order to raise specific problems about this population.

#### **Implementation of a psychiatric mobile team**

**Results: SamusocialdinRomania has a fully operational psychiatric mobile team, providing specialized assistance and treatment directly in the street for our beneficiaries and a clear assessment of the state of homeless population suffering from psychiatric diseases.**

Context:

In 2007, with the support of the Embassy of France in Romania, Samusocial International and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Netherlands, SamusocialdinRomania initiated a pilot project meant to establish a psychiatric mobile team. Indeed, over the last period, according to the evaluations made by the medics of SamusocialdinRomania, directly in the street and at the medical cabinet, more than 25% of the homeless population suffers from psychiatric diseases that can be diagnosed through direct observation and more than 80% have developed a psychosis-like disease, due to the harsh living conditions, lack of home, support, income and medical assistance. The homeless people suffering from psychiatric diseases are the most vulnerable, as they are unable to assess their own health state, to ask for any help to the existing services and are mostly subject to the violence in the streets.

This phenomenon is widely spread internationally, and facing the same issues, Samusocial de Paris has established such a team since 1998.

#### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the psychiatric mobile are the following:

- to provide specialized medical assistance to the homeless population suffering from psychiatric diseases, directly in the street;
- to give a presumptive and final diagnosis, to prescribe and administer medication in acute episodes and in remission phases;
- to guide the beneficiaries towards the public services involved in providing psychiatric medical assistance;
- to develop a study on the state of homeless population affected by psychiatric diseases and means of improving this state.

## Implementation:

SamusocialdinRomania launched the PSI team in May 2007, after a short period of training for accommodation and evaluation by the psychiatrist. It is operational 2 days and 1 night/week, and gives assistance to the homeless population with psychiatric diseases and to evaluate the state of the homeless population with respect to their exposure to psychiatric diseases. In addition, SamusocialdinRomania will build a lobby case meant to speed-up the establishment of public structures provided by the National Program for Mental Health.

Under the coordination of the Executive Director, a psychiatrist, a social worker and a driver were recruited and employed for the psychiatric mobile team.

The psychiatrist first evaluated together with the night mobile teams the situation on the field, and then developed a coordination plan to locate the patients with psychiatric problems and to start visiting them with the psychiatric mobile team.

The psychiatrist evaluates the symptoms, the history of the mental illness, the co-morbidities and makes an initial file to register them. After the first visit and evaluation, the team makes separate files to monitorize, to write the evolution of the mental problem at every visit.

Since May 2007, when our psychiatric team began its activity, thirty homeless patients were registered, diagnosed with a mental disease, and have compliance to psychiatric treatment. These people are constantly evaluated and monitored. The patients of the psychiatric team are known to the other teams, sometimes patients from other teams are referred to the PSI team. After establishing the final diagnosis, based on own observations and the story of the patient, medication will be administered. As medication for psychiatric diseases is not free and the majority of the homeless population does not benefit of any income, the medicines will be purchased by SamusocialdinRomania.

The psychiatric mobile team will also guide the beneficiaries towards the public psychiatric services existing.

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