



Sweden



Background

Convictus is a Swedish non-profit organization, founded in 1986, with no political or religious affiliations. For the last twenty years it has been supporting and encouraging HIV-positive individuals suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, as well as the homeless. In the middle of the 1980s, when the first cases of HIV among drug addicts were discovered in the Stockholm district, there emerged requirements to help people on the verges of society to find their way back to it. An initiative was taken for founding a support organization for this particular target group. That is how Convictus came about.

Convictus's philosophy

Its principal idea is based on the Swedish political and social philosophy which says that all human beings have equal value, right to receive care, support and feel hope. They should be appreciated as full-fledged citizens capable of giving their own contribution to society. Convictus works on daily basis with the HIV-positive, drug addicts and the homeless. It creates opportunities for them to feel that they can start over and that they really are welcome in the society they belong to. Involvement of persons from the target group is one of the ground rules within these activities.

Since the 1980s, Convictus has gradually been developing its network of activities and partners. It has grown into an important non-profit organization whose work has proved to be successful and effective, not only in Sweden but also on the international level. Co-operation has been established mainly with Eastern Europe, and particularly, in the Baltic region. And new projects with new partners are on their way.

Main scope of Work

The scope of Convictus's work in Sweden is quite large. The most important target group is that of the homeless drug addicts, many of whom are HIV-positive. These individuals are encouraged to participate in different joint events organized by Convictus. All the activities, in the first place, aim towards empowering the individuals and bringing some positive changes into the lives of those in need of it, as well as establishing

personal relationships, which may also be lasting. The activities are organized to consider the special needs and circumstances of the target groups. Convictus has regular contact with the institutions where HIV-positive and/or homeless people are being taken care of, such as infection clinics, shelters and nursing homes, and staff from these institutions also visits Convictus's meeting places. These meeting places make the core of Convictus's daily activities.

The Bridges

Convictus has three so-called Bridges in Stockholm - Bryggan City, Bryggan Vantör, Bryggan Östermalm - or daytime shelters for these vulnerable social groups, where they are always welcome to rest, wash themselves, change clothes and get some food. Here they will also find company, and hopefully get closer to volunteers or staff, which in the end may help them to get back on the right track. More stable and secure living conditions for them are the principal goal. So far, many have broken up with their homeless life and found a permanent residence or decided to enter a rehabilitation programme.

A mixed social environment, consisting of individuals with diverse profiles who offer and receive help, is one of the hallmarks of Convictus. The visitors are mostly Swedish. Fifteen percent have other ethnic background - African, South American or Eastern European. The most usual form of addiction is alcohol related. Fewer cases of drug abuse also occur.

Considerable staff with broad competence is always around. The shelters closely co-operate with people from social service, health care, churches and voluntary organizations. Their representatives are frequently present on the spot and offer help to the visitors. Good spirits and a pleasant atmosphere at the shelters is something everybody strives towards and all the activities have so far proved rewarding in that respect.

The latest research project conducted by Stockholm University at Bryggan City shows that eighty persons visit the shelter on daily basis; fifteen percent are women and the average age is forty seven. Most of the interviewed persons have been regular guests. They live under harsh conditions. Many sleep in cars, trailers or in public places - parks and staircases. Most of them are unemployed and receive allowance or pension. Others beg or get money from their relatives. The most commonly used drug is amphetamine, followed by heroin and cannabis. The research project arrived at the conclusion that the Bridge represents a positive element in the life of the regular visitors. The staff is considered to be empathic, committed and good at providing practical help.



Tomtebo Recreation Mansion

Another very special meeting place is a house known as Tomtebo, which is owned by Convictus and situated beautifully in the Swedish countryside. It is reserved primarily for HIV-positive drug addicts and alcoholics, as well as their close friends and families. Tomtebo admits visitors who wish to get away from city noise, hectic city life and need to relax. Other vulnerable social groups are also welcome, above all the homeless. The house functions first and foremost as a centre for recreation and resting, rather than as a rehabilitation facility. It guarantees a safe, cosy and drug-free environment. Meetings and education are occasionally organized here. Relevant and competent staff is always present.

Café Convictus

Café Convictus is a drug free place, where individuals using subutex and methadone, who apart from that also may be HIV positive, gather. Special attention is paid to health, diet and physical exercise. Members of Café Convictus receive instruction in these issues from professional trainers. A combination of community feeling, good health and hard exercise is highly important for those individuals who have just stopped using drugs, since it is usually not enough just to stop. One should acquire a new and positive way of thinking about oneself, which is what activities at the Café encourage people to do. Problems such as overweight and bad liver are frequent among addicts, and they must be dealt with properly so that the individual may have prospects for a longer and healthier life.

The Bicycle Project

The latest invention is the so-called Bicycle Project, an activity which boils down to seeking and establishing contact with the homeless in public places. In this way, Convictus's staff can also talk to passers-by about the life situation of the homeless as well as of HIV-positive drug addicts. Every day, the Bicycle team meets some several dozens of needy people and offer them coffee and a sandwich. This also creates opportunities to inform them about Convictus's work. Due to such public activities, Convictus has so far received several donations and has become more widely known and more visible in public.





International support and co-operation – the Cases of Estonia and Ukraine

Convictus encourages commitment to social work with vulnerable groups also by expanding and transferring its projects from Sweden to other countries, especially in Eastern Europe, where the proportions of HIV epidemics have become quite alarming. The first stage of the expansion abroad was reached in 2002, when the partner organization, Convictus Eesti, was established in Estonia.

The principal activities of Convictus Eesti are concerned with needle exchange, counselling of drug addicts, organizing support groups for HIV-positive (ex-)inmates and female drug addicts, education of young people, as well as campaigns against discrimination and stigmatisation of drug addicts. All the employees are educated and have necessary knowledge about the core issues of Convictus's social work. Moreover, half of its staff consists of former drug addicts. Similarly to Convictus Sweden, Convictus Eesti takes an active part in international conferences, seminars and related scientific research.

Convictus is active in the Baltic region also under the name of "Balticus", which deals with HIV- and Hepatitis-related issues. The project is funded by the Nordic Ministry Council. The principal goal is to strengthen the work of Convictus Estonia with young addicts, but also to exchange experiences with other Baltic countries. Support is given to the groups which work in prisons and are dedicated to the questions of human rights and rehabilitation.

The success of the Estonian project has additionally stimulated Convictus Sweden in its ambition to apply its working methods in other former Soviet countries. For this reason, but also due to the dire need in this country, a new project in Ukraine has been initiated.

It is estimated that virtually more than 500 000 individuals - 1,4 % of the population - are infected by HIV in Ukraine. The SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) has decided to help Convictus with initial funds to start up a similar kind of project in Ukraine as in Estonia. In co-operation with the Swedish Prison and Probation Administration and the Ukrainian counterpart State

Department for Execution of Punishment of Ukraine, Convictus is aiming to start a new project during 2006. The project implies objective-related activities such as a Convictus Centre Programme - a community centre which will be a centre where primarily HIV-positive ex-inmates and clients under supervision can get support to reintegrate into the society; an Inmates' Empowerment Programme consisting of psycho-social support in group sessions within prisons as well as among clients under supervision and training seminars for prison staff /probation inspectors; School Educational Programme consisting of lecturing/information giving to schools.

Staff, Education and Economy

In its work, Convictus is highly dependent upon other people's good will, which means that volunteers represent the most valuable resource. They bring with them unique knowledge based on unique experiences, and are willing to share them with others who need help and guidance in life. That is exactly what Convictus strives towards, to encourage people with different backgrounds, from different social settings and with similar problems - or at least problems they can relate to -, to get involved with and receive support from one another. It is thus Convictus's goal to make individuals on the verge of society more visible, which can be done when others, who live a more secure and stable life, try to reach out to them and make them realize their personal worth.

Convictus tries to be active in public as much as possible. Due to its rich experiences and extensive social work, it participates in diverse public events, where it provides information on its main occupations. It arranges seminars and conferences, the latest ones on Hepatitis C and "Addiction and health", held all around Sweden. The involvement with Eastern Europe, and especially the success of Convictus Estonia, has aroused considerable public interest in the work of the organization. However, Convictus still hopes for even greater attention to the vulnerable social groups it deals with.

Convictus's economy is partly based on yearly financial support from the state, county council and community, and partly on private donations. The organization also receives support from companies and private persons in the form of food, clothes, sanitary items, etc.



Networks

Convictus is a member of the Swedish National Association for the HIV-positive (Riksförbundet för hivpositiva). It has representatives in the Board. The Association works for the rights of the HIV-positive people in Sweden. It is consulted on regular basis when it comes to all the political decisions concerning the situation of the target group.

Another organization that Convictus belongs to is Rainbow Sweden - with no religious or political affiliations -, which works for a respectful treatment of clients in public and for looking after their legal rights. It opposes oppression and humiliation in social work and is very active in public, where it frequently gives statements on the questions related to addiction, criminality and social outcasts.

Contact information and support

If you want to know more about Convictus's work, please contact us as follows:

Convictus
St Paulsgatan 13
118 46 Stockholm
Sweden
Tel: +46 8 462 90 20
Fax: +46 8 642 90 56
E-mail: convictus@convictus.org
Web page: www.convictus.org

To become a sponsor or donor of Convictus, please contact the chairman, Mr Claes Heijbel.

E-mail: claes.heijbel@convictus.org
Cellular phone: +46 70 714 63 21



**We need your support.
Join us in the work for a more human world!**