

Pathways to Social Inclusion

10 Best Practices from Diaconal Organisations

in Europe

December 2014



Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity, equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.

We bring members together to **share practices, impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Eurodiaconia is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

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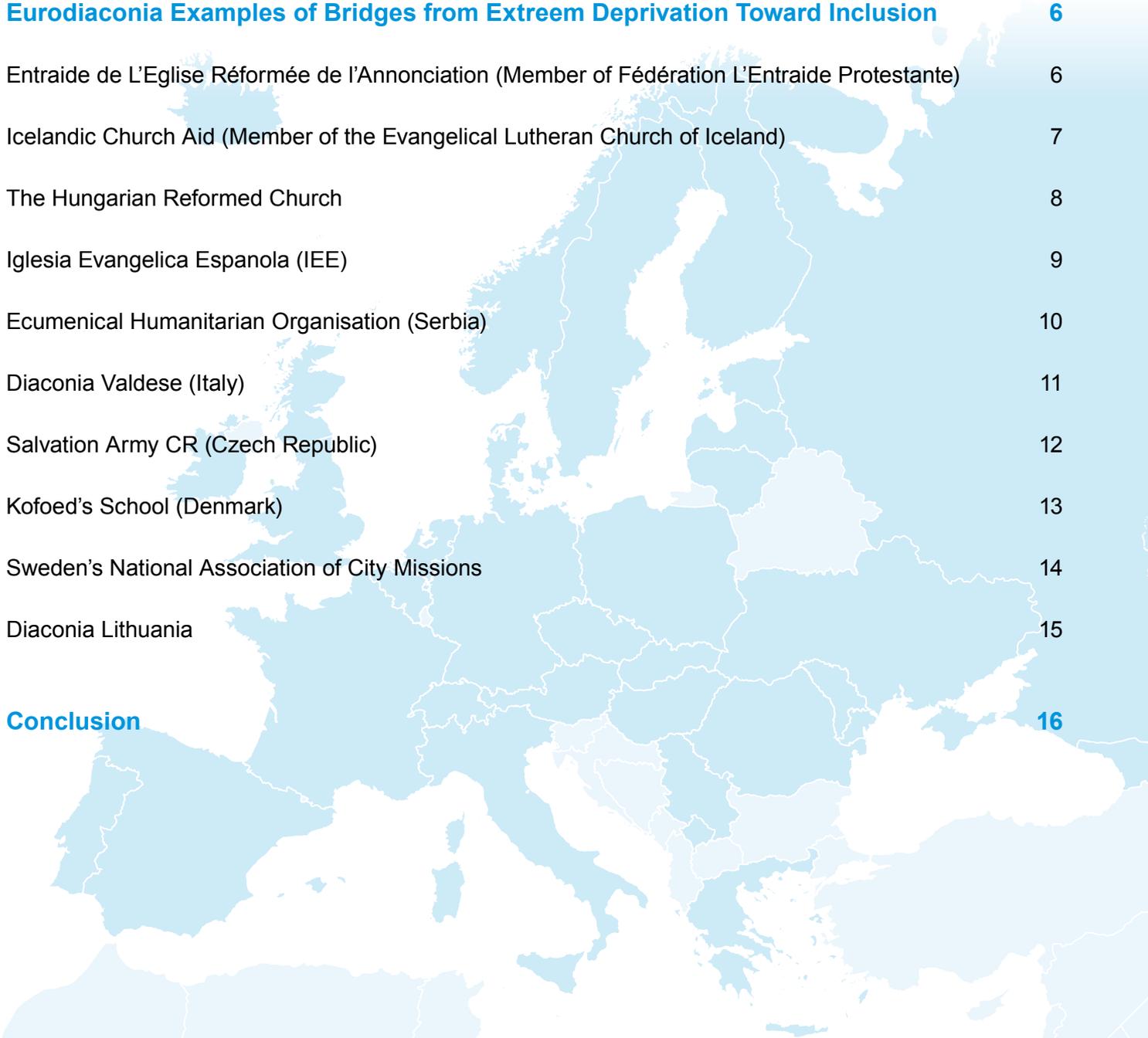
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INTRODUCTION

Why this report?

In 2014, the European Union's new food aid program was adopted. This program, the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived** or **FEAD** seeks not only to provide immediate material assistance to those in need throughout Europe through food aid, but also to foster social inclusion.

The principle of FEAD is that it can be used as a basis for the most deprived not only to find immediate support but to connect with organisations that can provide further programs and workshops that will lead toward social inclusion. Eurodiaconias' members already carry out many of these types of activities; specifically, our members often use food aid and

basic material assistance to support vulnerable groups and connect them with other activities run by the organisation such as language classes, legal counselling sessions and vocational workshops.

As the FEAD begins to be implemented throughout the Union, Eurodiaconia would like to highlight some best practice examples of our members who are currently carrying out programs that bridge the gap between extreme poverty and social inclusion. It is also hoped that this report can be useful to organisations seeking to access funds from FEAD and need project ideas which fulfill the "fostering social inclusion" goal of the program.

What types of projects are in this report, and how were they selected?

First of all, each of the ten projects selected for this report provide immediate material assistance to people experiencing extreme poverty (i.e. provision of housing, food, clothing, hygiene materials).

Secondly, each of the projects provides activities for those receiving the material assistance that empower them to begin a path towards social (re)inclusion. Staff and volunteers from member organisations use the material aid as a connecting point with participants, slowly building up trust with many of these people, forging key friendships and relationships. This trust enables participants to eventually join

many different projects that can lead a person back toward social inclusion.

In order to select key projects to include in this report, Eurodiaconia reviewed many different programs carried out by our 44 members all throughout Europe. The different projects that were ultimately chosen for this report were specifically picked to present a diversity of projects regionally (i.e. all throughout Europe) and methodologically, showcasing many different types of services specifically designed for different groups of people experiencing extreme poverty.

MAIN FINDINGS

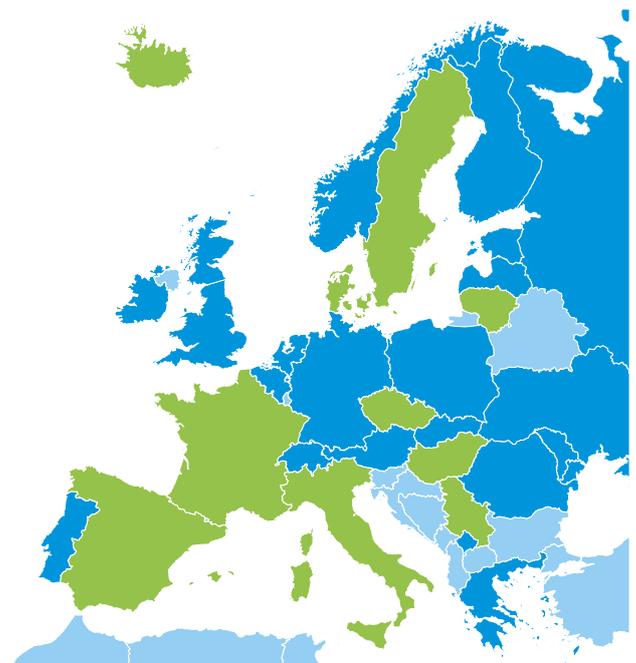
Looking at the 10 projects features in this report, some interesting patterns for successful projects appear:

- » **Tailor-made individual approaches** based on one to one meetings with participants, volunteers and professionals.
- » **Trust** build up over **time**, creates important relationships between participants and staff members and empowers participants emotionally and professionally
- » Providing a **response to basic needs**, then legal or administrative support and then social inclusion activities (e.g. educational or to re-build a social network)
- » Using **both innovative services and traditional support** depending on the specific needs of a those being supported

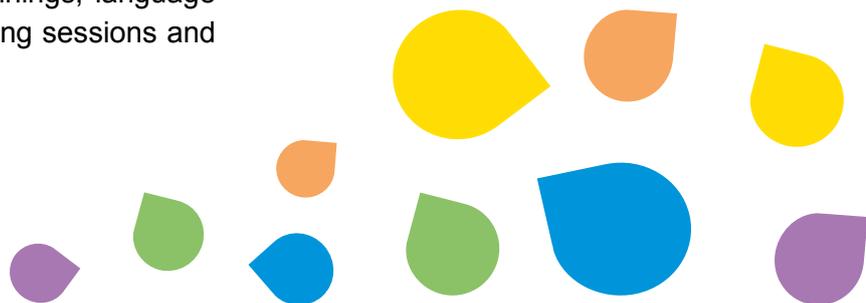
What are the key characteristics of these projects?

Through this research, we have found that these projects usually follow a “**3-step pattern**”.

1. First of all, members tend to provide a **basic material service** that supports individual needs of a person. This material service is used to create a **point of contact with a person, family or community**, and the continued distribution of this material provision allows for volunteers and staff members to develop important relationships among those receiving the material assistance.
2. Then, the diaconal organisation can often provide administrative or legal support to help the users to take back the control of their life.
3. Finally, after a period of time, those experiencing extreme poverty are open to the idea of participating in different **activities run by the organisation**, often with the same staff members they already have relationships with. **These activities empower users emotionally and mentally**, with education courses, vocational trainings, language classes, individual counselling sessions and so much more.



- Project Countries
- Eurodiaconia Members



EURODIACONIA EXAMPLES OF BRIDGES FROM EXTREME DEPRIVATION TOWARD INCLUSION

Entraide de l’Eglise Réformée de l’Annonciation (Member of Fédération de l’Entraide Protestante)

Solidarity grocery store project www.fep.asso.fr

What is the project?

This organisation, which is a member of the Fédération L’Entraide Protestante (FEP) in France, runs a solidarity grocery store for families in need in the 16th district of Paris. Social workers at the local town hall and members of CAFDA (the center for help for asylum seeker families) direct possible participants who are in need of support to this organisation and their social grocery store.

Participants who shop at the grocery store work with volunteers from the organisation to **talk** about why they need support in this area and then a decision is made on how much food the organisation can give them each week based on their family make-up. After the initial paperwork is finished with each client, **the client and volunteer together** go through the grocery store and pick out one basket full of items, both canned and fresh, that the client can bring home to his or her family.

Through this social grocery store project, the organisation feeds around 50 families each week, which equates to around 120 total individuals. Families or individuals receiving food aid from the social grocery store pay a small fee for some of the products of the groceries.

The social grocery store receives their food from the French food bank (BAPIF), a local bakery (who gives them unsold bread from the day before) and from their own food supply. The organisation is able to collect their own “food bank” from the “National Food Collection days” that occur in France each fall. During these days, the group places volunteers at local grocery stores to collect food from local citizens.

How does this foster social inclusion?

This project not only helps provide families within Paris weekly groceries, but it gives these people a chance to be more socially included through one-on-one interactions with volunteers and “social workshop” activities.

Through their work at the social grocery store, volunteers get **to interact with participants individually** and find out their needs, history, background, hobbies, interests, family makeup, and so much more. By requiring each participant to work with a volunteer upon first shopping at the social grocery store, volunteers are able to learn extremely valuable information about the people they are coming in contact with. Furthermore, because a volunteer accompanies each participant as they shop, participants and volunteers alike are able **to connect and build relationships**, overall helping the participant create a social network in France.

The organisation also has begun “social workshops” in conjunction with their social grocery store. These workshops that began last year are ways participants from the social grocery store can interact with French volunteers from the organisation in a positive way. Participants from the grocery store are informed about upcoming workshops while shopping each week and are able to then “register” for a particular workshop of interest to them.

Currently, a painting workshop, a cooking workshop, and a French class workshop are all being held; a sewing workshop will hopefully begin later this year. These workshops **empower participants** with new skills and provide them with new relationships that will help lead them to more socially included lives.

Icelandic Church Aid (Member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland)

Debit card project www.help.is/id/9

What is the project?

For years, Icelandic Church Aid operated a food aid program for families at risk of poverty or living below the poverty line. Families were able to come in once a week and collect a basket full of food, pre-selected by the volunteers at Icelandic Church Aid.

In 2011, Icelandic Church Aid decided to stop providing this type of food aid and switched to distributing debit cards to their clients instead. These debit cards are specifically for groceries and can only be used at supermarkets in Iceland. The debit cards are filled with a certain amount of money, depending on that person's family make-up, and the client can then use the amount for whatever they need at a particular grocery store.

The debit card program is more expensive than the prepared food aid that the organisation distributed prior to 2011. However after the 2008 financial crisis, the national government in Iceland began initiatives to help service organisations in food aid areas. Because of these initiatives, Icelandic Church Aid was able to receive grants from the government that assist in running in this project.



The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland welcomes families facing material deprivation

How does this foster social inclusion?

The organisation decided to switch from food aid to this debit card program because they realized that food aid in itself was not meeting the needs of the people who collected them. By giving the families and individuals debit cards instead of bags of food, these participants are able to **pick out their own food and shop at grocery stores like any other person in Iceland**, thus removing stigma and respecting the right of people to make their own choices as to what they eat.

Furthermore, Icelandic Church Aid now feels that they can interact better with clients because in order for a person or family to receive a debit card, they have to go through an application process which requires them to individually converse with a social worker from the organisation. In these conversations, social workers get a chance to get to know a client, discuss their finances, and understand their background better. Through this process, social workers can also effectively address the needs of the people they are interacting with by providing them with subsequent financial counseling, family counseling, and helping them register for various social inclusion seminars that the organisation runs in conjunction with this food aid project.

Not only does this debit card program **empower** a participant by letting them shop at whatever supermarket they choose and choose the product they want, but it also gives Icelandic Church Aid an incredible opportunity to get to know the participants thoroughly in order to work with them further through social inclusion activities.

The Hungarian Reformed Church

Lifebelt Project www.diakonia.hu

What is the project?

The financial crisis has hit Hungary quite hard in the past few years; many families have been unable to pay their mortgages and some have lost their homes completely. Seeing this issue, the Hungarian Reformed Church stepped in and started the “Lifebelt Project” in November of 2010.

This project seeks to support families who have recently lost their homes by providing them with housing for six to nine months. The Hungarian Reformed Church provides a housing stipend for a family when they begin this program, and the housing stipend subsequently decreases over the course of the next year as the family becomes more financially stable and is able to pay more of the cost of housing.

How does this foster social inclusion?

By providing people in need with immediate housing assistance and helping families experiencing some degree of homelessness or insecure housing the Hungarian Reformed Church is providing people with one of the most basic

social provisions of shelter. However, not only does the Hungarian Reformed Church provide shelter for people, but **they connect** these families with financial counselors, possible employers and social workers to assist them in wholly rebuilding their lives. The Hungarian Reformed church also works to connect the adults in each family with local employers so that they will be able to find jobs and slowly gain more financial independence.

Families that are taking part in the Lifebelt Project are also supported by the organisation through **mediation** sessions, which occur between the families and credit issuers and/or banks. Through these sessions, compromises are reached and families are able to progress even closer towards being socially included once again in Hungary’s society.

Since the beginning of this project, the organisation has been able to assist 310 different families, and almost 90% of those families were able to successfully reintegrate financially and socially after just one year of housing support and financial counseling from the Hungarian Reformed Church.



Lifebelt Project manager from the Hungarian Reformed Church discusses ideas with colleagues at Eurodiaconia’s Marginalisation and Exclusion Network meeting in October 2014

Iglesia Evangelica Española (IEE)

EEMI (Espacio Encuentro de Mujeres Inmigrantes/ Migrant Women Meeting Space) www.iee-es.org/blog/

What is the project?

This project is oriented towards migrant women and their families that are at risk of being socially excluded in Madrid, Spain. With this project, Iglesia Evangelica Española (IEE) hopes to provide these women with the necessary tools to help them integrate into society. The women who visit the center have their food and clothing necessities met through food aid distributions each week and a second-hand clothes “shop” where the women can pick out clothes.

The food aid and clothing shop help IEE volunteers and staff first get in contact with these women. Through these “basic provision” services, volunteers and staff members from IEE develop relationships the women and invite them to other activities the organisation runs like Spanish classes, job-training workshops, legal counseling sessions, and drama/choir activities.

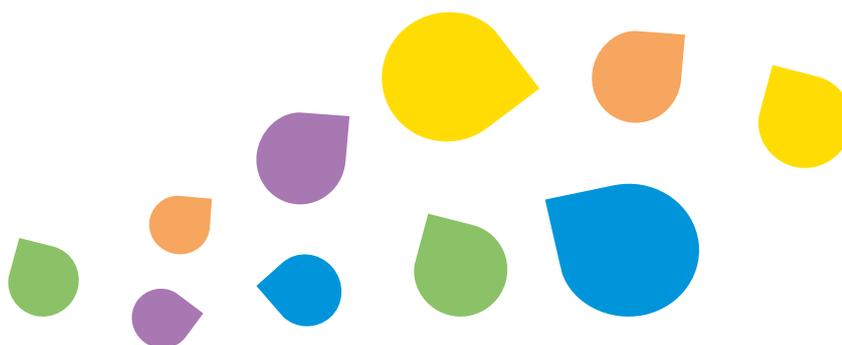
How does this foster social inclusion?

This organisation offers migrant women educational courses and vocational training courses so they can learn to speak Spanish and improve their professional skills. The basic needs of the women are met through the material assistance given, however, these women also have a much better chance of integrating

into Spanish society through participation in the other activities run by the organisation; IEE hires well-qualified staff members to conduct the education, language and vocational-training courses. By hiring staff members with specific credentials, IEE can certify a woman’s course of study, and she will be able to use the certificate on her CV in the future. The **relationship forged** between the migrant women and staff members is also beneficial to the women because they will be able to have a reputable reference to list when searching for jobs.

Not only do the educational, legal and vocational workshops offer valuable insight to the women, these workshops allow the women to have a **safe place to come** to where they feel comfortable and can make friends. In this way, the women not only enhance their job-related abilities, but they **grow as individuals**, finding friends and creating a new social network in Spain that will help them succeed as they integrate further into society.

According to IEE, this project fosters social inclusion because the space they create is welcoming and the atmosphere allows the women to relax; for most of them, this is the only time in the week that they have for themselves. It is a priority for IEE that the participating women feel supported; their volunteers work very hard to make sure the women feel important and that they are active in the decisions being made by IEE for the project.



Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (Serbia)

Day Centre Project www.ehons.org/en/

What is the project?

In fighting extreme poverty and deprivation, EHO works specifically with children (ages 4-18) who are out working and living on the streets of Serbia. EHO's day centre services are open to any child who is living on the street (i.e. in parks, abandoned houses and cars), working on the street through begging, collecting cans, washing windshields, or eating by finding food in garbage dumpsters.

The centre is open every day including weekends from 8AM to 9PM. Visiting children are able to receive hot meals, bathe themselves and pick up new clothes or shoes, as they might have recently grown out of their own and have no option to replace them.

How does this foster social inclusion?

Through this day centre, not only is EHO able to give many homeless children a hot meal and a new outfit, but they are also able to

connect many of these kids to the correct public or private institutions that can help them and their parents (if they have parents) achieve more socially included lives. Social workers and Serbian lawyers visit the centre weekly to provide administrative and legal help to these children and their families. Lawyers working with the centre are able to help the children in obtaining the required legal documents to get back into the school system in Serbia.

Furthermore, the centre also helps these vulnerable children get to know a responsible, qualified adult "counselors" from the day centre through educational and creative workshops. These workshops **foster healthy relationships** between the day centre's staff members and the children being helped. Through these developing relationships, staff can provide proper emotional and practical support to the kids and better understand their individual needs, which will ultimately lead to more and more children exiting these extreme poverty situations.



Diaconia Valdese (Italy)

Housing for Ex-Offenders www.diaconiavaldese.org

What is the project?

Often after getting out of prison it can be difficult for a person to fully reintegrate into society; the person may still be struggling with some sort of addiction, they may not have a social network built up, or they may not have adequate skills for success in the labour market. To aid ex-offenders dealing with homelessness, Diaconia Valdese began a housing program for those recently released from prison.

The housing program that Diaconia Valdese runs allows six ex-offenders to receive free housing in two different apartments. By helping these individuals and providing housing, Diaconia Valdese hopes to prevent a return to crime by providing stability and support for the future and thus reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

How does this foster social inclusion?

Not only does Diaconia Valdese provide ex-offenders with housing, but they also **partner with healthcare and social workers**

who can provide administrative, legal and individual counselling to the ex-offenders. Also, Diaconia Valdese provides **educational and practical** workshops for the residents that help them reintegrate into Italian society. For example, buying groceries may be a task that many of us assume to be easy, but this is not the case for some of Diaconia Valdese's residents. As volunteers and staff members realized that this type of practical knowledge was lacking among the residents, they coordinated an informal information session that fully explained how to complete this activity.

Furthermore, Diaconia Valdese actively partners with local and national public authorities to solve legal and administrative hurdles for their residents. Diaconia Valdese also partners with church organisations that will sometimes conduct vocational or language-learning lessons for individuals. Furthermore, interaction with church organisations in the local community **helps residents create relationships with the wider public**, furthering their inclusion in society.



Salvation Army CR (Czech Republic)

Street Work in Havířov www.armadaspasy.cz

What is the project?

The Salvation Army in the Czech Republic, Armáda spásy, operates a program that directly benefits the homeless people in the city of Havířov. Each day, staff members and volunteers from the Salvation Army go to areas of the city where homeless people live. In their visits, the Salvation Army is able to give these people necessary food provisions, clothing, hygiene products and any other necessary material items.

How does this foster social inclusion?

Through delivering material goods to those in need daily, staff and volunteers from Armáda spásy are able **to foster relationships** with many of these people, **building trust and**

friendships. These growing relationships allow informal legal, emotional, and practical counseling to take place among the volunteers and the people being supported.

According to Armáda spásy, many people would never reach out for help, but by going to where they live and offering services, Armáda spásy is able to provide both material goods and other practical services that help these people experience more social inclusion. By conducting their visits consistently, Armáda spásy is able to **deepen their relationships** with many of these people and provide so much more than just the initial material goods they show up with. In 2013, this program has allowed Armáda spásy to provide 571 different people with both material goods and practical counseling/ advice.



Kofoed's School (Denmark)

Educational Centre and shelter in Copenhagen www.kofoedsskole.dk/omos/international/aboutus.aspx

What is the project?

Kofoed's School is a both a vocational and education centre as well as a night and day shelter for those people in Denmark experiencing social exclusion. Kofoed's School works with people dealing with alcohol and drug related issues, those struggling with homelessness, and also those recently released from prison.

Kofoed's School offers assistance to those needing emergency material needs like shelter, food and hygiene materials. Recently, there has been an increase in homelessness among young people in Denmark; to combat this, Kofoed's School offers shelter to those youths in need in their "youth hostel".

How does this foster social inclusion?

Kofoed's School couples all of the emergency assistance they offer with further social inclusion activities like Danish classes, job-skill workshops (i.e. learning computer skills, driving school workshops, carpentry workshops, etc.) and counselling with staff members.

The school operates on a pedagogic model – help to self-help – to address problems associated with long-term unemployment, social isolation and loneliness. Kofoed's School provides shelter and safety for people experiencing social exclusion while **rebuilding their individual self-esteem and confidence**. By taking part in classes, workshops and counselling that the school offers, participating students are able to increase their personal strengths in different areas and have more of a chance to fully enter into society. Kofoed's School works towards moving people out of exclusion, not just solving their immediate problems.

Another aspect of Kofoed's School's social inclusion activities is their transitional and temporary housing program. Many of the young people that are coming to Kofoed's School for shelter have benefited from this housing program, which provides them with a free or low-rent apartment for a certain amount of time while they take classes and workshops at the school. This provides the person with security while they gain valuable skills that will help the re-enter society.



Participants at Kofoed's school have the opportunity to take part in social inclusion activities through a sports centre and specialised workshops.

Sweden's National Association of City Missions

Transitional Housing and Employment program www.sverigesstadsmissioner.se

What is the project?

Sweden's National Association of City Missions reports that in the past five years there has been an increase of the number of people on the streets of Sweden because of economic reasons. Before the economic crisis, most people who were homeless were living on the streets as a result of physical, emotional or mental issues, like drug or alcohol addictions. However, today, many more people are on the streets not because of an illness or addiction, but mainly because of tough economic times.

To combat this, many of the City Missions in Sweden have started transitional housing programs. These programs get many homeless people off the street initially just for a night or two; eventually, if it is deemed suitable and there is enough room, the homeless person may become a part of a transitional housing program associated with the City Mission. This program provides the person with the most basic human need of shelter as they slowly get back on their feet.

How does this foster social inclusion?

Once a person becomes a participant in a transitional housing program, they are also able to participate in many of the other programs Sweden's City Missions offer. Because these training and employment projects run in conjunction with the transitional housing program, participants can gain valuable professional skills while getting back on their feet financially. This program has had such success that some of the former participants in the transitional housing project are now employed through the City Mission and are in permanent, safe housing situations.

Ten years ago, Sweden's City Missions were just soup kitchens offering immediate food aid to those in need; through this past ten years, this organisation has been able to couple some of their immediate food and housing aid programs with educational and employment services that help people leave extreme poverty forever. Sweden City Missions has a goal **not to just place a bandage over an immediate material problem for a person, but they seek to empower those struggling with extreme poverty and show them their skills, strengths and abilities through many social inclusion activities.**



Diaconia Lithuania

Mother-Child Activity Centre www.ldiakonija.puslapiai.lt

What is the project?

This activity centre is located in the city of Skirsnemunė. The recent economic crisis has affected this city greatly and forced many families below the poverty line. Many low-income families are located here and struggle to pay rent, provide adequate food and clothing for their children and pay other household utility bills. This social reality increases the risks of the children of these families getting involved with a life of social exclusion through crime, drug-abuse or alcoholism. Furthermore, in Skirsnemunė, there are not a lot of programs or social services available that work towards keeping these struggling families together, so often when a family is unable to take care of a child, the family is simply separated, further exacerbating emotional, practical and psychological problems for everyone involved.

Seeing these types of issues, Diakonie Lithuania has stepped in and created a “mother-child” activity centre. This centre provides temporary housing for mothers experiencing extreme financial problems that would otherwise most likely lead to them being separated from their child.

How does this foster social inclusion?

At the centre, mothers living in the temporary housing facilities can participate in the “day centre” activities, which include both educational courses for the children and adults, employment trainings for the mothers, legal and psychological counseling and many other type of social inclusion activities.

Diaconia Lithuania has seen that through this temporary housing program and the further social inclusion activities, the risk of social separation of children from their families has dramatically decreased for the participants. This project **empowers both the mother and the child** by giving them a safe place to stay while the mother can **enhance** her employment skills in a particular area. This program provides **comprehensive** assistance to the child and mother in a financial crisis situation; this program overall helps children to not be separated from their families, and in doing so, reduces the risk of further marginalization, breaking the poverty cycle.



CONCLUSION

Overall, from these projects, we can take away many important lessons. First of all, it is important to realize that there are two characteristics that all of these projects have in common:

1. They connect people (staff / volunteers / participants) to each other in a safe, healthy way that fosters relationships and helps build a social network for participants.
2. These relationships empower people, increase their self-confidence and willingness to become involved in “self-improving / empowering” activities.

These two common threads ultimately help our members take a basic provision like food aid and turn it into a life-changing experience for staff member and participants alike. In these

projects, food aid is **the bridge** that is used to encourage social inclusion activities that ultimately help a person leave a life of extreme poverty.

In the coming years as more organisations and Member States have the opportunity to use money from FEAD, we must remember that for people experiencing extreme poverty, emergency help in the form of material assistance is often imperative. However, we must not look at food aid or the FEAD program as the key to fixing all of poverty. In contrast, we must continue to use the distribution of such material assistance as an opportunity to help people move towards a socially included life, just as Eurodiaconia members highlighted in these projects are doing.



A social grocery store project run by the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante.

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