

Jukka Mäki: Non-Governmental Organizations' Role in the Finnish After Care System

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Traditionally non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have had a strong position in Finnish social and healthcare. NGOs have had a special national role in expertise, promoting well-being and providing services for vulnerable groups like disabled people, homeless, unemployed, alcoholics and drug abusers or released prisoners. Furthermore, they act as advocating agents and organize voluntary work. Particularly in the past NGOs could have been called as “charity organisations” but during the last decades more precise term for NGOs’ role is “communities for public good”.

Nowadays NGOs in the field of social and healthcare are first and foremost expert organisations based on professional competence, and secondly they are ideological actors. During the last years European Union (EU) has challenged NGOs as service producers. EU viewpoint emphasises free market and competition. In that respect EU considers service providing NGOs’ status similar to the status of private companies. That is pity because the idea of public good is neglected.

Most NGOs in Finland which work with prisoners inside or outside prisons are small religious groups under Blue Ribbon. Their mission is giving support and “salvation”. But there are many NGOs who provide professional services both for prisons and prisoners: programs for drug abusers, vocational training and rehabilitation, education etc. Prisoners are only one target group for them. These NGOs have a special expertise in their own field: drug treatment, housing services etc.

Then there are only few expert NGOs which have prisoners and released prisoners as their main target groups. Besides Kriminaalihuollon tukisäätiö (Kritis), one can mention Silta-Valmennus in Tampere, which has a special role in vocational training rehabilitation and coaching. Vapautuvien tuki provides supervised family holidays for prisoners.

Within the last years KRIS movement / Peer Support was adapted from Sweden to Finland. Until now active and registered KRIS groups have been quite few. KRIS – Tampere is the leading one.

Relatives of Prisoners Association have succeeded better. They use internet in networking with each other despite long distances in sparsely populated country. In addition to active internet work they have some peer support groups for "prison widows and parents". Both associations get remarkable financial aid from Krits.

As elsewhere the aftercare work for released prisoners originates from charity work.

In Finland the first aftercare organization was Fängelseförening I Finland (The Finnish Prisoners' Association) established in 1870, a typical charity organization at that time. The roots of the present Probation Service and also the roots of Krits come from the Prisoners' Association.

Kriminaalihuoltoyhdistys 1975 - 2001, KHY (The Public Probation and Aftercare Association) was a long term follower of Fängelseföreningen. As far as in the late 1980s The Public Probation Association, which was financed by the Ministry of Justice, was the key actor in the field of aftercare. It did social work, counselling and case management. KHY provided housing services and employment guidance for released prisoners.

From the beginning of 1990s the Public Probation Association focussed on modernizing probation system. Community Service was launched in 1991 and Juvenile Punishment was piloted in 1997. Probation Association gave up housing services and the majority of other social work because they were regarded as the duties of municipalities.

But step by step KHY took, or the state gave to KHY, the task and role close to public Probation. Simultaneously social and healthcare was developed rapidly and the law on social welfare (1982) stipulated the responsibility of social services to municipalities. It is a common law without any mention of aftercare of released prisoners or the clients in probation. Released offenders are in the same position in getting social services and welfare benefits as any other citizen. In an average municipality this client group is so small and marginalized that there is not any aftercare expertise within social work. In addition to Helsinki there might be only a couple big cities, which have specialized social workers for aftercare. The municipalities and their social services have the main accountability in aftercare. NGOs have supplementary role and they provide specialized aftercare services purchased by the municipalities.

Legislation obligates municipalities to organise social and health services for residents, but it does not regulate their extent, content or method of arrangements in detail. Social and health care legislation does not include regulation on aftercare.

Municipalities may arrange services independently, as part of a joint municipal board or by buying them from other municipalities or service providers. There may be disparities in services according to local conditions and the needs of the population.

There has been a discussion whether community aftercare have really compensated that aftercare which KHY did. In practise municipalities purchase many aftercare services which ex-prisoners need like housing services, services for substance abusers or vocational education and rehabilitation from other NGOs which have no expertise in working with offenders. These kind of purchased services are in a weak position during the economical regression because municipalities might not prioritise them. These services are always on the first line of savings.

KHY gradually diminished its role as aftercare organisation with services. In 2001 KHY was nationalized to become the Probation Service under the Ministry of Justice. Just before this KHY founded Kriminaaliuollon tukisäätiö, Krits (Stiftelsen för Kriminalvårdens främjande).

The financing of NGOs

Charity and voluntary work is important mainly for small voluntary organisations and peer support associations. Very often these receive different kinds of financial aid from municipalities, parishes or foundations. The main financing source for expert aftercare organizations are municipalities which buy their services. NGOs can receive special financial assistance from Raha-automaattiyhdistys, RAY (Finnish Slot Machine Association) for the organized voluntary work, advocacy, information and communication, counselling etc. Furthermore, NGOs can get other kind of special assistance from RAY to development work (projects) and for special purpose related to "public good" (e.g. daycentres for homeless, needle exchange programmes etc). RAY gives also investment assistance for new premises, social institutions, half way houses etc.

One reason for the strong position of the Finnish non-governmental social and healthcare organisation is their long history in financing by RAY – 71 years. Finns do charity work by playing slot machines in grocery stores, playing games in casinos and playing internet games in the future. The "RAY founding system" is also one reason why the public organisations, particularly municipalities, have been very eager to push the welfare services of such vulnerable and marginalized groups as homeless, substance abusers and other excluded peoples care for associations and foundations.

RAY (Finnish Slot Machine Association) was established in 1938 to raise funds through gaming operations (slot machines and casinos) to support Finnish health and welfare (non-profit organizations, NGOs). The funding assistance this year 2009 is altogether 303 million euros and 105 million euros go to welfare services for the war veterans. Yearly about 900 organizations receive funding.

Kriminaalihuollon tukisäätiö

Kriminaalihuollon tukisäätiö, Krits (Stiftelsen för Kriminalvårdens Främjande) is a nationwide aftercare organisation, which has its headquarter in Helsinki. The purpose of Krits is to improve the deprived status and living conditions of released prisoners and clients of community sanctions and their families in the society. Krits develops and furthers probation and aftercare services and supports voluntary work. The focus is in rehabilitation and support for everyday life performance. The foundation brings its influence to bear in the field of criminal policy and promotes the interests of its target group. The goal of Krits is to create a nationally significant and influential network of NGOs in the field of probation and aftercare. The intention of Krits is to reduce recidivism.

The foundation started its operative activities in 2003 and is in the beginning of the road. Also the resources are yet modest. The personnel has grown from three to 28 within few years and the budget from 600.000 euros to over 3 million euros.

Krits acts as an active influential actor in legislation reforms and policymaking. The foundation has representatives in ministerial working groups and consultative committee of the Criminal Sanctions Agency (treatment programmes). Krits is actively supervising the interests of its target groups and have an ombudsman institution with a lawyer and a social worker.

The foundation actively carries out development project by it self, with NGO partners or municipalities and the sanctions system. The purpose of projects is to create necessary aftercare services (e.g. housing services, peer support activities, treatment tools for substance abusers, family work, through-care systems etc). Krits furthers probation and aftercare by education and working in different co-operative organs. Furthermore the foundation gives financial assistance for voluntary work, for modest development projects or research etc. related to probation and aftercare. The grants are small but very important to small peer support groups or to associations who do voluntary work. The grants for this year are 35.000 euros.

As an aftercare service producer Krits have a role only in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

Krits has a service strategy that it does not provide services elsewhere in the country but promotes local social service providing NGOs to produce needed services. When doing this promotion Krits offers development projects, education and expertise help to activate other NGOs to produce aftercare services to offenders. In Helsinki Krits is increasing housing services for homeless released prisoners during the next three years. At the moment there are four small "half-way houses" and 25 flats for supported housing. In 2011 Krits' target is to have about 50 supported flats of their own and additionally about 100 independent lodgings after a supported housing period provided by the collaborating partners (municipalities and other NGOs).

Krits offers also peer support activities in a Contact point Redis. It is a "low threshold" place to come in, have a cup of coffee, getting advise and guidance, use internet and e-mail. There are also support groups for inmates inside and outside prison, voluntary support persons etc.

Krits have made partnership treaties with some prisons, Probation service and municipalities to do developing work together and to produce also services like social work in an open institution for women or housing guidance for released prisoners in Espoo or case management with parolees.

In a sparsely populated country where the number of released prisoners in an ordinary municipality is very small, one tool to keep in touch with offenders and their families in the course of rehabilitation is internet. Krits has made a lot to develop its own internet site to its target group and extranet site to its partners.

Krits have a special "Gate to Freedom" portal for people with criminal background and their families. The content of site has useful databases (e.g. "survival kit" for released prisoners), E-forms for different purposes, discussion forums, consultation corner of the ombudsman and family worker, news, happenings, interviews, links to other sites etc.

Krits extranet site is for networking with other NGOs which are working with prisoners or ex-prisoners. The aim of the site is to help them in their everyday work, to create a forum for professionals and offer tools for communication.

More details about Krits: www.krits.fi - www.porttivapauteen.fi