

# Down, but definitely not out

It is all too easy to find yourself left behind in the competitive rat race of modern society. And once you drop out, it can be very hard to climb back in. Factors such as low education levels, unemployment, homelessness, abuse and drug addiction can stack up to form an insuperable barrier to social integration. Self-confidence, once lost, is very hard to rebuild.

*"We want to show policy-makers and the public that marginalised people, in our case people with severe drug problems, are not hopeless cases who need permanent care," says Alec Carlberg of social enterprise Basta Arbetskooperativ. "Given the right surroundings they can produce high quality products and run an efficient company which will amaze ordinary people and fight prejudice."*

The Empowerment for the Future Development Partnership has created a good practice model of how an empowerment-based social enterprise can address social problems. It focuses specifically on rehabilitating drug abusers and thereby resolving their problems of unemployment and homelessness.

## Colleagues, not clients

The project helps the most vulnerable people, who exist on the fringes of society. They are typically in middle age, and three-quarters are male. They have usually had little education, have been long-term unemployed and are homeless. Many have been victims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and many are drug addicts. The main barrier to reintegrating them is their lack of self-confidence.

The DP aimed to find innovative forms of rehabilitation to tackle long-term drug use. The social services pay for one year's rehabilitation, but because Basta is a trading enterprise, people who want to stay can work within the company as long as they feel that they need the security of being a part of a company where no drugs exist, either at work or after hours. People are not considered as "clients"; during the first year they are apprentices and after that, if they choose to stay on, they become colleagues. This is of great psychological importance in the rehabilitation process.

Basta offers its members job training and coaching to set up a new business. The qualification they get after one year's study both strengthens their self-esteem and prepares them for real working life – both vocationally and psychologically.

## Re-awakening an old tradition

Empowerment by self-organisation among poor and marginalised people was downplayed in recent years as a method of tackling severe social problems in Sweden. But this project has re-awoken an old tradition of self-organisation through social enterprise. This revival has benefits for both marginalised people and society as a whole. Individuals gain a stable and secure livelihood, while society enjoys an economically efficient way of tackling problems in the modern welfare state.

Empowerment for the Future's example has now inspired a second group in Gothenburg to set up a similar enterprise. It is now recognised by social services departments, who recommend it to drug users wanting to reform.

The project has a competitive edge when bidding for municipal contracts to offer therapy services to drug users because it only needs to earn around half its income



*Qualifications strengthen self-esteem*



*Graffiti removal is one service offered by the social enterprise*

from its therapy work. The other half comes from the sale of goods and services such as construction, graffiti removal, design, carpentry, a dog kennel and vocational training. This productive activity is an integral part of the alternative rehabilitation process and brings in around half the co-operative's income.

## A return on society's investment

A cost-benefit analysis of the value added for society of enterprises like Basta is now being carried out. Preliminary studies show that even if a drug user stays at Basta for one year, and then goes back to his old life, society reaps a 50% return on its investment in terms of reduced cost of healthcare and crime. If that person succeeds in holding down a job and stays on at Basta, then social profitability rises as he starts to pay into the benefit system rather than being a drain on it.

The different skills and experiences of the DP's partner organisations fitted together well. Basta provided the experience of setting up a co-operative integration enterprise, and FUNK the contacts on the ground in the Gothenburg area. The University of Lund contributed evaluation expertise, and once it has assessed the project's results, insurer Folksam is a possible vector to multiply the experience more broadly.

Empowerment for the Future is also active at European level. With its partners abroad, it has created a one-year university course aimed at adults marginalised by their lack of a basic school education. The course teaches people how to manage social enterprises in a more efficient and businesslike way, and combines distance learning with modules taught at universities in Lund, London, Paris and Murcia. Twenty students have qualified so far.

The DP and its partners have also created an international social enterprise called ECCO (European Community Co-operative Observatory). One service under development in the next round of EQUAL is consultancy in the new EU member states on starting up new social enterprises. And in addition to partners from Britain, France, Spain and Italy, Hungary is now joining the team.

*A more detailed version and other EQUAL success stories can be found at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/activities/search\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/search_en.cfm)*

**Country:** Sweden

**Region:** National coverage, but main activities in the Municipality of Nykvarn and around Gothenburg

**Project name:** Egenmakt för Framtiden (Empowerment For the Future)

**Project duration:** January 2002 – June 2005

**ESF priority area:** Entrepreneurship

**ESF funding (€):** 698 961

**Total funding (€):** 1 463 252

**National EQUAL partners:** Basta Arbetskooperativ, FUNK (Funktionell Narkoman), School of Social Work at the University of Lund, Folksam

**Transnational partnership with:** UK, France, Spain, Italy

**Contact details:**

Basta arbetskooperativ

Alec Carlberg

S-155 92 NYKVARN

Tel: +46 8 552 41400

E-mail: [alec.carlberg@basta.se](mailto:alec.carlberg@basta.se)

Website: [www.basta.se](http://www.basta.se)