

Visits in the Dark

Problem definition:

Elderly people aged 65+ amount almost one fifth of the population. In 2050 the number will grow to one third and one tenth of people aged 80+. There are more than 300 thousand informal carers in Czechia, more than 90 % of social and health care is carried out by informal carers. A typical informal carer is a woman aged 45 to 75 years, usually a spouse, daughter or in law, for whom the long-term care is physically and mentally exhausting. Because of caregiving responsibilities, women unwillingly reduce their working hours or drop out of employment (gender employment gap). Long-term care responsibilities tend to aggravate the gender pay and pension gaps – already present because of childcare responsibilities. There is a substantial gap between demand for social services, especially respite care, and the actual capacity of such services in Czechia. The number of the elderly to whom day-care services are provided will grow by one third till 2050 with two peak years 2025 and then 2035-2045. Up to 40 % of informal carers take care of an elderly as well as a child, i.e. the sandwich generation phenomenon.

People with visual impairment belong to the target group of handicapped people with the highest unemployment rate, which is estimated to be 70-80 % in Czechia. Unfortunately, they go through an unsustainable educational system and career planning focusing on any kind of employment with no respect to the current and future demand on the labor market and individual capacities of the blind. People with visual impairment are usually low qualified, which in combination with a lack of practice means a critical lack of self-confidence and motivation to enter the labor market. Requalification is possible, however, the qualification they gain is not sustainable, i.e. basketry, upholstery, piano tuner or masseur. Most of these jobs are carried out within protected labor market and because of insufficient capacity of suitable jobs in businesses, there are overqualified people in the protected workplaces wasting their talents and competences. The workplaces for handicapped people are subsidized, however the subsidy doesn't respect the level of disability. Economic benefits generated from the subsidies have a negative impact for the state. The subsidy usually equals the salary, therefore, tax deductions, insurance and VAT generated by customer consumption cover only half of the subsidy. Moreover, the employers tend to terminate the work contract when the subsidy is not provided. The subsidy then serves as a salary compensation not a contribution to the skills development.

Solution:

Visits in the Dark is a service, which nowadays concerns more than 300 thousand people. It is a service, which supports home care for the elderly. A service, which employs talented people, who return happiness to the lives of the old and help people who take care of their parents and grandparents balance their work and life. Visits in the Dark now employ 15 blind and visually impaired people, visitors, as we call them. We visit clients in their homes and in senior houses and day cares, where we spend time with them in a way that brings joy and colorful variety to their daily routine and more than that we give them back their competences which they tend to lose due to long-term institutional care.

The visitors, as we call colleagues working in the field, go through an onboarding training which is a series of soft skills courses (teamwork, communication, emotional intelligence, self-presentation), IT courses or mentoring and expert courses focusing on the core business – the visits (first aid, dementia,

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memory training, Montessori approach to seniors, music therapy etc.). Throughout the year each visitor finds his/her own trainings according to the specific needs of their clients. We put a lot of emphasis on team sharing and internal mentoring.

Visits in the Dark is a project of the Czech Radio Endowment Fund, which is now being transformed into a social startup.

Target groups:

Seniors

Most frequently 75+, living alone in a household and 85+ living in an institutional care, i.e. senior house, day-care, respite care

Visually impaired people

people who are completely blind or still have some residual sight, 20 – 45 years old, new team member aged 70 years

Informal carers

In 80 % a woman aged 45 – 65/75 years, most frequently a daughter, spouse, in law

Social workers

We communicate and collaborate with representatives of social services providers, such as social workers, day-care workers

Expected social change:

- A new alternative in the system of employing people with disabilities – grows the capacity of the system, generates jobs for visually impaired people based on the “Employment First” principle, use the disability as the value added, therefore there is no need to compensate the disability because it becomes the characteristic value of the service. Such jobs do not limit and underestimate mental and personal capacities of the workers delivering the service (i.e. they can use their talents, knowledge, skills at full scale for the benefit of the client).
- Positive effect on the motivation and readiness of employers to offer job opportunities to people with disability based on their satisfactory personal experience (an informal carer is an employee or employer as well)
- A new alternative in the system of shared care for the elderly in home environment (growing the capacity of the system supporting the informal carers and seniors)
- A better quality of life of the elderly as well as the informal carers
- Positive effect on the negative trend of unwilling reduction of informal carers’ working hours or drop out of employment

The impact evaluation verifies, whether and under what conditions:

- a) Employing visually impaired people on job positions designed for the service Visits in the Dark increases their self-esteem and their self-perception thus enabling them to integrate in the labor market (incl. self-employment)
- b) The service helps informal carers maintain their work-life balance
- c) The service helps professional carers improve well-being of the elderly
- d) The service has a positive effect on subjective perception of well-being of the elderly

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Objectives:

The objective is to develop a sustainable model of visually impaired people employment with provable economic and social impact for the target groups of the visually impaired people, the elderly as well as the informal carers.

Outputs so far:

- 15 visitors, i.e. colleagues in the field, delivering the service for at least 60 hours a month, 2 colleagues taking care of the service delivery, customer support and team management, 1 colleague with no disability at all focusing on marketing and business development
- 500 seniors who have benefited from the service so far
- 900 hours of individual as well as small group visits
- 17 institutions that we visit regularly in 5 cities
- Web www.navstevypotme.cz
- Slack for communication and collaboration (blind friendly)
- Raynet for CRM (blind friendly)

Outcomes so far:

- Clients are willing to pay for the service
- Clients want us come again
- We build the business on reference – client to client, employee to employee
- Colleagues aspire higher than when we started, take responsibility, make decisions, ask for feedback and are much better in teamwork (which was by the way the biggest challenge for our team)

The impact and process evaluation will be ready in September 2019.