

THE DÉLUTÁN FOUNDATION PROJECT

Innovation - novelty

The DéIUtán project was created 14 years ago by two people who worked at a telephone helpline for children and young people. They noticed how many of the calls came from elderly people who, while talking about their grandchildren, spoke about their own loneliness in the family, their mental sufferings, fears and depression, which they could not and were afraid to share with family members, friends or acquaintances.

It was easy to see that in our fast moving world elderly people tend to be excluded from the events of everyday life. They become more sensitive and vulnerable.

They find it difficult to come to terms with the passing of the years, the loss of personal relationships, loneliness, illness and the idea of approaching death. Many elderly people suffer from retirement and the psychological and physical burdens of inactivity, the feeling of uselessness. The founders of the project thought that supportive listening, understanding and emphatic sharing their concerns may ease their uncertainties.

These considerations led to the establishment of the DéIUtán telephone helpline in 1998, which was financed by the founders themselves at the start. They also provided a thorough training on gerontology to the first group of volunteers working for the service.

In traditional societies elderly people have a role: the community relies on their life experience and wisdom. In the modern world, however, this age group is often a burden, and beyond their physical well-being there is no concern for their inner health. The DéIUtán project helps preserve the mental health of a target group, which is not dealt with properly by other social, civil or governmental organizations.

From its very foundation the leaders of DéIUtán telephone helpline have always looked for similar services all over the world to share experiences, but so far without any success. In Europe Hungary operates the only telephone centre that offers a free service of anonymous calls to middle-aged and older people. Hungary has a 10 million population and the number of potential callers is 4.5 million. Only in the capital 900,000 people live who are over 45 years old.

Innovation in reaching and involving the target group

In a crisis situation old people are often left to their own resources, with nobody to call on if they feel exposed or have suicidal impulses. To be able to make anonymous calls to the centre means that the older people in need can freely express their thoughts, bad feelings or doubts which have often been hidden even from themselves. They do not have to face the listener whose body language may imply to them criticism or judgment. They can enjoy the benefits of shared thoughts, empathy and confidentiality. Searching for the right words, finding previously unidentified connections stimulate progress and help to get rid of suicidal thoughts.

Another aim of the conversation is to give reliable information about important practical possibilities, like home care, personal alarm systems, messenger service or home deliveries, which may help the caller to avoid the feeling of total helplessness.

The DéIUtán telephone helpline can be called seven days a week from the whole country free of

charge. Our experience is that elderly people in the country, especially in small villages, find it extremely difficult to ask for psychological help locally for fear of stigmatization, and they often prefer to call the DéIUtán helpline which guarantees anonymity.

Calls are received on two telephone lines by forty-five trained volunteers who do this stressful work on a voluntary basis, without remuneration.

The project increases the potential of the target group by offering support and empowerment by the knowledge that there is an easily accessible service, which is qualified and ready to listen to their problems.

Naturally, DéIUtán also welcomes calls by family members who need help in connection with the care of their elderly relatives.

We live in a society where beauty and youth enjoy an exaggerated cult. In spite of this, when, thanks to our good PR activity, people see posters of the DéIUtán project in many different places, they hopefully remember the elderly in their own family or neighbourhood who would deserve more attention and respect.

The target group receives continuous information about the existence of the project. Anyone can read leaflets and posters about our activities in council offices, in city and country town halls, in hospitals and surgeries, in libraries and underground stations, on the cable television and in free local newspapers. There is also information on how we can be reached.

Innovation in realization

It took great courage to start this project from nothing, relying entirely on voluntary work. Grants ensured that it could operate in a sustainable way for the last thirteen years. The annual maintenance cost of the project is 4.5 million HUF (17,000 Euro), which we are trying to acquire from many different grants and small donations of civil supporters. Applications for grants are made continually by the project management, also without any remuneration. Every single forint serves the project, including rental costs, the very large telephone bills, printing and distribution of leaflets and posters, and the regular training and monthly supervisions of our volunteers.

The DéIUtán project changes continually according to new requirements. The anonymous supportive conversations had to be developed further year by year. In 2001 we launched DéIUtán's free legal consulting service to help with the wording of wills, guarantees in contracts with old age homes, questions of inheritance, etc. In 2002 a legal counseling service was introduced for patients' rights and since 2003 we offer free medical advice as well.

Since 2005 not only the elderly, but people over the age of 45 may also call the DéIUtán helpline. This age group is becoming isolated in several aspects: they can no longer belong to a workplace community, they have little chance of finding a new job, their family life has become insecure and they often suffer from lack of self-esteem. We would like to offer a foothold for these people, who are not old in terms of age, but feel useless and written off by society.

Following the requirements of the computer age, since 2006 we maintain a bilingual website for the DéIUtán project: <http://www.delutan.hu/>

In recognition of our efforts in 2006 DéIUtán won the The Civil Organization of the Year prize.

Since 2007 well trained mediators help to find solutions to conflicts in the family, between couples or neighbours, and they offer the possibility of conflict management to the callers. This way they hope to prevent the escalation of problems possibly leading to violence within the family or even suicide.

In 2008 DéUtán started a beginners' computer course for pensioners. This idea proved to be an incredible success. There is a long waiting list and applicants have to wait sometimes for half a year to start their course. By this initiative we can involve a different type of old person: those, who do not accept social prejudices and who want to keep pace with their children and grandchildren.

Regular professional training is an essential part of our work. The supportive conversations are based on the 'Rogers method', which is used by other helplines, as well. From time to time we share our experiences with other support centres and we invite guest lecturers from other groups, especially from the Kék Vonal helpline for children and young people. Our trainings and monthly supervisions are held by well known Hungarian psychiatrists and psychologists.

Innovation – giving example of a good practice

DéUtán has close professional relationships with different organizations on the basis of their similarity in thinking and working, such as the Hungarian Hospice Foundation, the Life Mentalhygiene Association, the National Medical Council's Patient Rights Co-ordination Agency, the Federation of Hungarian Pensioners, the Memory Foundation, the Szabó Ervin Library and the Cultural Centre of Budapest.

The carefully selected volunteers take part in a six month training course before they answer calls. Most of them are graduates: doctors, psychologists, lawyers, engineers, teachers, social workers, pastors and librarians. Some of the volunteers work for other charitable organizations as well.

We had offers of voluntary help from many young IT experts when the news of our plans for computer courses became known.

A grant in 2010 may provide an opportunity to make a dream come true for us. Since most of our colleagues are proficient in the major European languages, we would like to realize a new aspect of the project: to offer our telephone helpline to people from several European Union countries. But this is not all. We would like to extend our system of supportive services for the elderly into other countries of Europe, and, using our project as a model of good practice, offer all our theoretical and practical experiences to those who need them.

We enjoy great interest and support from the Secretariat for the Elderly at the Ministry of Social Affairs, and they presented our project at international conferences.

The media is also interested in the project and we get many invitations for interviews. From time to time our colleagues take part in television programs, too, as they did last Christmas.

And apart from all this, university students have been known to use the project even as the topic of their thesis!