

Animus Association Foundation

Psychosocial work with women, victims of trafficking

Animus Association Foundation /AAF/ was founded by women professionals in the helping professions – psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers. It was established in 1994 as a nongovernmental organization working to support victims of violence. In 2001, it acquired the status of a public benefit organization. In 2004 Animus became a cofounder of La Strada International, which is a European network of nine independent non-government organizations working for the prevention of trafficking in women.

Presently AAF manages National Helpline for children, Helpline for survivors of violence, Social Services Centre for children and families, Crisis Centre for women and children survivors of violence and offers psychotherapy and psychoanalysis programs.

I work as a psychologist at the Crisis Centre where together with my colleagues we work directly with victims of trafficking in human beings. The Crisis Centre is accessible 24-hours/day and provides shelter for victims of trafficking; psychological assistance to deal with post-violence crisis; humanitarian support; social advocacy and institutional support; empowerment counseling. The team of the Crisis center consists of a coordinator, psychologist and six clinical social workers, five of which give night shifts.

The way we support victims of traffic is the following: First and foremost, women who are victims of trafficking need to return to Bulgaria in a safe way. Therefore, we establish the preliminary contact with the victim over the phone, we get in touch with the local police, and if the victim agrees, we provide reception assistance for the woman upon her arrival to Bulgaria.

For the victims of human trafficking it is crucial to spend the first days after arrival in a safe place. The Crisis Centre provides them with accommodation of up to 3 months, humanitarian support such as food, medicines, clothes, medical assistance and other essentials.

The urgent needs of the victims of trafficking are mostly related to decision-making for their immediate future, need to receive medical care, need to renew or issue new documents and return to their families. We undertake the development of individual action plan, establish contact with the relevant social services, cover emergency expenses and establish contact with the victim's parents or relatives.

As for the emotional needs of the victims of trafficking, such as the need to feel safe, to share their feelings and to receive support and understanding, the team of the Crisis Centre provides crisis intervention, counseling and risk assessment.

Upon their accommodation at the crisis center, the victims of trafficking get access to the empowering program that provides them with assistance in finding a place to live, work, referrals to professional courses, etc. We conduct individual counseling that presents the

opportunities for professional development in Bulgaria, informative details that aim to reduce the risk of abuse in the workplace and re-trafficking; introduction to fundamental labor rights and responsibilities; acquisition of greater self-confidence and abilities. The Crisis Centre provides assistance with legal consulting from the center's team officers, but also from expert lawyers that can inform victims of trafficking on their rights.

Since 2000 the Crisis Centre of Animus Association Foundation has accommodated 344 women and children, victims of trafficking, most of which – victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. 50% of the victims have been from the Roma minority, illiterate and unemployed. The most frequent destination is Germany. The main reason for involvement in human trafficking for people from the Roma community is the promise for well-paid job, and the involvement usually happens through the family or their friends. As for the few cases of begging that we have worked through, they are all victims from Roma origin and we can say that they are traditionally associated with their family and community. “The training” of children is carried out from an early age and is associated with the use of violence.

Animus Association Foundation works for raising the public awareness of the problem of human trafficking and the mechanisms for its limiting and for creating public disapproval for this phenomenon. AAF works in networks at national and international level; disseminates informational materials targeting children, teachers and parents in all types of educational institutions (schools, kindergartens, etc.). AAF participates in the media, various advisory and expert groups, conferences and seminars at international and national level.

As for prevention of trafficking in human beings, AAF disseminates information on trends and forms of trafficking, prepares and disseminates informational materials among risk groups, organizes trainings for professionals from the helping professions, judiciary and the executive power, in order to increase the awareness and understanding of the problem “human trafficking”. Last but not least, AAF works directly with clients, providing psychotherapy, social programs and empowering care.

In the past year, our efforts have been focused on developing guidelines for the identification and proper attitude towards victims of trafficking from the social services. We've worked on the development of standards for direct work with victims of trafficking and also participated in the development of National Referral Mechanism for referral and support of trafficked people, based on the principles for respect for the human rights of the victims.