

# The Crisis Centre in Fredrikstad Norway



*The crisis centre in Fredrikstad provides a haven for women and children suffering domestic violence and is part of a network of shelters established 21 years ago. Advice and support is offered, but the emphasis is on helping people to help themselves. The centre has a staff of 12. It also operates a 24-hour telephone service.*

Like most crisis centres, this one is run by a private organisation as a subsidiary to public services. Half the funding comes from the state and the rest of the budget from the municipalities of Fredrikstad and Hvaler.

### ***Domestic violence in Norway***

In 1998, 51 crisis centres had 2.200 women and 17.000 children through their doors – totalling some 80.000 overnight stays. In addition to providing a safe house for sufferers of domestic abuse, these shelters try to address the gender bias that legitimises domestic and sexual violence.

### ***Workplace health promotion in the crisis centre***

Providing support for traumatised women and children can be very demanding for staff at the shelter. They are constantly dealing with people whose situation is desperate and have to face the challenge of turning despair into something positive. For staff to be able to cope with the huge demands placed upon them, they too have to feel nurtured. Staff welfare is a major concern and the centre

works hard to create a supportive structure.

The Fredrikstad centre is owned and run by the Blue Cross Fredrikstad and is a member of the Norwegian Association of Crisis Centres. It also belongs to an employers' organisation, the Federation of Commercial and Service Enterprises. Employees' wages and working conditions are fixed according to current agreements.

### ***Developing effective working relationships***

An open working environment and close co-operation between staff is essential if a high standard of care is to be provided for abused women and children. In a sensitive environment such as this, a good rapport between staff is vital.

Staff meetings are held every month. Everyone contributes to the discussions on the running of the centre and how things can be developed in the future. This helps create a sense of ownership among employees that is so important to a small operation where every person counts. Work is also divided democratically so that everyone has to do their fair share of good

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and bad jobs. The crisis centre is a progressive organisation and staff are encouraged to enhance and update their skills.

### ***Meeting employees' needs***

Two years ago, as part of a training course, the shelter manager had to ask employees to give an evaluation of the shelter's managerial style and how this could be improved upon. Staff said that they wanted to feel recognised and valued and have their opinions listened to. These requests were responded to, with good results. Employees are looked after in a number of ways, for example:

- n If someone is having problems in their private life they are offered advice or therapy. Changes in the work schedule and workload can also be arranged to ease the burden.
- n Consideration and thoughtfulness are important too. If someone is ill they are sent flowers and get well cards. Following sick leave staff are eased back into the workplace gently.

### ***Developing a relationship with the community***

The crisis centre is run from a private house in a residential area. Generally speaking, people are sceptical of having a crisis centre on their doorstep, but in this case

neighbourly relations are excellent. The centre has made a point of involving the community and has invited everyone in the area to a discussion session.

The centre is very active in terms of raising awareness about domestic violence and creating a better understanding of this issue. Awareness campaigns also serve as a marketing tool, alerting women to the centre's existence, so that they know where to turn when the situation at home becomes untenable. A good relationship has also been developed with the press and the centre's work is often highlighted in a positive way. Contact has been established with the police as well as with the casualty department at the hospital. Lectures on domestic violence and the centre's work have been given to both the above and practical experience is offered to trainee social workers, police officers and nurses as well as pupils from the local comprehensive school. A leaflet has also been produced for survivors of violence and their families.

### ***Occupational Health and Safety***

The centre has an arrangement with a security firm called Securitas, so that help is at hand if a situation becomes hostile. There is also a fire alarm system with a direct connection to the Fire Brigade. The centre is connected to the local occupational health ser-

vice, Volvat OHS, and receives advice on developing a health promoting working environment.

### ***Results***

The crisis centre is a small operation with limited financial resources. The centre leader works hard to create an organisational culture that promotes health and safety for everyone. A caring atmosphere has been developed and staff know that they can expect support if the work becomes too stressful or when problems arise in their private life. Despite the pressures inherent in this work, the centre has made positive strides in promoting good health for both the women and children who use its services and for employees. Staff turnover is very low which is surprising given the demanding nature of the work and the fairly low status it has within society. Employees also take great responsibility and pride in the way the shelter operates. The centre is highly regarded by sufferers of domestic violence and is seen as a safe haven. No formal evaluation of the crisis centre has been carried out, but these indicators show that this centre is a health promoting organisation both for the women who need help, and for the employees.