

Prague, January 31st, 2008

His Excellency
Petr Nečas, Minister
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the CR
Na Poříčném právu 1
128 01 Praha 2

Subject: Position Statement on the use of cage beds and on institutional care; a call for dialogue

Open letter to the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic

Your Excellency,

The latest controversy on the use of cage beds inspired us to address you. We, as professionals in the field of social care, cannot leave unnoticed recently published images of BBC reporters and the consequent statement of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the CR on this document that followed. We feel it as our own responsibility to call upon you for dialogue not only in the matter of cage beds, but in particular regarding the transformation of institutional care.

We feel as important to explain the point of protests against cage beds. The protests are not directed against the use of safety side rails as such, when it would be indispensable for example in order to prevent the child from falling off the bed in night. Our law does not allow the use of cage beds in case of acute aggressive behavior, let alone as a preventive method, where the cage bed becomes client's common living space.

The difference between a cage bed and a childbed is related to the above. We keep children in beds during their sleep. The rest of the day we play with them, cuddle them and stimulate their development – we provide for their needs. The people in front of BBC cameras are left on their own in their cage beds, at a first look suffering of a permanent deficit of contacts and stimuli. Therefore we consider the use of cages in social services to be an inefficient practice devastating the human being kept inside as well as his caretakers.

Given that the Czech Republic is perceived abroad as a developed and civilized country, it might be expected that the international pressure would continue to grow.

We have evidence proving that we could make it without cage beds even in our country. In many places in the Czech Republic they have already started with their suppression. It is becoming confirmed that the suppression of cage beds would not result in a substantial increase of doses of tranquilizers, as many feared it would be (cf. e.g. the brief published in the website www.kvalitavpraxi.cz). However it would be necessary to increase the staff number and provide an educational program widening professional competencies of the staff. The last still missing things are strategies and funds that would allow the clients to live a normal life in a normal environment, in our society considered as common, as it is stipulated by the Law on Social Services nr. 108/2006.

Nevertheless, cage beds do not represent the principal difficulty in the life of people living in establishments of institutional care. They stand only for the tip of an iceberg warning of a much wider and hidden problem. This problem is the institutional care as such. The institutions are generating a necessity to use cages due to their own quintessence.

Permanent deficit of the essential human needs, necessity to comply with the rules of a collective establishment and misunderstandings due to the absence of skills in functional communication methods on both sides – staff's and client's – these are the reasons for suffering of the people in institutional care establishments and the frequent causes of their aggressive behavior.

The suppression of cage beds needs to be compensated by an increase of the number of staff working in the direct care and by widening their qualification. However, the solution that would bring a real increase of quality of life for people living in institutional care would ask for a transformation of social services from the institutional care to the services provided in the natural environment. Therefore, it is indispensable to change the way of using the funds destined to the financing of social services. We know that funds available for social services are quite sufficient, but are used in an extremely inefficient manner.

We are convinced, that the issue of cage beds became so widely discussed, because they represent a symbol well expressing the principle of these institutions: they are cages, sometimes even golden, built in the name of protection. Institutional care is an inhuman and in the same times an inefficient service. For this reason, in developed countries and overseas is unambiguously strengthened the capacity of services provided in the natural environment. There are countries, where all the institutions were suppressed. But in the Czech Republic the capacity of institutional care is growing from one year to another (in 2006 it increased by more than 100 beds, cf. the statistics of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs). And we consider this as a problem.

Therefore, we are offering you our collaboration – our professional potential, our local and foreign experiences. We would appreciate to meet you in a brief meeting, where we would have an opportunity to explain you personally our point of view, arguments and experiences.

Yours sincerely,

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