



KIRKENS KORSHÆR



DAN CHURCH SOCIAL

a voluntary, social charity organisation



- In Danish society, change, development and evaluation are among the key concepts. Society and its citizens are constantly exposed to the desire and the need for changes and development.

There are no discussions as to whether and why things such as the Danish education system should be changed; the only discussions concern the way in which it will be changed. In by far the majority of cases, change is an absolute or obvious thing that cannot be discussed. The argument is usually based on the fact that the Danes live in a globalised world, and the fact that you have to adapt yourself to the needs to which this leads. It doesn't seem as though society and its citizens have any choice. That's just the way it is.

Most of the Danes manage to live a life that is adapted to these constant changes, and some find them positively enriching and challenging, but there is also a group of people who don't manage to or want to live their life on the basis of the constant need for change and development. They don't fit into the middle class life that by far the majority of Danes live and thrive in.

These people live on the edge of Danish society, often in solitude and often as a consequence of abuse, psychological illness or unfortunate social circumstances. They live the life of socially vulnerable people.

Sadly there are far too many

● It is difficult to say how many people are living a socially vulnerable life in Denmark, but Kirkens Korshær has considered its main task to be by the side of socially vulnerable people for nearly 100 years, even if they are never in a position to live up to the constant need for change, development and evaluation.

Kirkens Korshær does not count its number of users, but once a year (one week in November), Kirkens Korshær makes an approximate estimate of how many users the organisation is in contact with. In recent years, this number has constantly remained just below 10 000 people. 10 000 people during the space of one week. Each day, Kirkens Korshær is in contact with around 1 200 people every day throughout Denmark who live on the edge of Danish society for one reason or another.

To this figure you can add more than 30 000 calls that Kirkens Korshær's telephone advice line, the St. Nikolai Service, receives per year.

There are therefore many people who need Kirkens Korshær, since they are living a life that they find difficult to cope with for personal, social and financial reasons.

Kirkens Korshær

● Kirkens Korshær was founded in 1912 by Copenhagen priest H.P. Møllerup. The purpose was the same then as it is now, to help people in need, irrespective of who they are, and irrespective of how great the need is - work that rapidly spread throughout Denmark and that, in line with the change in society, has grown and adapted itself to the living conditions prevailing at any one time for the most vulnerable of that society. The changes in the society have meant that Kirkens Korshær has continuously moved in new work areas, but always on the basis of the desire to be at the side of those who are the most vulnerable in Danish society.

Kirkens Korshær perceives itself to be part of the Danish People's Church and therefore works on the basis of a Christian philosophy which maintains that all people, irrespective of what life has dealt them or what they have done with their life, were created in the image of God. Kirkens Korshær believes in and works on the basis of the belief that all people are God's children and therefore have an inalienable value. For this reason, all people must be treated with respect and dignity.

” Kirkens Korshær is in contact with around 1.200 people every day.

Among society's most vulnerable

● Kirkens Korshær works among the most vulnerable people in Denmark - the people who in many other contexts have been forgotten, cast out and abandoned.

Poverty, loneliness, homelessness, psychological illness, substance abuse, criminality and prostitution are therefore some of the main disciplines of Kirkens Korshær's work.

Kirkens Korshær tries to reach these people when life is chaotic, difficult and unpredictable and wants to be at their side, even if they are down.

There are of course some who abuse narcotics or live on the street, some who are moving away from abuse or who are luckily finding somewhere to live, but there are also far too many who are not coming out of the social hardship they are living in. These are the people for whom Kirkens Korshær works.

Kirkens Korshær's work includes:

Hostels and re-establishment centres

● Kirkens Korshær runs hostels and re-establishment centres in five major Danish cities. A hostel is a temporary living space for people with psychological illness, substance abusers or the homeless, for example. The intention is for the residents to hopefully be able to find another long-term place to live, but unfortunately in reality, several of the residents will live at a hostel for a long period and in several stages.

The hostels have different types of external home through which the residents can be fed back into the general housing market. (Jeg forstår ikke hvad denne sætning prøver at fortælle læseren: "external home" as in different types of homes according to the needs of the resident? "Fed back into..." is this literally meant or is this just a metaphor? What does "general housing market" mean? Does it mean the resident's journey back into society?)

The Danish local authorities pay for this, but Kirkens Korshær pays for the running of the hostels and re-establishment centres.

Shelters

● Kirkens Korshær runs shelters throughout Denmark. At the shelters you can buy a portion of cheap food, have a hot bath and get some clean clothes, so you can always find someone to talk to. The shelters function as sanctuaries in an otherwise hard and hectic everyday life.

The biggest cities have night shelters. This is where people come to sleep on mattresses and sheets, and many are usually in the same room. However, the alternative is often spending the night on the street.

Housing shares

● Kirkens Korshær runs various types of housing share. The hostels have preparatory communities to which former residents can turn for more normal accommodation arrangements.

The 'sluse' (whose function is comparable to that of a canal lock) is a living community for prisoners who have been released and who are preparing for a normal existence. At Frederiksberg, Kirkens Korshær has two housing shares for substance abusers who are psychologically ill. Korsly is a living community for young people who are psychologically fragile. In Aalborg, people who cannot live in other places can live in a camp, and Copenhagen's Southern Harbour has the Fru Prip ship, which is a housing share for former hostel residents.



The St. Nikolai Service

- The St. Nikolai Service is a telephone line that is open to everyone who needs to talk on an anonymous basis. A range of 30 000 people use the service each year.

Many call because they're lonely or confused and therefore have no-one to talk to, but there are no restrictions as to what people can talk about.

The St. Nikolai Service is manned by many hundreds of voluntary workers and a few employees, all of whom are subject to confidentiality and do not ask names, addresses or personal identification numbers.

In Copenhagen, you can also turn up in person.

The county gaol work

- Kirkens Korshær has three employees who regularly visit Denmark's county gaols (jeg har aldrig set dette ord....men nu er jeg også amerikaner! Er det et slags fængsel?) and talk to the inmates. Since the county gaol employees are not a part of the prison system and are also subject to confidentiality, the inmates and county gaol employees can talk about everything that is going on in the inmate's life without others gaining knowledge of that.

The talks can concern anything from what it's like being in a county gaol to questions about guilt for a crime and punishment. There are many times when Kirkens Korshær's employees are the inmates' only opportunity to talk about things that they would not otherwise talk about in a county gaol.

Charity shops

- A large share of the money it costs to do Kirkens Korshær's work comes in through contributions from the Danish Government and the Local Authorities, but around one quarter is collected by Kirkens Korshær itself.

A considerable share of this quarter is earned by Kirkens Korshær through the more than 200 charity shops run by the organisation throughout Denmark.

This means that the charity shops are very important to the work in terms of finance alone, but since more than 4 000 of the total of around 6 000 volunteers that Kirkens Korshær has are volunteers in charity shops, the charity shops also play their part in characterising Kirkens Korshær as an organisation that is sustained by voluntary workforces.



An organisation belonging to the Church of Denmark

- Kirkens Korshær is a church organisation that works within for the Danish church's frameworks. This is firstly shown by the fact that Kirkens Korshær has employed priests who are both the Church Army's priests and parish priests. The Church Army's priests come to the shelters and offer the users help if they need to talk to a priest.

Church Army religious services are held regularly in several of the communities in which Kirkens Korshær works, and some of the workplaces also hold prayers.

As a user of Kirkens Korshær's services, you don't need to participate in religious services and prayers. You don't even need to be a member of the Church of Denmark. Everyone's welcome, irrespective of what he does or does not believe in.

Secondly, this means that Kirkens Korshær is an organisation belonging to the Church of Denmark, that its work is based on the Christian philosophy, i.e. that all people were created in the image of God and therefore have an inalienable value. Each individual person must therefore be treated with deference and respect.



Thousands of spokespeople

- Volunteers and employees in Kirkens Korshær first and foremost have the task of either meeting the users at the workplaces, or of earning money for this work through the work in the charity shops or other types of work. However, all of them also have another very important function, i.e. to be spokespeople for the socially vulnerable. In telling people about, providing informing on and drawing other people's attention to the conditions of the socially vulnerable, they create awareness of the hardships that they experience, and open up a world that many Danes do not know of or believe exists.

Throughout Denmark, Kirkens Korshær has around 7 000 spokespeople for the socially vulnerable, i.e. more than 6 000 volunteers and around 400 employees.

Unfortunately, we just have to tell them

● Society's socially vulnerable suffer many unfair circumstances. On the part of some of the public authorities, it can be difficult to understand those who are vulnerable or direct their help towards the socially vulnerable. This is rarely put down to unwillingness on the part of the individual case handler, but is instead due to the great pressure under which the case handlers work. It requires time to keep company with the socially vulnerable, and this time is rarely available in the work with the socially vulnerable. The trust that is so crucial to the work with the socially vulnerable cannot be conjured up in the space of 15 minutes, or however long a period is available now. It takes time to build up trust. The great pressure under which the meeting between the socially vulnerable and their case handlers takes place can easily lead to a feeling of powerlessness and discrimination. It's possible for them to relate their experiences to Kirkens Korshær in their way and maybe obtain a bit of support for the way in which the meeting with the public case handlers can be tackled on another occasion so that they are given the correct and useful treatment to which they are indeed entitled.

It's not just in relation to the public that Kirkens Korshær's employees have an obligation as spokespeople, but also in relation to the large majority of Danes who know nothing about the life of a socially vulnerable. Kirkens Korshær's employees tell their users' story by relating stories of the ostracism and lack of understanding experienced by the socially vulnerable. This takes place by telling people that not all people can or want to follow the standards and ways followed by the majority, for example, and by arguing the case that these people are also entitled to a dignified life.

A prejudice that Kirkens Korshær's users have to live under is the prejudice that they just need to pull themselves together and find a home or a job or get themselves together and walk away from abuse. This prejudice is what Kirkens Korshær's employees endeavour to invalidate, since they have experienced that the socially vulnerable, for many and complex reasons, cannot just pull themselves together. The employees have spoken to people who were born into social hardship and therefore cannot just pull themselves together.



What can you do?

● If you want to know more about Kirkens Korshær and its work for the socially vulnerable, you can visit Kirkens Korshær's homepage, www.kirkenkorshaer.dk, or you can call Kirkens Korshær on: +45 3312 1600 or send an email to kk@kobenhavn.kirkensorshaer.dk

You can also see more about the life of the socially vulnerable on the homepage www.hilsenfravirkeligheden.dk. This shows some pictures of Kirkens Korshær's users in their everyday lives.

Financial support

● You can give Kirkens Korshær financial support in several ways. You can buy clothes, furniture or books in one of Kirkens Korshær's more than 200 charity shops, for example. On www.kirkenskorshaer.dk, you can find addresses and the shops' opening hours.

You can offer support by going to a bank and paying an amount into Kirkens Korshær's account, reg. no. 9541, account no. 541429. Ask at the bank what you should do.

A CHURCH WITH A QUEST
that meet people right where they are

A PROTESTING CHURCH
that is on a level with society's socially vulnerable people and is a barometer that is sensitive to what is happening at the bottom of society

A PROTESTING CHURCH
that wants to keep the Church of Denmark firmly on track with its evangelically-based responsibility for the vulnerable people

A CHURCH OF SOLIDARITY
that wants to be the spokesperson for the vulnerable people of society and that wants to have opinions and create debates so that it can be heard and noticed



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