



Unemployment and volunteers receiving training within the Icelandic RC project

Jóhann Thoroddsen, project manager
Psychological Support

Icelandic Red Cross



Introduction

- The scope of the problem
- Red Cross response
- The content of the Red Cross response
- Volunteers – recruitment and training



October 6th 2008

“May God help Iceland”

(The Prime Minister of Iceland)



Financial crisis

- Iceland was the first country to be hit gravely by the global financial crisis
- Icelandic banking system crumbled down in a matter of weeks
- All the reassurances of authorities proved to be wrong
- Monitoring bodies had slept on guard
- Iceland was on the verge of bankruptcy
- The Icelandic nation is up to pay the bill



The situation in 2008

- Unemployment – from 0.7% to 10% (12% in some areas)
- Companies went bankrupt, taken over by banks (The State)
- Companies and governmental bodies reduced working hours and salaries
- Devaluation of the currency (IKR) Dropped more than 100%
- Inflation - from 1,5% to 10% - most loans are inflation secured
- Debts increased - around 20.000 households are in serious debt



The situation in 2010

- Unemployment – is now around 7%
- Companies are still in the hands of the banks (The State)
- Reduction of working hours and salaries is still in place
- The currency - more stable in 2010 and recovering a little bit
- Inflation is 3.7 %
- Debts on ice for two years - now it is payday!!
- People face loosing their homes



Psychological reactions

2008

- A state of shock
- No trust in authorities
- Insecurity
- Doubt and disbelief
- Feeling of deception
- Fear and suspicion

2010

- Numbness
- No trust in authorities
 - 7% trust the parliament
- Loosing hope
- Deception confirmed
- Anger, desperation and outbursts!!



Some other effects

- The solitary among people is not as strong as before
 - Those who have money and those who don't
- Peoples position is not much clearer today, than before
 - e.g. "what is mine and what is not, how much do I owe"
- Those who have financial difficulties
 - Worries about: , growing expenses, the political instability, debts, (un)employment, housing, uncertainty about the future
- Those who do not have financial difficulties
 - Worries about: growing expenses, the political instability, uncertainty about the future and people in difficulties



Red Cross response

- IRC went in to emergency preparedness mode
 - The response was to build upon projects the RC already had and reinforce them
- Tend to basic needs – psychosocial needs
- Information

- Activate people



Red Cross response cont.

- IRC 24 hour helpline was strengthened
- Branches stepped up their psychosocial programmes
- A series of video messages on prime time

- Cooperation with the authorities
- Monitoring
- Plans if the situation gets worse e.g. poverty
- Clothing – exchange markets



The Red Cross house

- The IRC headquarter opened a service centre
 - Individuals and families can seek support and counselling for free
 - A venue for diverse social activities
 - Volunteers help guests to find appropriate solutions to their needs
 - Interviews with psychologists, members of IRC crisis team
 - Access to computers, a coffee corner, magazines, books and a playground for the children
 - The service in the Red Cross House is available for everyone throughout the country but based in Reykjavík
- The Red Cross house is the basis in all the IRC response



Activities

- The daily schedule is advertised on a weekly basis
- Shorter lectures on diverse subjects and various workshops
- One on one mentor mentie
 - Active jobseekers are mentors for jobseekers that have not been active and have become isolated
- The Bees – a think tank grassroot group of jobseekers have a base in the Red Cross house



Activities

- Youth in action
 - A Co-operation between the Directorate of Labour, the Red Cross and the national sports association.
 - Participants sign a contract to do volunteer work or courses 9 hours a week or risk losing their unemployment benefits.
 - Project managers were jobseekers themselves and who are now on a 9 month temporary contract



The Red Cross house multiplies

- This project has now been moved from the head office to the branches and now there are 4 “Red Cross Houses” in the greater Reykjavík area open and using the same strategy as the original one.
- All other branches have responded in some way:
 - Working more closely with state institutions and other NGO’s
 - Strengthening the programs already in place



Beneficiaries and volunteers

- New groups of beneficiaries
- Recruiting a whole new genre of volunteers
- Red Cross is facing a strange but happy dilemma. Once the volunteers have been trained they seem to find it easier to get a new job.



Volunteers - main foundation

- Volunteers are the basis for the RC response
- They get experience, broaden the horizons
- They are not only participating for themselves but for others as well
- Psychologically it is strengthening to assist others - you have an active part to play



Recruitment of volunteers

- Advertised in the newspapers
- One on one method
- The Directorate of labour
- More effective to have volunteers introducing the RCH than staff
- Happy volunteers bring others in, both as guests and new recruits
- Get help and give help



Selection of volunteers

- Everyone who's interested is given the chance to try
- The first shift - an addition to a fully staffed shift
- Those who are not reliable tend to drop out soon
- The volunteers are told if they are not suitable for the RCH
- To begin with one does not have to apply for becoming a volunteer
- Staff and experienced volunteers keeps an eye on new recruited volunteers



Volunteers - training

- Volunteers starts immediately after showing interest
- Training courses for volunteers are held every 3 months.
 - all volunteers are encouraged to participate regardless of their role in the house.
- Content of the training course
 - Psycho-social support, interview techniques - theory and practice, reception of guests and how to “fish” people to talk and stay and the fundamental principles of the RC.



Volunteers - support

- Debriefing – before leaving a shift , especially if they were conducting an interview
- A group debriefing every second month
- Irregular breakfast meetings where particular topics are discussed and volunteers can raise concerns and ideas
- The staff has an access to a psychologist and if needed they can even refer the volunteer to this psychologist



Thank you!