KOMPASSET EMERGENCY SHELTER IN HELLIG KORS KIRKE

REPORT NOVEMBER 2017 - MAJ 2018
Content:

1. Introduction 3
2. Target Group 4-5
3. Staff and volunteers 5
4. Partners and community 6-7
5. Challenges - harsh winter times 8
6. Statistics 8-9
7. Acknowledgements 10
Introduction

And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58).

On 6th of November 2017 we opened Kompasset Emergency Night Shelter in Hellig Kors Kirke in cooperation with the church board and the support of the whole congregation at Kapelvej 38. This is the second year of our mutual efforts to provide 40 sleeping places for everyone in need. We were welcomed with the open arms and overwhelming support.

We must recognize that there are still strong stereotypes surrounding homelessness and those who find themselves in the situation of having to sleep rough, and situation of social exclusion. Often homeless people are suspected to be possible criminals, and that’s why some of us keep a vigilant eye on our belongings when they pass by, we avoid taking money at an ATM where there is someone sleeping or sitting nearby, or we plainly avoid places where there are homeless people. However, it is important to keep in mind that often, the rough sleepers are equally alert since they are themselves aware that they can be victims of aggression. Even more, we need to reconsider the way in which homelessness is perceived. Being a homeless person is not a character trait, it does not speak about one’s capabilities or shortcomings. It is a situation in which some people find themselves, primarily on the base of structural reasons, and it can happen to any of us. We cannot judge someone by whether they have a roof on top of their head or not. Being homeless is for most people a difficult and even humiliating experience, one that can have long-lasting consequences on their lives. It is, however, a situation that can be overcome with adequate support and care.

Departing from this understanding we believe it is extremely important to do the best in our power to provide for the most basic of needs: that for a safe space to rest, away from the cold and the potential dangers of life on the street. And this is part of our motivation here at the Kompasset Night Shelter in Hellig Kors Kirke.

The night shelter was open from November 6th 2017 to 21nd of May 2018, 6 days a week. Friday was set as the night without operation of the shelter, as in our experience this is the night with least demand of our service, as many users work on the streets collecting bottles. The 40 places were on several occasions distributed through a simple lottery system. The shelter is staffed by 2 paid and professional staff members each night + volunteers to assist in the first few hours. On several occasions, the lottery was cancelled, and the capacity was exceeded by up to 80 % due to drop in temperatures.
Target Group

Kompasset emergency shelter in Hellig Kors Kirke is a service open to everyone in need of a safe and warm place to sleep regardless of citizenship and resident permit. The vast majority of our users are foreigners, with few exceptions of Danish citizens. The latter, since holders of a CPR number, have access to many other services and shelters. Based on nationality, it is possible to distinguish two main groups among our users: European citizens and non-European, the latter also referred to as third-country nationals. The first group is mainly formed by citizens of Romania, Poland, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and others. In the second group the nationalities most represented are Nigerian, Ghanaian, Moroccan, and Senegalese. A large majority of third-country nationals hold a resident permit from a European country, in most cases Italy or Spain. After spending years in South Europe, experiencing difficult labour conditions and unemployment, especially starting from 2007 with the economic crisis, they have decided to explore new possibilities in other EU countries. However, as non-EU citizens holding a residence permit from another EU country in Denmark, they are not allowed to work and can only reside on the Danish territory for a maximum of three months, in a time period of six months. Considering gender, the clear majority of Kompasset emergency shelter's users are male. On an average, out of the 40 users we have in the shelter, only two to five-six are women. In general, most of our users are single men, but we also host some couples and families\(^1\), mostly from Romania.

The age distributions among our users is various, but most of the people that use Kompasset emergency shelter in Hellig Kors Church are between the age of 30 and 45. A large part of our users survives by collect bottles and cans around the city. They work long hours walking and biking, especially during the weekends when people go out and drink leaving behind more bottles. It is common that our users knock at our door late at night and early morning after spending hours collecting bottles, as well as, leaving the shelter early to collect what was left behind in the streets the night before. Many of our users are also looking for a more settled jobs, hoping to earn more and reach better living conditions than what they experienced in their home-country. Moreover, some users are already employed, however they are still experiencing homelessness as the cost of a room, including a deposit, is usually quite high. Furthermore, the first salary can take a while to be received by our users, as they must go through the process of applying for the tax card and opening a bank account, actions that can require sometimes for someone who does not yet have a CPR number. Working and living in the street is extremely hard and, without support and help, there is a risk for our users to lose their job.

\(^1\)Families with only adult’s members, as underage persons are not allowed in the shelter.
Having a place to sleep is fundamental for each of our users, who can count on a safe, warm and welcoming place to spend the night and share their success, frustrations and everyday life experiences in the streets of Copenhagen. Our users slept on mattresses between the church benches.

**Staff and Volunteers**

Staff and volunteers of Kompasset emergency night shelter in Hellig Kors Church come from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Romania, Italy, USA and Poland, and we work together to secure a safe space for 40 people each night. We all come from different background and have different educations – but we have that common goal. Some of us started as volunteers in Kirkens Korshær, some as interns and all were through a recruitment procedure before beginning work.

To run our night shelter this season we employed 4 people working full time and we contracted 5 substitutes. When open 6 days a week we worked 9 hours shifts from 22.30 to 7.30

We received big help from more than 15 volunteers who came in for the Christmas and Easter period for example to help us out with celebrations organized by the church. We ate together, even listing to one concert one day.
Quotes from our volunteers:

"I've been very happy volunteering at the shelter for homeless people in Hellig Kors Kirke in Nørrebro. It's clear to see that there indeed is a need for more shelters and therefor I find this initiative very important. Through the work in the shelter I've met committed social workers who do their best and users who appreciate this initiative. The shelter is giving these people a sense of being human equal with the rest of the society regardless of their position. "

Josephine, Volunteer

"Kirkens Korshær's shelter is a very warm and welcoming place where I enjoyed working in the final months of the season before the shelter closed for the summer. In my view, the shelter functions very well with a system that makes the shelter a comfortable place for people to come and sleep during the night. Furthermore, the staff working there do a good job to make a nice atmosphere and keep the place calm for people to rest. Overall, I had a very nice experience working at the shelter and I think the place is well-run."

Sophie, Volunteer

**Partners and Community**

Statements from partners concerning collaboration with Kompasset nigh Shelter in Hellig Kors Church.

"When temperatures dropped by the end of February, Red Cross Copenhagen responded promptly and opened a emergency night shelter for homeless people, so no one would have to sleep rough. We already run a house for young homeless people aged 18-30, Kanten, and we used these premises for the night shelter. It opened February 27th and was open for 1 week. It was used by 70 people all together, some of them came several times. 16 Volunteers made it happen and we were also visited by the minister of social affairs Mai Mercado, who thanked the volunteers for their great effort. We had a great collaboration with partner organizations, such as Grace (Blue Cross) and Kompasset (Kirkens Korshær). These partnerships made it possible to spread information about our new service very fast."

Anne-Katrine Sørensen, Manager, Kanten, Red Cross
“For Grace the cooperation with Kompasset Night Shelter in Hellig Kors Church was a great and natural thing. We have the same users coming to the two places and it was great to work with people who know the users just as well as us. It was amazing to get help – and giving help back – as we could see how it affected the users as well as our volunteers. It showed that we were able to be on top of every situation – and that made everyone feel safe. First and foremost, it created a sense of safety and great communication between the two shelters. It made the every-day easier and it was very helpful in our day-to-day routine. We would be happy to continue this cooperation next wither.

The volunteers say that they loved the fact that we were able to help so many people. Especially in the period where we were working together to ensure that no one should sleep outside – they really felt needed and that they were making a difference. “

Aicha Lind, Manager, Gracekbh

Statement regarding the collaboration between Hellig Kors Church and Kompasset, Kirkens Korshær.

“The Congregation Council for the Perish of Blaagaarden is happy to contribute to the social work done by Kirkens Korshær. Our motivation to continue this work is the combination of seeing the poverty in the streets and being asked: Could you house our shelter? The congregation council reacted very quickly to the question from Kirkens Korshær Kompasset last season and was motivated to continue this season.

Another motivation to continue the cooperation with Kompasset in this field, is the response from the daily users of the church: the Sunday congregation, the congregation of funerals, weddings a.s.o.. Some say, that this is real Christianity – not just talk. Some wedding couples has chosen this church because of its social profile shown in this work. Also, non-believers, who never attend any activities in the church and who are normally critical to religion are now more respectful in their approach to the church as local partner.”

Sognepræst (Jens) Andreas Christensen
Challenges - harsh winter times

While the work of the shelter is surrounded by gratifying experiences, it is important to look back also at the challenges we have been able to overcome during this season.

It has been a tough winter with temperatures dropping often below zero with cold wind blowing remorselessly. Facing these harsh conditions, we had to reconsider our opening times as our capacity during certain time periods in the winter. In those periods, we opened every day of the week (with Fridays being our usual days of closure), and we stopped the lottery that usually takes place every night for the normal 40 places. We were the last shelter in Copenhagen to open every night (from 23.00) and we had to keep in mind that every single person who came to our doors is a person who had no other place to turn to. In order to open every day and raise our capacity, do that we have had to hire extra staff to make sure that not only the services for higher numbers of users are delivered in the right fashion, but also all the safety measures are met.

We also, quickly arranged a direct and close cooperation with neighbouring shelters such as "Grace" of Blå Kors who were able to host 40 people each night despite insufficient staff and the Kirkens Korshær shelter in Stengade 40 who were able to host few of the most vulnerable users during the busy nights.

We received an extremely positive feedback from the users regarding our actions, despite their visible tiredness and anxiety that was stemming from constant cold. We were able to temporarily alleviate the hardship, indoors, with a warm cup of tea, as well as occasional food donations we would receive from various donors. The Grace night shelter also voiced their appreciation, their mission being upheld thanks to the effort of our night team here in Hellig Kors Kirke.

Statistics for season 2017/2018

"Churches’ efforts to help the homeless reflect obedience to Jesus’ instruction to “feed my lambs” (John 21:15), as well as recognition that every person, loved by God, needs and deserves the basic shelter essential for their survival and well-being” Justice Revival article – Honouring the God by Loving the homeless.

We have been open 157 nights in total during the 7-month period, with an average of 36 people sleeping in the church every night. We exceeded our capacity of 40 places in harsh winter period – giving shelter to 76 people some days. Unfortunately – and the great frustration to us and our users - in 49 times we had to use our “lottery system” rejecting between 10 and 20 people each of those
nights. We reached the number 5672 of total “sleeps” in this season. The busiest week was week 11 of 2018 - between 12th and 18th of March with temperatures below -5, when we cancelled the lottery and called in extra staff.

Usually Saturday night was the quiet nights of the season with average of around of 30 people.

One week in March, we did internal counting for our statistics in Kirkens Korschær in whole land of Denmark. We counted 97 different users in 7 days.

We got donated more than 200 hundred blankets and sleeping bags, a few boxes of new winter jackets, new t-shirts, socks, scarfs and winter hats.

From a private donation received we bought 50 new self-inflated mattresses to provide optimal comfort for our quest, they valued that fully with a lot of positive feedback.

As the shelter was slowly closing, we had more than 60 people queuing in front of the church.

21st of May we hosted our guest for the final night with 4 big trays of homemade lasagne and fresh gazpacho delivered by our friend. Luckily, we didn’t have to do the lottery and we end up with 38 souls inside.
Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful for all the fruitful collaborations we build during this season. We feel compelled to offer a heartfelt thank you to the entire staff of Hellig Kors Kirke, in particular to priest Andreas Christensen, without whom we would not have been able to keep the shelter running for as long as we did. The entire staff working in the shelter together with our users are deeply appreciative of his deep understanding and support shown to us throughout these past 7 months.

Moreover, we are very grateful for the fruitful collaboration with Blå Kors and their team of volunteers and staff at the "Grace" shelter in Copenhagen, the Red Cross team in the Kanten and last but not least to all the staff working in the Kirkens Korshær shelter in Stengade 40, all of whom helped us ensure a safe place to sleep for everyone during the very cold winter nights.

Furthermore, we have great appreciation for the volunteers who took time to come and help us when it was most needed and contributed in making our place a welcoming space for all our users.

Finally, we extend our thank you to all those who have contributed anonymously with donations in blankets, mattresses and occasional food. They have been an enormous help in our daily work.

Many thanks to The Runde Bord chief Peter Haugelund for re supply of sleeping bags and lovely food that our users appreciate truly.

We are looking forward to continuing working together in bringing some ease and support to those in need during the next season.

Warm regards,
The staff working in Kompasset Night Shelter in Hellig Kors Kirke.
Kirkens Korshær (Dan Church Social) was founded in 1912 with the objective of offering help to people in need. Kirkens Korshær has 450 employees and 9000 volunteers. We run day and night shelters as well as second-hand stores with pleasure. Kirkens Korshær is a private, social charity belonging to the established church that operates among society’s marginalized and excluded groups. Kirkens Korshær works according to Christian and humanitarian views, i.e. we believe that each human being is unique and infinitely valuable. Please read more about us at www.kirkenskorshaer.dk
“The program was good, the place is nice, it's spacious and the mattresses are good. I think that the staff is nice, and the users are friends with them. It got much better after the new system with the line (where the passage was introduced at the entrance), because then people can't cut the line or go for more than one number (can't cheat the lottery).

A suggestion for improving would be to extend a little bit the wake-up time - as people go to bed late, it would be nice to wake up at 6:30 - 7:00. - otherwise, many thanks!”

User of Kompasset