



## **Ebook Report Visit Brno**

The following report is the summary of the exchange of professionals between colleagues from Gangway e. V. in Berlin and from Brno and Blansko. Some of them had already visited Gangway e.V. in Berlin a month before.

The main topic of our exchange was the cooperation between street social work and schools. During our one-week stay in Brno, we visited various institutions, including youth clubs with outreach street social work, school social work and a centre for crime prevention and resocialization. With this report we want to give an insight into the work on site and present our exchange of experiences.

## **Blansko, PVC Klub**

In Blansko, a smaller town that still belongs to the Brno region, we visited the Nizkoprahovy Klub, or "PVC Klub". This youth club belongs to the organisation Podané ruce (the meaning is close to "helping hands"), which offers support for abusive substance use and addiction for adults as well as facilities for working with "youth at risk". The organisation now has about 200 employees, making it one of the largest in the Czech Republic. Podané ruce started with drug prevention programmes and then expanded into youth work and youth social work. In addition, the organisation has also been offering testing and vaccination stations since the pandemic period.

In addition to youth street social work, Blansko also has street workers (who only work as such) with a focus on addiction prevention and safer use.

The PVC Club is one of the oldest youth clubs in the Czech Republic and also the only one in Blansko. When we arrived there, many young people were on site taking advantage of the different rooms and activities the club had to offer.

The target group consists of teenagers and young adults aged 13 to 26. However, most visitors to the youth club are between 14 and 18 years old. Every day, about 30 young people visit the club, for whom the staff have to make "individual plans" - if they visit the club regularly. These "individual plans" include both the reason why someone is considered a "youth at risk" and a goal that is set together with the young person. In addition, new counselling contents and changes are constantly documented, which, apart from a high bureaucratic effort, can also offer the advantage that important information about visitors can easily be looked up and remembered. This can be an advantage for the relationship work, as the colleagues can retrieve important information and follow it up with conversations. At the same time, however, the documentation system bears the danger of suggesting that the effectiveness of social work can be verified in all areas. This ignores the fact that, for example, the effectiveness of the relationship work cannot be recorded well in this system and that the process of relationship work in particular can sometimes take a very long time. This system can also create a certain pressure on social workers to justify themselves and shift attention from the young people to the office during working hours.

In contrast to Berlin, where the work in the youth clubs and the street work are separated from each other, the work of the colleagues in the Czech Republic includes both street work and support in the youth clubs. The street work area is still quite new and is currently being developed and expanded. So far, there are no fixed times for patrols, as it depends on when the club's workload and staffing allow it. The combination of street work and youth club requires a lot of capacity and organisation. However, it also seems very advantageous to have a combination of work in a public space and the possibility of offering a meeting place, a counselling area, or a place of retreat in the work. For the relationship work especially it can be very advantageous if young people, with whom a first contact was made on the street, come to the club and spend time there. In our work, this possibility is missing because our offices are not places for young people to stay. However, since the club and street work mean a lot of work, there is no time in the combination for excursions or the like, which is possible in our work.

### **Brno, "Ratolest Brno" Youth Club Likusák**

The youth club "Likusák" is part of the association "Ratolest Brno", which is active in various areas of youth social work in Brno.

The club is located in the outskirts of the city, which is characterised by typical prefabricated buildings from the CSSR era. The residents are very mixed in terms of social and economic situation. The club building is located in the middle of the prefabricated buildings, relatively central and easily accessible for the young people. The district "Lizano" is the most densely

populated in Brno with about 25,000 inhabitants. However, the Likusák club is the only youth club in this district!

The concept of the work includes the "location-based structure" as a classic offer of a youth club, as well as outreach work in the form of street social work.

The target group includes adolescents and young adults aged 12 to 14. If the work with the young people goes beyond an initial meeting, contracts have to be made between the social workers and the young people, which are a prerequisite for public funding of the services.

This type of contract does not exist in Gangway's work in Berlin. The advantages can be that a certain commitment is established with the young people, whilst the disadvantages can be that the work is evaluated and financed on the basis of quantitative contracts and not on the basis of qualitative and content-related criteria.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, many visitors to the club have stayed away. The social workers are trying to establish or maintain contact with the young people through an online presence on social media such as Instagram. This is only partially successful, as youth work thrives on actual relationships. The great advantage of the concept of outreach work can be seen well in this situation. The social workers can meet many of the young people they already know, but also "new" young people on their regular rounds, and thus continue to offer the relationship work and the offers of open youth work. Before the pandemic, the club had an average of 250 clients on contract every year. Currently there are a maximum of 140 per year. Many youth clubs in Berlin are currently hearing similar things. Young people are staying away as visitors because the regulations due to the pandemic have considerably reduced the attractiveness of the offers on site.

### **Brno, Základní škola a mateřská škola**

The day started well, as we took the wrong entrance and ended up in the school canteen. While we were there trying to explain our request - nobody spoke English, we didn't speak Czech - a school employee who had already observed us taking the wrong entrance followed us and escorted us to the school entrance. Andrea, Janča and their intern from the youth centre Lavina were already waiting for us. Andrea was already known to us from the Czech delegation's visit to Berlin in September. Together we then met with Vaclav, the school's social worker. In his office, Vaclav told us about his work over coffee and biscuits:

The school is a kind of primary school, covering grades one to eight. A total of about 400 pupils are educated there. The average class size is about 15 pupils. Vaclav offers his office hours almost every day. There are problems especially in the areas of school absenteeism, gang formation, theft and increased propensity to violence. Although they attend secondary school, only a few of the students are likely to go on to graduate. This is partly because many girls get pregnant early and as a result drop out of school.

Afterwards, Vaclav took us on a tour of the school and we were allowed to have a brief look at the lessons in progress.

As street workers from a diverse city like Berlin, it was important for us to ask many questions about the diversity of the students. According to Vaclav, about 95% of the students are from so-called "socially excluded areas" and are predominantly Roma and Sinti. One percent of the student body comes from Ukraine.



**After lunch with Lavina's colleagues, we went to her nearby youth club.**

### **Brno, Klub Lavina**

The Lavina Club is a low-threshold children's and youth centre in Brno whose services are aimed at children and young people between the ages of six and 16. The club is run by the Salvation Army, which began its work with homeless people and other marginalised groups in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1919. In September 2013, the Armáda spásy (Salvation Army) was registered as a church by the Ministry of Culture.

This connection to church history is directly visible in the Lavina Club, because the building not only houses offices for the social workers, a canteen kitchen, a music room and several common rooms with games, table football, table tennis and computers, but also a chapel.

Masses and church events are held here several times a year, to which the children and young people of the club are cordially invited. Although such gatherings are integrated into the concept of the club, they are not an everyday part of the social work with the children and young people, who can visit the club free of charge.

During their visits they have the opportunity to relax on the sofas available, play table tennis or table football, or play various instruments (including drums and guitar) in the music room. In addition, support is offered for homework to be done and the use of three computers for school or play purposes. There are always two social workers on duty, so that the children and young people have the opportunity to address issues that concern them emotionally. To maintain privacy, more intensive conversations often take place in a room furnished with comfortable cushions and many plants.



**Employees of Gangway e.V. Berlin and Klub Lavina in the premises of the children's and youth club.**

A special feature of the concept of Klub Lavina is the combination of location-based social work in the club and street social work.

In addition to the fixed opening hours of the club, regular rounds are made in certain neighbourhoods to invite children and young people to the club and to draw their attention to the existing services.

There is also cooperation with one of the local schools, Základní škola a mateřská škola.

Within the framework of this cooperation, teachers and social workers exchange information about the children and young people for whom the club offers appropriate services, and about the needs of the pupils.

The time we were able to spend at Klub Lavina during our visit was stimulating and pleasant.

By staying in the club during opening hours, we came into contact with a primary school pupil who invited us to play table football and listened to the music created by three young people in the music room.

**Brno, Centrum prevence a resocializace**

At another meeting at the Ratolest headquarters we got to know the "Centrum prevence a resocializace", the centre for prevention and resocialisation. The focus of this project is on "conspicuous" young people or those who have already committed a crime.

We were welcomed by the social worker Anna Krchňavá, who gave us a deeper insight into her work.

The programme presented to us consists of two parts. One is aimed at young people under the age of 15 who have not yet committed a crime but have already become conspicuous. It is a prevention programme for this target group. The other part is a probation programme for 15 to 18-year-olds who have already committed a crime.

If young people have already committed offences, the programme can be mandated by the courts. In cases where it is to be applied preventively, youth welfare offices, for example, can arrange for admission. However, the programme is not aimed at juveniles who have already committed serious offences.

A special feature of both programmes is the voluntary nature of participation. Although a court or the youth welfare office can suggest participation, the participants are free to drop out of the programme. And if the young people decide to start again at a later date, they are usually given a second chance.

The programme includes two appointments a week. This includes therapeutically oriented group and individual discussions, excursions, sports, art and educational work. Parents are also involved whenever possible.

In groups or individually, the young people are to learn how to react better in conflict situations and which resources they can use to avoid becoming delinquents. Individual goals are formulated and evaluated at the end of the programme. For example, did the young people pursue their hobbies as they intended? And if not, what prevented them from doing so?

Highlights of the three- to four-month programme are the outdoor weekend and the training with a Czech Muay Thai world champion. Both push them to the limits of their physical endurance and are also a lot of fun.

However, it also happens that prosecutors take part in the sessions and visits to detention centres are organised in order to apparently scare the young people a bit.

We considered the latter to be very critical, because it gave us the impression of a raised index finger, showing the consequences for young people without looking at their causes.

In the end, however, we all left the meeting with the feeling that very meaningful work is being done here with young people.

### **Brno, Youth drop-in club Pavlač and tour of the surrounding district**

Where the three Brno districts of Sever, Střed and Židenice meet is one of the poorest and at the same time one of the most rapidly changing residential areas in the city centre.

In this area, described as a "socially excluded area", Roma families are sometimes already in their fifth generation.

Life there does not seem to be easy.

It was exciting for us to visit the Pavlač youth club there and then to explore the neighbourhood on a tour. Outreach work is also part of the repertoire of the Pavlač Club.

First, we met in the premises of Club Pavlač, where Martin introduced us to their work. The target group of the club are children and young people from this "socially excluded area", who are mostly children from Roma families. The age range is from six to 18, with different visiting times for six to ten year olds than for eleven to 18 year olds.

The aim of the work at Pavlač is to try to compensate for the poor social conditions of the children from this area. This includes developing social skills, a healthy self-confidence, activating their own resources, dealing with conflict situations and trying to systematically reduce social risks. Last but not least, this also means creating a safe space for children who are otherwise discriminated against in many places. Every day, about 25 children and young people are guests at the Pavlač.

During the subsequent tour with Martin, we were able to get a direct impression of the surrounding neighbourhood. Along our way, the progressive gentrification of these residential quarters was brought directly to our attention. Unrenovated house fronts seem to be gradually replaced by new and renovated buildings, leading to the displacement of the long-established Roma population. On this tour, we had the opportunity to get to know a local drug education project. In a car park, we met a minibus in which two social workers were collecting used syringes from addicts and handing out new ones. Coffee, tea and social counselling were available on site if needed.

A hostel for homeless people, opened during the Coronavirus period and now apparently to be permanently installed, was the last port of call on this extremely exciting tour of the heart of Brno.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, we were able to spend a week in Brno with a wide variety of impressions and many encounters. We recognised many parallels to our work, such as the relationship work with young people, the low-threshold approach, the work at eye level and the partiality for young people.

We also found similarities with regard to the current pandemic situation: both in terms of the distribution of young people in clubs and on the streets, as well as in terms of the psychological stress and economic consequences for young people.

It was very exciting for us to get to know the outreach approach, which does not exist in this form at Gangway. The project for crime prevention and resocialisation was also a new and interesting concept for us.

The obligation for detailed documentation in youth clubs stimulated a critical discussion about the measurability of the effect of social work and the accompanying pressure to justify it.

We noted with regret that social work in the Czech Republic is held in lower esteem both in politics and in society, which is reflected in both pay and social reputation. We hope that this will change in the future to make the field of work attractive for young people for a longer period of time.

This exchange has once again shown how important professional encounters are not only on a national but also on a European level. We were able to broaden our perspectives, gather new ideas and establish further networks.

We look forward to future cooperation.