



KAVOD

A holistic approach to helping victims of sexual exploitation

■ *Looking back*

What a month! So much has happened that has been little short of miraculous ***we can't stop being amazed!*** For example: it took us an hour to make the decision to move forward some of the plans for the Christmas outreach because we did not know how long the brothels would be closed in the coming lockdown. Within five hours of that decision, our co-workers had produced 30 kg of Christmas cookies packed in 280 little gift bags ! This particular little miracle was made possible by the help of the women of the Catholic sisterhood in Styria. That weekend before the lockdown we visited brothels in Graz and one or two other districts. Shortly before Christmas we were then able to get round the other districts in the province as well.



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A couple of days later Sabine's phone rang: *"Can you come over right now? Denisa has been having contractions for hours!"* Denisa is one of seven women we know who were all married off very young, at around 15. This is not so uncommon in the Roma culture of Romania as for the family it's one less mouth to feed. What often happens is that the girls get pregnant more or less immediately, have two or three children and by the time they are in their late teens are then divorced. At twenty-one, Denisa is a bit older and this was going to be her fifth child. She'd had counselling from AmberMed, an organisation which offers advice and treatment to people with no insurance, she had decided to give birth anonymously and then give the baby up for adoption. It took us a whole hour to get to the hospital. By that time her contractions were coming every two minutes. She gave birth to a boy. Back home afterwards, the hospital called to inform Sabine that Denisa had tested positive for Corona which meant she herself (triple-vaccinated) was a class 2 contact. So during the next a week she tested herself daily at home and miraculously they were negative each time, even though with the new variant the vaccinated can be infected so easily.

One Sunday shortly before Christmas, the 24/7 Help Line phone pinged with an incoming mail. *"Can you help me?"* it read. *"They're checking up on me in the nightclub, somebody even said something about killing me!"* Sabine wrote right back, but got no answer. She rang our colleagues down in Styria and they headed out right away, taking a man along with them (many thanks, Jason)! When they arrived at the club, the manageress opened the door and said, *"No, there's no Marie working here."* But the team didn't give in and after a minute or two another woman who had heard what was go-



ing on went down to the cellar and came back with Marie in tow. She thereupon just grabbed her ID and went off with the team, leaving all her other stuff behind in the brothel. Next day Sabine met up with her at a service station and the two of them went to the office of the provincial police where Marie spent upwards of the next six hours giving a full statement about the pimps involved. This included her won father. We haven't heard yet whether there will be arrests. In her home country Marie is under guardianship and this is the sort of fact which the pimps' lawyers are known to exploit. But we are hoping for the best!

The next day Sabine took Marie to one of Solwodi's safe houses where she is now staying there and doing well. A couple of days ago she wrote: ***"I was like a lamb. I read the story of the lost sheep and I realised straight away that was talking about me. He has answered all my questions. I knew I was the one that the shepherd risked everything for."*** If that isn't a real miracle, what is?

The next outreach sessions in Styria will be taking place at the end of March, shortly before Easter. We are producing a flyer with a strong message of hope. In Vienna we are still visiting the brothels every now and again. Our friends on the street we visit more regularly every week. They are having a tough time.

■ Report

Paula is our new co-worker in Vienna and Burgenland. She has been coming along on the street outreaches every two weeks.

She is a nurse and in the hospital where she works she often has to take care of women who work in prostitution. Recently we visited an apartment of several women who work on the street. There are quite a number of similar apartments around Vienna where the landlords don't demand a deposit, the tenants aren't given a contract but instead are charged horrendous rent for space in a tiny room shared by several people. In the same apartment each room is can be rented out in this way. The kitchen and the bathroom are communal and are often in an appalling state.

Here's what Paula has to say about our visit:

Up till now I'd only got to know the women there on the street, where they work at their profession. I mean 'profession' in the sense of them having the self-confidence people have at work, and them using that to stay "pumped". You see this in the way they keep smiling, acting as though everything's fine, even though now and again they'll also let on how fed up they are at the way Covid has messed up their whole situation. But even then they seem to be standing tough, despite the work they have to do and the way it wrecks havoc with their emotions.

*But seeing them at home, in their private lives, (although some of them do have to bring their work home too) – in kids' pajamas and pink dressing gowns, unmade up, listless, deep rings under their eyes, their gaze totally empty – that was totally different and nearly broke my heart. I simply couldn't believe it. The state of the apartment was truly appalling. **I couldn't get my head around how what's basically slavery can be allowed to exist in Austria.** It's the landlord mafia at its worst.*

Days later I noticed myself still getting upset at people around me when they started complaining about things that are trivial in comparison. The dreadful things going on just round the corner in those women's house are so much worse. That's what we should be complaining about.

■ TOPIC:

Loverboys and their tricks – the lowest form of manipulation

Young men often aim to make young women totally dependent on them and so that they can go on to exploit them through prostitution. Many women in prostitution are accompanied to their work by the man they live with. These men hang around where the girls work on the street, checking up on them by driving by frequently. These men are referred to as "Loverboys". Recently in the media there has been some information on how these men work.

A longing for love is the deepest need we all have. It's this need loveboys latch onto and unscrupulously exploit. Often they are quite young men who **target mostly younger girls between 12 and 16**. These men have a sharp sense for the point at which a girl is most vulnerable, most hungry for love and attention. This can be due to parental neglect. Sometimes the girl is in the middle of a crisis, maybe because her parents are divorcing, or she has problems at school, or struggles with low self-esteem. She might get to know the loveboy through Facebook, or meeting out in front of school, or at a disco. He's a couple of years older, quite good-looking and most importantly seems interested in her. In Eastern Europe these young men often hang around orphanages to chat up the girls. One documentary even showed the female director of one of the orphanages was in league with them, encouraging the young girls in her home to meet them.

The lover boy takes his time gaining the girl's trust.

At the start he showers her with compliments and presents. Sometimes he turns up in a cool car. To the girl, everything seems so great. Often he is



the first man she has ever had sexual contact with. She yields more and more of herself to him. Step by step he slowly reduces her contact with her friends and family until she is quite isolated. He is her one true love. **No one understands her like he does.** She becomes more and more dependent on him, socially, emotionally and even physically. She becomes prepared to do anything for him. Sometimes drugs are involved. He manipulates her in the basest fashion.

One typical story a loveboy might use is that he owes someone money and is afraid of being beaten up, but if the girl would only sleep with the other man, just one time, then the debt would be settled. Then that 'one time' is recorded and he uses the video to **put pressure on her**. Or he simply begs her to keep on doing whatever he asks for just a while longer. After that he promises to marry her, once they have enough money. Or the whole thing can happen much more directly and brutally. He gets his friends together and they all rape her, humili-

ating her completely and stripping her of her last dignity. Or if she doesn't do what she is told, he threatens that to post nude photos of her on the internet. Or he makes threats against her family, saying things like, " *I know where your little sister lives.*" This is when he shows his true colours. He isn't her one true love after all, but he is simply turning her into **a product to sell**, into a means to the end of making all the money he wants.

■ "Perpetrator-victim bonding"

Once a young girl has fallen under the spell of a Loverboy it's very difficult for her to break the bond that has formed. For a while, some of the girls live a kind of double life. They go to school, behave more or less normally at home, but to the practised eye signs of prostitution begin to show. The challenge for those of us who want to help is that generally the victims are subject to the Stockholm Syndrome. ***She experiences an unbreakable dependency on the offender.*** The victim is no longer in touch with her own true emotions and accepts the violence as part of the relationship. People subject to Stockholm Syndrome develops an unhealthy, positive bond to the abusers. They accept the lies and justifications the offender offers for his behaviour. Considering the danger the victim is in, this is completely irrational. On occasion victims are even known to actively cooperate with the offender in hurting others. Being in this psychological condition makes it difficult or even impossible for a victim to make decisions that would help free her from the offender's influence, for example bringing the offence out into the open, getting him arrested, or simply leaving him. Each present, each empty promise, each kindness is a positive sign she overvalues.



And so the unbearable status quo in the relationship stays as it is, so that self-hurt is seen as the only way to survive.

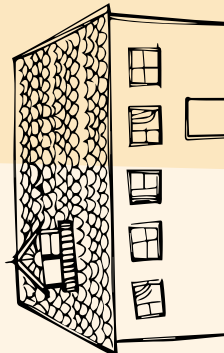
The victim also deceives herself into believing her partner wants to change. This is typical in cases of domestic violence. The woman wants to believe him, even if the pattern of abuse keeps repeating, even if she has already had to forgive him many times. She thinks that all she has to do is try harder and love unconditionally. She blames herself when he treats her badly. One of the things we know we must never say is anything negative about a woman's 'boyfriend'. That only makes her spring to his defence.

This is also a problem for the police (in Austria, too). Women who they have identified as victims refuse to testify against the offenders. It's as though they have the offender's voice in their head. They feel a shared guilt, a co-responsibility. After all, initially they were willing participants as their bodies reacted to the sexual stimuli

■ *Reminder*

„I have a dream”. Two newsletters ago we wrote about our dream of a house. It's a dream we still have.

Our own safe house where people could be taken in without any kind of delay, where they could live in a sheltered environment and come to know healing and restoration. We do not have the financial means to buy a house like that and we do not intend to take out a mortgage. But we believe that God can put a suitable house at our disposal. The house would ideally be somewhere near Graz or Vienna, because we would need to be close to a transport hub. It should have enough space for between 8 and 10 women, with accommodation for those working there too. We would also need at least one larger room where everyone could come together, and a large kitchen. The dream house should also have a large garden or courtyard. ***Thank you for praying and believing along with us!***



■ Annual report 2021

This year we are not producing an official annual report. A lot of activities took place via Zoom and were anyway interrupted by various lockdowns. When it was possible, we were on the streets every week. We also visited the brothels regularly. Outreach in Styria took place for the first time in June, and then again in September and December. In December we also began outreach in the province of Burgenland. From September we have been able to employ Emanuela for a limited number of weekly hours and back in the summer signed a cooperation agreement with the 'Kircheneck' (Church Corner) in Graz for the use of their premises. Sabine conducted several training sessions: with the team in Graz, the EFN (European Freedom Network), teachers of courses in Ethics, the bishops' conference, a safe house in Albania and an organisation in Finland. Sabine also concluded her continuing education course as a trauma counsellor/instructor, finishing it in December.

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