

# Trampoline House

## The antidote to asylum centres

No European country was prepared to receive as many applications for asylum as they did in 2015. Some of the asylum seekers were granted a residence permit, some were deported and some returned voluntarily. But many more are still waiting for the most important decision of their lives. While they wait, their autonomy is significantly restricted by authorities.

**Julia Jousilahti**

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**Waiting can be even more traumatizing than the experiences from the crisis one has escaped from**”, says Morten Goll, the founder of Trampoline House, a community center in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The story of Trampoline House began six years ago when its would-be founders felt the need to change the problematic situation of asylum seekers who were waiting for the results of their application. They wanted to offer something instead of asylum centres (or, as the asylum seekers call them, “camps”).

“People waiting in the camps feel powerless. We wanted to shift the power in such a way that they would feel like a part of the society”, Goll explains.

Trampoline House was founded by a group of artists, asylum seekers, students and other professionals six years ago. It is an independent community centre in Copenhagen intended as a space for refugees, asylum seekers, Danish citizens and other residents in Denmark.

Among the first things they did was a workshop. The residents of the asylum centre and the Danish participants created short movies in which they discussed their current situation and their past experiences. “Many of our asylum seekers come from dictatorships and are not used to telling their opinion. It is

quite a big task to make people understand that their opinions are wanted. We wanted to create a social platform where this is possible”, Morten Goll explains. They decided to start with a video workshop, because a tool like camera can help people interact with one another.

“The participants had to find a question they could ask everyone in the workshop, without anyone feeling framed by it, in order to find a middle ground. The movies were about answering those questions”.

The workshop revealed that the main problems of the people in the asylum centres were poverty, isolation and mental paralysis as they stayed in “limbo” for too long, waiting their residence decision, not able to start a normal life.

Trampoline House was established soon after to intervene in this situation and to continue the dialogue. In the beginning Morten Goll and his fellow co-founders thought that the main problem was, that the asylum seekers were stuck in the remote centres, so they decided to hand out free bus tickets to the residents so they could travel to Trampoline House. That proved to be the wrong thing to do.

“The problem was, that the tickets were were distributed like charity. The camp system is based on charity. All resident get their basic

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**”You need to demand something from people, nobody wants to be a client of charity”** →

needs covered, but they are not seen resourceful survivors with skills that could be put at use. Instead the system is content with covering their biological needs. They feel like they are slowly killed by charity, because the system on one side pays respect to their biological bodies, but on the other hand refuses to respect their experience, resources and social needs. It is a schizophrenic way to work. With our free tickets, we were becoming an extension of the camp. We saw them as victims and they were so fed up with victimization”, Goll reminisces.

Today, Trampoline House is a lively hub that offers different activities, such as Danish and English classes, legal counselling, a theatre group, a tailor, a bible school run by Farsi speaking Christians and much more. There is a cafe too, and on several days a week people in the house share a hot meal. Once a week everyone gathers together for the house meeting, which is the democratic foundation of the house with an open agenda. In the meetings people discuss asylum politics, the house rules and program, actions and activities. It is an experimental democracy in which participants exercise freedom of speech and unconditional respect, which are the core values of Trampoline House.

The initial mistake of handing our bus tickets eventually came to inform the foundational ideology of equality at Trampoline House. All activities are carried out together, equally from people to people. Those who have arrived earlier teach the newcomers. Everyone contributes and agrees to certain set responsibilities in the house, such as a couple of hours of kitchen duty. In return, they receive free bus tickets.

“If you want to develop a democracy based on solidarity, You need to demand something from people. Dignity is in the fact that you contribute as brothers and sisters: shoulder to shoulder”, Morten Goll says, “Charity is really a perversion of solidarity, and it destroys the foundation for democracy”

When a new person comes to the house, he or she is asked about his or her interests, resources and aspirations. Then, a suitable internship or task is found for the person. Many activities in the house depend on the resources the volunteers have. The key idea in Trampoline House is to mobilize the asylum seekers’ energy by letting them use and develop their own aspirations.

“Then people can walk on their own feet and don’t need to be herded like cattle”, Morten Goll says, “One may have a nearly finished university degree but then he or she has been captured by ISIS for five months. It is all about de-victimization. You can recover when you are allowed to rediscover your potential”.

One important part of Trampoline House’s activities is to educate newly arrived people in how the Danish society works, and what are people’s rights and responsibilities. But it is not just the immigrants who have things to learn.

“Danes also have to learn about democracy in a multicultural society”, Morten Goll claims and concludes: “When I started this house, I thought only Danes were racist. Today I know that fear of the other is a normal psychological condition. We are all racists! So it is not about whether you are a racist or not, it’s about how you deal with it.”

Read more about Trampoline House at <http://www.trampolinehouse.dk>