

## Project on developing self-help groups is over, what have we learned?

### Press release

During the past two years, clients of the Persefona organization have developed their personal competences through services based on self-help, therapy groups, and educational group activities. Thanks to the project called "Comprehensive aid to victims of domestic and sexual violence and their loved ones", which ended on 31 July, Persefona staffers were also able to gain new experiences. In addition to attending many courses, they also traveled to Norway for a one-week study visit.

The project was aimed at women who have been the victims of violence and their loved ones. It ensured the organization had the capacity to provide professional legal, psychological and social counseling, as well as therapy for clients' children with a child psychologist.

In the autumn of 2014, a self-help group for victims of sexual violence also began. Following the principle of self-help makes it possible for women to share their experiences and feelings, to support each other, to give and receive feedback, to find mutual comprehension and new inspirations. A total of 42 meetings took place. The group will continue even after the close of the project to serve the interests of those clients who feel it is aiding them.

In June 2015, a therapy group was opened for victims of domestic violence led by a psychologist with years of experience. She met with the group for 23 sessions. Members learned to find themselves again, to understand their own needs, and how to take a positive approach to the world. The topics of forgiveness, self-confidence and self-esteem were raised. On the basis of various exercises, techniques, and the sharing of their stories, the women gradually grew closer to the personal goals they set themselves at the beginning of the group.

During the duration of the project, 15 group activities were held of an educational nature. These were courses in arts, communications, IT and self-defense. The clients perfected their skills and were able to forget about their usual worries. Their artistic creations remain with them as a souvenir of the pleasant moments in the class.

Thanks to this project, Persefona succeeded in establishing collaboration with the Norwegian organization *Felleskap mot seksuelle overgrep*, which is an

### **Komplexní pomoc obětem domácího a sexuálního násilí a jejich blízkým**

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umbrella organization of centers for victims of sexual abuse, rape and violence throughout the territory of the Norwegian Kingdom. The main motivation for establishing international cooperation was to share the ideology of self-help as it has been developed by these centers. In May 2015, Persefona staffers spent one week in the Norwegian cities of Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim, sharing their own approaches, experiences and practices with experts there. They met with representatives from a hospital center for victims of sexual assault, with police, with a support group for victims of domestic and sexual violence, with coordinators of a center against domestic violence, with representatives of a special police facility for work with children, and with perpetrators and victims of violence. They also visited a center for victims of incest and a center for victims of sexual violence and rape. The opportunity to take a look at this broader system of centers in Norway and how they cooperate and function was a valuable inspiration.

Persefona also focused on informational and outreach activities as part of the project. In the spring of this year, Persefona launched a leaflet campaign on the public transportation system in Brno. In June, on the occasion of the International Day of Equality of Women and Men, Persefona held a press conference on the topic "Male victims of domestic violence", which resulted in press coverage. On the International Day for Combating Violence against Women, a benefit concert was held that drew the attention of both those who attended and the media. The evening included the opportunity to paint a bag to take as a souvenir or to participate in a quiz competition. These important days and other project activities were reported about through Persefona's newsletters, social networking, and website.

By performing all of the above-mentioned activities, Persefona fulfilled all of the aims of the project on "Comprehensive aid to victims of domestic and sexual violence and their loved ones". Supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants.

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