

THE CHALLENGES WE FACE WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF TRAFFICKING LIVING IN DENMARK

HopeNow is an NGO in Denmark with a mission to see, find, identify and work supportively and motivationally with men, women and children who are marginalized, stigmatized and often criminalized as a consequence of human trafficking.

Submitted by Michelle Mildwater

HopeNow was founded in 2007 and has provided multiple services for over 2000 trafficked men and women. One small section we also focus on are those whom we first identified as trafficked over 10 years ago and are living in Denmark. Some of this group have been reunited with their children, while others have had children while living here in Denmark.

We provide tailor made services for this small focus group, and we have contact with around 25 people. HopeNow provide counseling and legal advice for these individuals and couples with or without children.

Obtaining a work permit and in fact any form of permanent residence for non-EU citizens trafficked or not has become increasingly problematic, due to tighter and tighter immigration laws imposed and celebrated even with cake by Danish politicians. Children who reach the age of 18 years, risk being deported. In 2019 one of the girls we identified as trafficked aged 17 we found in Ellebaek prison. She was after we contacted journalists hurriedly transferred to a youth camp, but her plea for protection was rejected, when she was 19 years old. She now lives underground in Denmark.

DISREGARD FOR THE NON PUNISHMENT CLAUSE

In 2009 a young woman of 24 was arrested during a police raid, carrying a false passport, which she was forced to carry by her trafficker. HopeNow through outreach work found her in a prison, by which time she had already received a sentence in prison for fraud. We identified her as trafficked, found a lawyer, appealed the case and ensured that the penalty for fraud was lifted, because she was deemed to be trafficked. This was a precedent in law in Denmark, as the non-punishment clause had not been applied to any trafficking cases previously. This woman through marriage and the birth of a child, managed to obtain a semi-permanent residency in Denmark and trained as a nurse for old people.

In 2019 having paid her taxes and worked for years full time, she applied for citizenship. We helped her with this document, which required a long and exhaustive list of demands, all of which she had managed to achieve. However, the letter she received back was a negative. The immigration department managed to dig up the original court case in which she was accused and convicted for fraud and wrote that she would have to wait for them to consider her case again. The earliest date of obtaining citizenship would now be in 2020 as she had committed a serious crime and had received a sentence. The fact that she had been trafficked was apparently NOT relevant.

The woman was devastated and we had to provide multiple therapy sessions. These are her words which she expressed through floods of tears. "All these years working so hard to change my life, training passing exams, learning Danish, working for years with old people, even contracting COVID-

19 and returning to work afterwards. I now feel like a second-class person, I am not respected, they treat me like a criminal. The circumstances in my life which brought so much pain years ago, have been thrown back in my face. It is so humiliating.”