Recovering from domestic violence in Denmark

For women who have experienced an abusive relationship, recovery can be a struggle. Danish Red Cross volunteers provide a social network which helps women overcome loneliness and bridge the difficult transition from living in a women’s shelter to everyday life.

Barriers to recovery from domestic violence
From the age of 15 every third woman in the EU has experienced physical or sexual violence. In Denmark 21% of all women have experienced violence committed by a current or previous partner.

For women who have escaped an abusive relationship, recovery can be a struggle. In addition to traumas and financial worries, one of the major challenges is loneliness, as the women often have a limited social network.

A significant number of women continue to be vulnerable after ending a violent relationship. Building resilience and positive social relationships are therefore crucial. Despite this, the possibilities for assistance to establish social networks are limited. In Denmark, one third of women’s shelters cannot
offer this essential aftercare. As a 32 year old woman with two children explains: “It’s a process you have to go through. I have taken the first step ever to save my own life. The first step is to get out of a violent relationship both physically and mentally – that is one thing. But what comes after that is an enormous struggle. “

Red Cross action
With the project Qnet, Danish Red Cross supports mentor activities for female victims of domestic violence. The women are matched with female Red Cross volunteers who provide social, interpersonal and practical support.

The volunteers are trained in psychosocial support which enables them to provide lay counselling and support to the women and children living in the shelters. As the women and volunteers meet regularly over informal activities, such as cooking together or just talking, an important support network is formed.

Based on this experience, Danish Red Cross has entered into partnership with Red Cross Societies in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, countries with similar challenges as those experienced in Denmark. The objective is to gather the best experiences on providing volunteer based psychosocial support and building social networks for victims of domestic violence. The outcome of this partnership will be a toolkit, which can be used by volunteers in all European countries.

Achievements
The Danish support networks (Qnet) have shown promising results, which will now be shared with other European countries.

In 2012, the Danish Red Cross was able to support 20% of all women who stayed in a women’s shelter. The women who received support particularly valued knowing that they had someone to talk to, who was ready to listen, as well as the practical assistance when moving from a women’s shelter to their own apartment.

Meeting other women in a similar situation provides a safe space for discussing sensitive and difficult topics. More than half of the women have made new friends, and several of them explain that they have gained more self-confidence and trust in their own competencies.

“I like being here. I feel calm, when I am here. I can be myself and I trust them [the volunteers]. They listen to and support me, and they ask me how I am”, tells a 32 year old mother of two.

For further information please contact: Qnet in Denmark: Mia Falconer, mifal@rodekors.dk or Laura Hjarvard Raaschou, lahra@rodekors.dk