

The Kolping House Redefines Family

By Adriel Vasquez

"Family" has different meanings in every society. Types and forms of families have also changed over time; however, one constant is that it is a place of nurture. A family should nurture both responsibility and self-sufficiency, and perhaps the beauty of this support is that it does not expire - making family also the place for a second chance.

The Kolping Family is no exception, and by initiating their Training Apartment Project, the Kolping Family in Prague has devoted its non-profit community service to building positive futures for disadvantaged young mothers. The goal of the project is to nurture motivated and relatively independent women, who are living in shelters, to have socially competent, fully independent and successful lives. It offers women and their children an opportunity to gradually and systematically develop skills and habits for a healthy life outside the shelter.

With the Training Apartment Project, Kolping House provides one-bedroom, low-rent apartments to qualifying families for a maximum 18-month lease. There are currently two apartments, with two to four more planned acquisitions this year. The staff of social workers aim to integrate their families to independent and competent social lives as productive citizens. Mothers, usually single and between the ages 17-24, undergo intensive in-house training in parenting, managing money and general care of an apartment. According to Ludmila Boková, Fundraiser and Internships organizer, very definite goals and measures of progress are made clear to the mothers and they receive consistent coaching.

The Training Apartment Project is a response to the tendency for mothers to move from shelter to shelter without any follow-up assistance. They are not usually offered practical, long-term incentives to participate in, or complete, any kind of social rehabilitation, nor make a realistic effort for independence. Additionally, before the Training Apartment Project, there was not a long-term assistance program that presented a realistic and stabilizing future outside of shelters.

The Kolping Family in Prague also aims to strengthen and sustain its families' resolve for independence with compulsory consultations with social workers. The families develop strong relationships with the House's trained and competent staff. Over the course of their one-year training at Kolping House, families interact with and come to know their trainers personally in the shelter and out once they qualify for the Apartment Training Project. Thus, the transfer from in-house care to independent apartment living is done smoothly, and familiar, reliable assistance is provided throughout.

The children living at Kolping House are typically under three years of age and under the full-time care of their mothers. It is a priority for the Kolping Family that mothers receive a thorough parenting education and are taught how to provide a safe and stable family environment.

Kolping House embraces the community as its family. And like any family, it offers shelter and offers its members unmatched guidance and encouragement. The Training Apartment Project's aim to integrate socially disadvantaged families to the greater social framework is practical, realistic and carefully executed.

Kolping House operates as an organ for the International Kolping Society founded by Adolph Kolping, a German-Catholic priest long venerated for his commitment to providing underprivileged youth with spiritual and social support. After witnessing and being moved by the poor living conditions in the early 1800s , in Germany, Kolping devoted his life to promoting the establishment of associations in Europe which would assist youths unable to find work. Today, there are Kolping Families in 59 countries and 470,000 members all engaged in social rehabilitation and education.

Kolping House Prague is funded primarily by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and by Prague City Hall. Additional support is provided by international foundations, including the Our Child Foundation. Personal donations are also graciously accepted. Anyone with a mobile phone can make a donation via sms to 87777. The sms costs 30 kc, from which 27 kc goes directly to Kolping House Prague.

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