

## **Return from the street to homeland**

Six homeless people returned to Poland. It was one of transports of Barka Foundation from Hammersmith and Fulham borough. The following departs will take place on regular basis every two weeks.

In Broadway Centre in Goldhawk Road on Friday we could hear mainly Polish conversations. In the building and in the garden there were gathered homeless people that were going home, their friends and people linked with BARKA foundation. A few dozen of Poles in all.

### **THEY WON'T BE MISSING LONDON**

'Last Wednesday I was still drinking alcohol with friends. But I was scared that I would miss the transport and for two days I've been avoiding alcohol.' says Janusz. It shows he is not lying. He is sweating a lot and he has shivers. His hands are shaking because he is addicted to alcohol and his body is demanding daily dose of alcohol. Janusz is promising that in Poland straight away he will start his battle with alcohol. 'Barka will help me. I was promised that I will go on detox and therapy. Maybe I will get through addiction. I would like to start a new life and I have heard that Barka had helped many people in similar situation like mine' He says with hope.

Bogdan and his son Pawel are going to Poland as well.' We would like to come back to normal life. Here we found ourselves on the bottom. We cannot see any chances for ourselves here. Maybe we will have more luck in Poland. Everything we faced in London was a horrible experience.' Says father.

There is one more father in the group that is waiting for transport. 'I didn't want to come back because I was ashamed that I hadn't achieved anything here. He says. He's nervous that transport is being delayed. He would like to be already inside the car. If I hadn't missed my children I wouldn't have decided to come back. I have lost contact with my family. I want to come back to my relatives.'

Men that are going to Poland are clean and shaved. They wear clean clothes they got from social services. Because of this they do not remind the homeless they used to be several days before.

### **BARKA IS GOING OUT ON THE STREETS**

For two months representatives of Polish foundation have been visiting places in Hammersmith and Fulham where Polish homeless people are living. 'During this month I have found several places where they sleep. They were sleeping in the cardboards behind the shops, in the parks, in the parking places and near the river Thames. Those places are well hidden and as a result it's hard to see all that unhappiness. My colleague showed me all those places. He was here for one month and he shared all his knowledge with me. During this month I have recognized new places and I have been trying to persuade them to return to Poland. Now I am leaving with my group and I have passed all my knowledge to my follower who will continue my work here.' Grzegorz Niewolny explains.

The presence of the Barka foundation in London is possible due to contract that council of this borough had signed with Polish organization. Foundation is obligated to help three people

each month to return to their country. During two last months Barka sent twelve people to Poland. 'There would be much more of them but our minibus can take only few people.'

'In the beginning of the project it wasn't so clear that it would be so many volunteers to return to home country. First time the car returned only with the one passenger. There were more people who were supposed to go to Poland but they did not believe us completely. We were lucky that we had at least one person who wanted to come back'. Says Tomasz Sadowski. 'It helped us a lot. Later that person came to London again and he explained to other homeless that we are not cheating, that we are really going to Poland and we are not throwing out anybody just after crossing the border. He explained that in Poland they can rely on us. Since then the homeless talk with us openly. All of them need our support with their battle with alcohol, drugs and rebuilding their self-respect.'

#### NEW LIFE IS POSSIBLE

Barka does not only take the homeless home but also provide them housing in their own canters, therapy and work. 'We are here to help those people to return to normal life in society, to help them to begin to believe in themselves and help them to give themselves a chance for normal life. We have great experience that we gained during twenty years of our activities in Poland.' Now it is giving the results'.

'Foundation provides help not only for those who want to go back to Poland. Many of the homeless people prefer staying in London to returning home' explains Grzegorz Niewolny. 'On the basic level, English social services are very effective. In London it is easy to get free food and clothing. Medical care is well organized and social workers are organizing cultural and sport activities for the homeless. However, providing therapy is a problem here. Poles as well as citizens from new EU countries do not have access to therapy. Consequently, winning the battle with addiction, rebuilding self-esteem, finding a new meaning of life is impossible here. It is due to the fact that a homeless person, who is addicted, has very small chances to help himself and change his own situation. In Poland we can help them through our centers. In this respect we are better than the English social care.'

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