



Emmaus Association's pool of workers

The Emmaus association acts as an intermediary between unemployed immigrants and local people with regard to small tasks. Most of the clients are elderly people in rural parts of Åland who need help with tasks that are often too small to be of interest for entrepreneurs. The association acts as the formal employer of the unemployed people involved and takes care of the administrative issues, but makes no profit.

Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

This social innovation addresses several challenges at once. In the beginning, it was a way to provide employment for a beggar. Despite wanting to work, this person was unable to obtain assistance from the local unemployment agency because most beggars who come from Eastern Europe are not registered in Åland. At present, the initiative also provides employment for other immigrants as well as for the unemployed born in Åland. In doing so, it indirectly addresses the challenges of ageing because most of the clients are elderly people in rural areas.

The idea was born when a local inhabitant decided to invite a beggar to his home to carry out small tasks, and also advertised this person's services on the social media. He discovered that many people were interested in such a service. The administrative burden of functioning as an employer was however heavy for private people, and the initiator, who is a member of the Emmaus association, contacted Emmaus to find out if Emmaus could function as the intermediary and the official employer of the workers.

During the fall of 2015, the system of Emmaus functioning as the employer was tested with two Romanian brothers who used to be beggars in Åland. As Emmaus found out that there were no juridical or other administrative barriers, they started to work with this 'pool of workers' on a larger scale in January 2016.

In practice, people in need of small repairs or small gardening tasks can get help from the workers for 20€ per hour, of which half goes to the workers and half takes the form of different kinds of taxes, pension schemes and other related employer costs. Emmaus does not charge anything for the service. At the moment, the activity is coordinated by a person employed to work at Emmaus as part of his civilian service/non-military service, so Emmaus does not need to cover his salary costs.

Although the initiative started by employing beggars, it has later also provided jobs for immigrants from countries such as Jordan and Iraq as well people born in Åland. In addition to providing employment, the initiative is also of particular assistance to elderly people who need help with different kinds of tasks that are too small to be of interest for regular entrepreneurs. Most of the work is carried out for elderly people living in the rural parts of Åland who are no longer able to take care of all tasks themselves.

Implementation

Resources

The existence of the Emmaus association was crucial for the possibility of scaling up the approach from being an initiative by one individual to a larger project. The association has the skills and capacity to function as a formal employer, which is a prerequisite for the project in order to make it easy for the clients to use the services. It was also essential to have an organization with the right skills to investigate any juridical or other regulative challenges at the beginning of the project.

The initiative has not received any external funding. The employment costs for the employee responsible for the initiative is, however, covered by the state in the form of his civilian service / non-military service payments. There has been a discussion on applying for project funding or seeking out sponsoring from companies after his civilian service period has ended. The possibility to slightly increase the hourly rate for the services of the workers is also being discussed as a way to cover the salary of the initiative's coordinator in future.

The Network / Cooperation

The initiative does not rely on large networks or cooperation structures. In connection with the initiative, Emmaus has had some contact with the public employment agency, which has provided a few tasks, but the extent of the cooperation has been limited.

The initiative is partly a response to the absence of public initiatives targeting immigrants from other EU countries who are not registered in Finland or Åland. The initiative gives them an opportunity to become employed although they are not covered by the services of the public employment agency.

The employee who coordinated the initiative states that there is a need to build stronger networks with larger private companies that have a continuous need for a work force. This is because of the current challenge of finding a sufficient number of tasks for all the interested workers, because the lack of such work means that some people need to return to begging.

Enablers and Barriers

In addition to the difficulty of finding tasks for all potential workers, another challenge has been the negative attitude of some citizens. There is a need to market the initiative and increase the citizens' understanding of the potential of beggars and immigrants. However, it is also noted that those who have used the services have been content with them. As the approach is still very new, it is possible that the attitudes will change with time when more people have positive experiences.

Important enablers for the possibility of establishing the initiative were the resources and skills available at the Emmaus association.

Interaction with Municipalities and Other Levels of Governance

Interaction with any authorities has been limited to some contact with the public employment agency. No need for increased cooperation has been experienced.

Social Innovation Effects

Outcomes, Impact and 'Scaling'

The first half-year of the initiative has had positive results. The clients of the services have been happy with them, and Emmaus has to date employed a total of 30 people to carry out approximately 120 tasks. As a result of tasks coordinated by Emmaus, some of the workers have also become employed directly by individuals or companies on the longer term.

The future plans include better contact with larger companies in order to be able to provide jobs continuously. Emmaus also plans an integration project where the focus is on helping the workers to enter the labour market more permanently.

The approach has received media attention in Åland and mainland Finland, but Emmaus is not aware of the approach being tested in other places yet.

Lessons Learned

The approach is still new, but some lessons learned so far are as follows.

- There could be a potential for providing people who are far away from the traditional labour market with the possibility of making additional income in the form of small tasks.
- Associations could be good coordinators for these types of tasks since they are not profit-driven or dependent on public funding and thereby dependent on changing policy targets.
- The approach is an example of utilizing all resources and bringing together two vulnerable groups on their own terms in a mutually beneficial way (immigrants and the elderly).
- Marketing and awareness-building around this kind of initiative is central to decrease prejudices and negative attitudes towards immigrants.