

NAATSAKU NOORTETALU (JUGENDHOF NAATSAKU)

AS AN EXAMPLE FOR SOCIAL FARMING

Summary

by Kersti von Schwanenflügel

European social sector is moving towards new solutions for healthcare. It is more important to consider social aspect and economical sustainability. In many European countries “Social farming” is recognized as a part of governmentally provided healthcare. In Estonia it is not yet well known or used method. The service/method can be therapeutic and related to a caregiving or medical establishment, but the main starting point is its connection to nature and agriculture. Patients/clients/wards are involved in agricultural or horticultural activities and participate in them based on their abilities.

Social farming covers different terms that refer to the components of the service and their relative importance. The service can be therapeutic and related to a caregiving or medical establishment, but the main starting point is its connection to nature and agriculture. Patients/clients/wards are involved in agricultural or horticultural activities and participate in them based on their abilities. Social farming is suitable for a wide range of target groups in various ages. In addition to that, the main advantages of the service include the improvement of physical and mental health and natural environment where there is no need for artificially created activities.

In Europe, social farming can be observed in different stages of development. In Estonia, social farming is not yet widespread and consequently there is no legislation or quality requirements for the farms. However, there is an increase in interest and the state is taking steps in searching for sustainable solutions in regional and social politics. Although there are few enterprises in Estonia that define themselves as “social farms”, the ones that do, include establishments that concentrate on therapy and/or the anthroposophical approach.

Anthroposophy is a little known and unconventional approach to therapy, agriculture and education in Estonia. It includes a holistic approach to a person, including also the spiritual aspect. For the life on Naatsaku Talu an important part is harmony between the nature and the

man, concentrating on the person, not on the problem and is a partner-partner relationship between the user of the service and the mentor.

The empirical part of this thesis studied the effect of social farming in a social farm that follows the anthroposophical approach. The farm Naatsaku Talu has been operating for 15 years and includes the principles of both green production and biodynamics in its activities. The managers of the enterprise have higher education in Steiner pedagogy and have German roots. Having a long-standing teaching experience in Steiner pedagogy schools, the farm offers various opportunities to young people with behavioral problems.

The participants of the effect-study included both the young people who had used the service, and their parents, in order to obtain the evaluation on the extent of the effect from both sides. Also, bringing out and comparing the answers of the two response groups served to increase the credibility of the study. The young people and their parents participating in the study had used the service 1-12 years ago. This allowed for the person-centered overview of the impact of social farming in the long-term perspective.

The young people who participated in the programme, considered it to be a useful and developmental experience and brought out various influencing factors that they considered important. Most often the structured daily rhythm and relationships with the residents of the farm were mentioned. Also, the activities involving animals were considered important. From the parents' viewpoint, the environment of the programme was very important, as well as the concept of the social farming. In addition to that, they considered relevant the opportunity of the young people to continue fulfilling their educational curriculum.

When comparing the opinions of the two respondents' groups with each other, there are similar evaluations on the social coping before and after the programme and independent economic coping after the programme. Likewise, the evaluations on family relationships are similar – both respondent groups admitted that these improved thanks to the programme.

In comparison to the studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the results of this study are similar, both in regarding the effect factors and the results. The young people give importance to similar factors and see their mental health and independence after leaving the programme in a positive way.

The author believes, based on the conducted study, that social farming is a suitable alternative method in helping young people who have behavioral problems. To study the evidence base it is necessary to conduct further studies that would map the situation of the service user before the programme and during a longer time after the programme.