

## Freedom First for the First Time in the Czech Republic – Fokus Praha Publishes a Czech Translation of a Major Foreign Publication on Mental Health Care Reform

Prague, 10 December, 2019



Fokus Praha, the biggest NGO supporting people with the experience of mental illness, publishes the book *Svoboda Především*, a Czech translation of an outstanding Dutch publication *Freedom First*, in their private edition named *Marco Cavallo*. The authors of the book analyse the revolutionary approach to mental health care in the Italian Trieste, and compare it to the practices in the Netherlands. The Czech

edition complements the foreign inspiration with the context of community services in the Czech Republic. The launch of the book *Svoboda Především* was held symbolically on the Human Rights Day, the 10 of December 2019 in *Dům světla* in Karlín, Prague. Jan Berndsen, president of the European non-governmental organization *Mental Health Europe*, also came to support the publication of the book, which is available free of charge electronically on the website of Fokus Praha.

*“Fokus Praha will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year. In the past three decades we have developed a complex network of community support for the people with the experience of mental illness, which had been completely missing here after the fall of the totalitarian regime. At the same time, however, we sought to transform the entire system and significantly deinstitutionalize it during this time. Trieste, where the local psychiatric hospital was closed in 1977 and the care was transferred to the network of decentralized services to make sure the people can get a respectable housing, jobs and be part of a community, is still a great inspiration for us. The book *Freedom First* describes very well why it is so important to give freedom to people with mental health issues and not hide them behind the walls of mental health institutions. It is a moral imperative which must be incorporated also into the Czech mental health reform, which is currently in progress, and on which we actively participate,”* says Petr Hudlička, director of Fokus Praha.

*“The emphasis on the individual’s freedom and autonomy, which had been put into practice in Trieste, represents a new paradigm in the field of mental health care. Unfortunately, we still think differently in our system. People with mental illness are treated, cared for,*

*educated to get cured, respectively to get normal according to our model. If this is not the case, we go on hospitalizing them, sending them to social institutions and making their isolation and social exclusion even deeper. Isolation that prevents their recovery and increases their stigmatization. This is why our reform needs to be based on such an approach to treatment that works very individually with people with mental health issues and in close contact with their families and immediate surroundings. Only an intense community and field support can help them live meaningful lives and fulfil their social roles,”* says the co-founder and former long-time director of Fokus Praha Pavel Novák, who is actively involved in the reform of mental health care in the Czech republic, and who is a co-author of the chapter that complements the book Freedom First with Czech context.



Similarly, according to the president of Mental Health Europe **Jan Berndsen**, who was an exclusive guest to the launch of the Czech edition of the book, it is essential that human rights be strictly respected when working with the mentally ill. *“It's not only about closing the hospital, it's even more about building up really good community mental health,”* says Jan Berndsen, and adds: *“There's no health without mental health!”*

The publication Freedom First by authors Christien Muusse and Sonja van Rooijen was published in 2015 by Trimbos Institute in Utrecht. The Czech extended edition was supported by the Prague City Hall. After the books Behind Walls and Paths to Recovery it is the third title published in the Marco Cavallo edition. This edition brings the book production, offering a new inspirational insight into mental health care and mental health, closer to the public. All published titles are available free of charge on the website of Fokus Praha.

