

**BASTA**  
**ARBETSKOOPERATIV**  
- A REPORT INTO THEORY AND  
PRACTICE



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# Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to Basta and aims of the report

Basta Arbetskooperativ (work co-operative) is situated some forty miles southwest of Stockholm in the municipality of Nykvarn. It resembles a small village with thirty or so houses and workplaces scattered over a beautiful landscape of forests and lakes. Through the *process* of work, Basta provides ex-drug users with a new identity and an increased sense of their own worth. The co-operative is home to around 70 people who, for the most part, live and work on site. This report will explain the ideological principles underlying Basta through a discussion with the founder and Chairman Alec Carlberg. Then the practical issues of living and working at Basta will be explored. Key business enterprises will be explained through conversations with the workers. A summary will assess the overall achievements of the co-operative to date and will look at plans for the future.

## 1.2 Historical Overview

The establishment of Basta was heavily influenced by the renowned San Patrignano, Italy. The Italian co-operative is presently home to 1600 former heroin addicts. Founded in 1978 by Vincenzo Muccioli, it is famous for the quality of its workmanship and its success in rehabilitation. Basta for the moment is more modest in size but not in ambition. In May 1989, Alec initiated a study tour to San Patrignano, inviting the 'Swedish Association for Help and Aid to Drug Abusers' (RFHL). Clearly impressed by the visit, San Patrignano inspired a new way of thinking about rehabilitation in Sweden. As in many countries the typical Swedish way of treating addicts is in small and secluded treatment centres. At San Patrignano hundreds of former addicts were learning to live without drugs through the process of cooperation and work. The visit led to five districts south of Stockholm providing support for the RFHL to plan for a Swedish workers co-operative based on the Italian model. In 1994 Basta Arbetskooperativ was able to welcome its first residents.

Basta fuses ideas from San Patrignano with the Swedish notion that people must bear their share of the common burdens of society. The establishment of Basta was achieved through financing from the Board of Labour Market and the municipalities from the Southern part of Greater Stockholm. Several small to medium sized companies operate at Basta, including; furniture making, construction, a graffiti removal service, breeding of Basjkir horses and dog kennels. Of those working in these enterprises and living at Basta 95% have a history of drug addiction and crime. The vision is to create a successful company and through this process to enable people to live and sustain a drug free life.

# The Philosophy

## 2.1 Ideological Principles of Basta

In order to comprehend the ethos of Basta and all that goes on there it is essential to understand the foundational principles upon which the co-operative is built. These principles are not written in stone nor are they issued to new 'Bastians' as commandments, rather they are *experienced* through living and working at the co-operative. 'Basta' is an Italian word, although also used in Swedish it translates as 'stop, quit or enough'. The six ideological principles of Basta were explored through discussions with the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Alec Carlberg. They are as follows:

### ● Communication as a tool for life

The first key principle is to help people redevelop vital communication skills and norms of human interaction. Many of those who have been involved in drug abuse for long periods of time will have experienced homelessness, crime and have been in and out of prison and rehab. This lifestyle will have undermined the fabric of their social interaction. Many ex-addicts will not have communicated in a normal manner with people for years. Emotions which many of us take for granted, such as empathy and trust are often hard for drug addicts to appreciate. Also difficult to overcome are the habits of cheating people and exploiting people for your own needs. At Basta through work, collaboration with others is not just desirable but essential.

Work is conducted at Basta not just as an end in itself rather as a means to promote communication and human interaction. It is the process of work which is central to rehabilitation. The market place is utilised as a beneficiary tool rather than being something to fight against. The pressures of the market place – time and quality – ensure that people have to communicate about practical and important matters. Bastians do not work for a boss or an anonymous shareholder they work for themselves. Their job, home and entire social network depends upon the success of Basta and the work they do. Although the market place is used to reinforce the rehabilitation process, Alec is clear about priorities: "If the market place compromises personal growth, personal growth must come first". So it is the process that is the key, "Someone may become a brilliant carpenter because of their time at Basta, which is great, but it is not the point". The point is that in becoming a brilliant carpenter that individual will have learnt to communicate on a normal level with people – which empowers the individual and leads to enhanced self - confidence.

### ● Solidarity:

A selfish attitude is usually an inevitable by-product of habitual drug use, where your own habit must be fed at the cost of all else. Drug addicts are used to looking after their own needs first – in terms of getting a fix. Basta helps drug users to overcome this attitude through the notion of solidarity. Through the way the organisation is structured, solidarity is seen as a practical measure, not some abstract un-achievable theory. Basta, uses a mentoring system, whereby all new comers are assigned a mentor who they can go to with any problems or if they just feel like a chat or some

company. As everybody has been through similar experiences regarding drug use they are able to understand and support each other. This solidarity is an on-going process as one individual becomes settled at Basta and feels confident, they are able to become a mentor to a newer person. At Basta they try to view solidarity in a broad sense, it's not a matter of just those at Basta feeling solidarity with each other, but solidarity with the wider community. On Christmas eve this year, half of those who live at Basta went out to help homeless people in Stockholm – its not that they are saints – just that they have many of them have internalised the principle of solidarity with others. They are now able to see that there are people in a worse situation than themselves.

### ● **Ecology:**

Drug users are not used to taking care of their bodies, not only do they inject harmful chemicals but they do not think about what they eat, or have no choice about what to eat due to poverty or homelessness. When people arrive at Basta it is obvious they are in a bad way both mentally and physically. At Basta they are encouraged to think about what they eat. Meals are served three times a day in the communal dining area, the emphasis is on simple, healthy food – salad is always an option. Furthermore the people of Basta are encouraged to take long walks in the extensive grounds. Through exercise and diet it is hoped people will begin to think about their bodies and minds from an ecological perspective.

Basta aspires to think about ecology in a much wider sense, in terms of caring for the environment. Alec, is honest about the achievements in this area to date. He believes Basta could do a great deal more for the environment in terms of recycling and energy efficiency. Time pressures so far have dictated that little has been done, it however will be a priority over time.

### ● **Quality:**

The life of a drug addict can be thought of as 'consumeristic' – in the sense of consuming increasing quantities of a drug. Basta tries to help people break out of this cycle to appreciate the quality not the quantity of things. Basta wants people to see that there should be quality in everything they do, in their work and in their relationships with others. This principle can be seen in action in many aspects of daily life. People take a great deal of care ensuring that quality is maintained at all levels. The horses are immaculately groomed, the furniture is finished to an exceptional level, the dogs are walked four times a day e.t.c. At Basta more time is available for quality craftsmanship. Produce is never sold at a low price to undercut other firms as Alec believes this would result in Basta being seen almost as a charity. Clients want to buy Bastian furniture because it is of exceptional quality not because it is cheap and made by a 'bunch of ex-drug addicts'. Furthermore quality is valued in terms of people's living and working space, all areas are kept clean and uncluttered.

### ● **The Pride of Independence**

The people of Basta are encouraged to take pride in independence on two levels; firstly, in an individual sense in terms of being in control of their own lives and secondly in terms of being part of Basta – an independent company. Basta is a co-

operative, the government does not own it nor do stock holders. As one Bastian put it “You work to keep Basta going not to the fill the pockets of your boss”. Drug abusers (like most of us) are used to attributing blame for things that have gone wrong in their lives. It’s easy to say it’s ‘Societies fault I ended up in prison’ or ‘It’s my parents fault I was a drug addict’. At Basta people are encouraged to accept what has happened in their lives and to take responsibility for it. The whole structure of Basta reinforces this attitude. Firstly, people who come to Basta must have made the decision for themselves, they must want to change their lives. People are not accepted through the referral of a social worker or a probation officer. Once you have been at Basta for over a year you can apply to become a partner in the organisation. It is run by ex-drug abusers for ex-drug abusers. If you don’t work (and it is your choice to) then things wont get done, Basta will loose profits and go bankrupt. If this happens people loose not just their jobs as would normally be the case but also their house, their social structure the whole fabric of their existence.

Therefore Basta is about the twin privileges of power and responsibility. Gaining power over yourself and accepting responsibility for yourself, having power within the organisation but accepting responsibility for the organisation. Which means sharing in the mistakes as well as the successes. This pride in independence also relates to the power relations within Basta. The administrative staff have for the most part been drug abusers, they are therefore not viewed as managers or personal.

● **The benefit of a good example:**

Sixty people work at Basta as an integral part of one of eleven semi-independent units. Ten of these departments are managed by people who are ex-drug users. This helps new Bastians to see that a drug free life is possible, that they can get through the rehabilitation process and lead meaningful lives. The aim is for people to see that there is a more interesting life available than drug addiction. This principle is reinforced through the mentoring system.

## **2.2 A Summary of the Ideological Principles of Basta**

Through living and working at Basta the ideology should unfold and become essential to the workers lives. When discussing this philosophical underpinning it is tempting to think that some sort of utopia has been created here in this small area of the Swedish countryside. This is not the case as Alec says “No miracles are performed here, people do relapse”. He does not claim to have developed a miracle cure for rehabilitation nor does he think other clinics are useless and Basta is the best. He acknowledges this is just one method that seems to work for some people. He is also clear that Basta cannot cater for all ex-drug users “we do not take in any people who have psychiatric problems as well as drug addiction, nobody here is medically or clinically trained we cannot help them and we are honest about that”

People work hard at Basta both in terms of physical labour and in terms of their personal development – overcoming many fears and challenges. Alec says that some people have come to Basta as an alternative to finishing their prison sentences and choose to go back to prison after just a few weeks. They would prefer to just sit out their time rather than work for eight hours a day. Life at Basta is not an easy way out.

It is of course an individual's free choice to leave if they do not feel the environment suits them, Basta is not a work camp.

Alec, says during the early years of the company he used to worry about its day to day running; "There were all these crises all the time... I kept thinking can't we just have one day without a crisis!" Then he realised that there *should* be crises all the time because if there were not it would mean people were already perfect when they got here - in which case there would be no point in the organisation. He says "Life got easier when I learnt to accept the crises!" There absence would mean the system was too authoritarian and people were not feeling able to complain about things.

## Business Initiatives

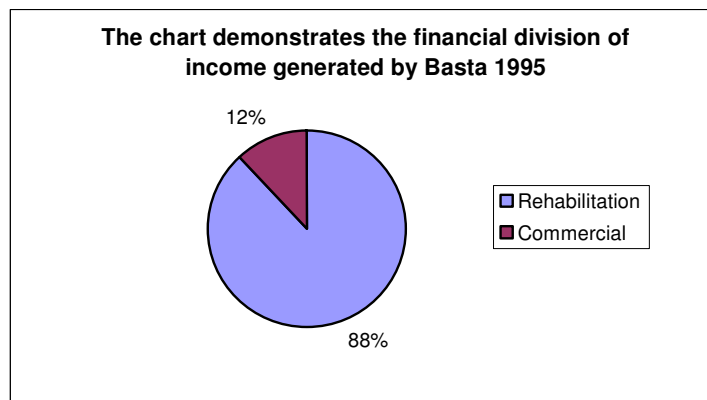
### 3.1 Introduction

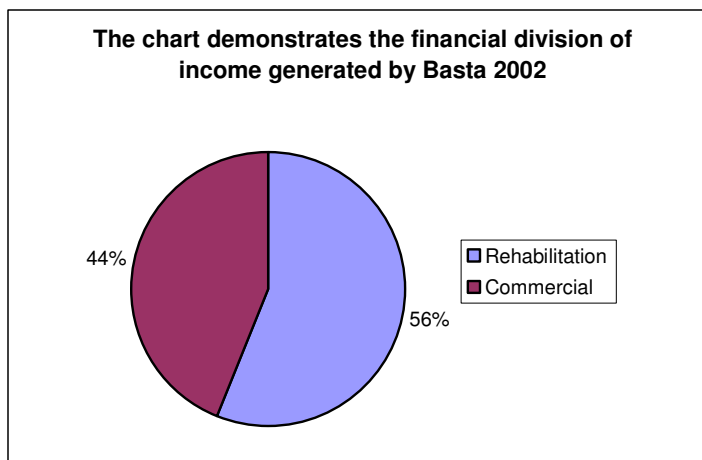
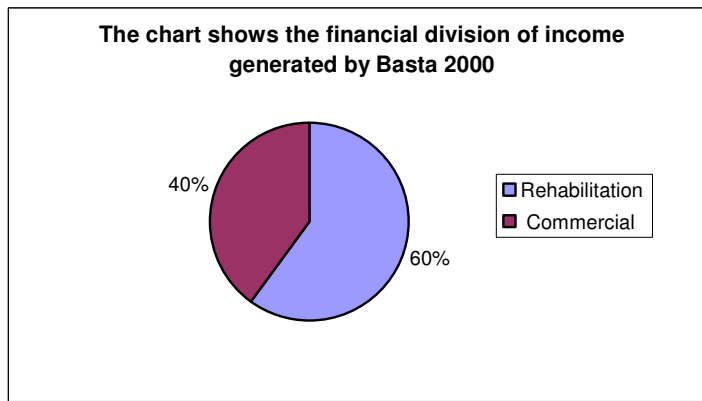
A total of eleven semi-independent units operate at Basta; finance and administration, the canteen, a computer school, construction, a graffiti removal service, agriculture, horse-breeding, dog kennels, carpentry, insulation of buildings and rehabilitation. A number of these are money-making enterprises others are departments that keep Basta running.

Basta has no anonymous shareholders, which allows a degree of freedom. However the very structure of Basta means that money must be made. All those who stay at Basta for over a year cease to be funded by municipality, they must then earn their place. Production and sales must generate enough income to cover the costs of wages, accommodation and food as well as investments to guarantee future development and survival.

The over-riding aim of Basta is the rehabilitation of drug addicts and to ensure this can continue there must be financial stability. A constant balance must be maintained between rehabilitation and personal development and the business side of things. Alec, explains "We are not a profit maximising company but we are a profit making company". Were profits to be the dominant factor Basta would loose sight of its *raison d'être*.

The following charts provide details of Basta's financial situation.





The pie charts show that in 1995 (a year after Basta's establishment) 88% of income came from selling rehabilitation places to the social services in what is a competitive field. Alec, never refers to this income as 'funding'. Which would imply a top-down relationship with the social services. In reality both parties benefit from the arrangement and hence the 'selling of rehabilitation places' is more accurate terminology. By 2000 the more straightforward commercial sector had grown considerably with 40% of Basta's income now coming from the sale of products and services excluding rehabilitation places. The third chart shows that by 2002 the commercial sector had grown further amounting to nearly half of Basta's total income. By 2000 Basta's annual turnover had reached 11 million (Approx £1 million). The money is poured back into the company through wages, equipment, modernisation and expansion.

I spent a day working with three different Basta business initiatives. The following accounts provide some practical information about the work conducted at Basta as well as giving insight into the way it has helped transform people's lives.

### **3.2 Basta Hundpensionat**

Basta Hundpensionat (Basta dog kennels) really are a source of pride for all involved. They are recognised as one of the best dog kennels in the country and have even had a visit from the Queen of Sweden!

There is room for up to fourteen dogs. Some are brought to the kennels each morning and collected in the evening by their owners. Others stay for longer, perhaps weeks at a time when the owners are on holiday. Five Basta staff work at the kennels ensuring that the dogs are well looked after and are walked four times a day. Each dog has a large area to itself with constant access to an outdoor enclosure. The manager of the kennels explains that dog owners know their pet will be well looked after. Basta can offer facilities that other kennels cannot, including extensive grounds for long walks.

Like all kennels in Sweden, 'Basta dog' is subject to regular and unscheduled visits from dog club officials. "One Sunday I was walking up to the kennels" says the manager "and I saw two official looking women standing outside, and I thought it was strange because we don't usually have customers on Sundays, but it was officials from the dog club coming for a random check up on our work". Despite the initial surprise there was no need for concern as the kennels were awarded 10/10. Ranking them as one of the best kennels in Sweden.

The manager of the kennels came to Basta a year and a half ago, following years of heroin addiction. He said he had reached a turning point in his life, either he could carry on with drugs knowing they would lead to his premature death or he could make the active decision to change his life. He believes that to succeed at Basta people must have reached a similar point in their lives, where they know they want to change and they mean it. Following his decision to go to Basta, his sister asked him why he hadn't decided to do it ten years ago. "But that's the point...ten years ago, I wasn't ready to change, I still thought life was a party, you can only begin to overcome addiction and the lifestyle it entails when you really want to".

Mostly when people come to Basta they have a choice of which profession to work in but the needs of different enterprises must be considered. When the dog kennel manager came there was a shortage of staff in this area and so he was asked to work there. He said he had no experience of working with dogs and was not particularly enthusiastic about it, but within a couple of hours he realised he would love it. Working with dogs has helped him in the rehabilitation process, the long walks give him time to reflect on things and to clear his mind. Also having something else to look after, caring for something else's needs helps him to overcome his own problems.

The dogs do take a lot of looking after, and it is a continuous job, he must work seven days a week every day of the year. Especially in holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year when other people are able to relax his work load doubles, because this is when people are going on holidays and need their dogs to be looked after.

Talking to the manager of the kennels and the four other members of staff, it is clear that many of the ideological principles that underpin Basta have been internalised by them and do help them to go through rehabilitation. One member of staff who has been at Basta for just four months says of the manager "He is the best boss in the world but also a great friend". The manger explains how they all work together and

try to help each other overcome their problems. The manager serves as an example to the others showing them that a drug free life is possible. The manager says if one day one of the newer Bastian's is feeling bad he will tell them to take it easy, and talks about their problems; "They know that I understand what there're going through, because I have been there myself".

One member of staff suffered from alcoholism for many years, her addiction eventually landed her in prison, where she heard of Basta's activity "I was lucky I was able to come here instead of prison, it is so much better for me". Many of the people who I spoke to agreed that when you first come to Basta the thought of spending a year here seems very daunting, but within weeks if it is right for you, you will know. The manger explains that you begin to internalise the routine and system, "time no longer seems daunting, you adjust to the way of life here".

The manager explains some aspects of the regulations at Basta: "In the first year if people want to leave for an evening or weekend, they have to talk to their mentor and say a week or so in advance where they want to go. And the mentor will usually say ok but you must go with someone who has been here for over six months". The process of mentoring is ongoing, just by being there and working the manager is an example to others that a drug free life is possible. He says he does not "lecture people or anything, they just see that I'm working and I'm doing ok and that gives them hope that they can do it, and then in turn they will be an example to others".

The manager believes the first year at Basta is not the hardest in terms of rehabilitation, it is often when people leave after a year and the structure is taken away from them that they can fall back into difficulty. Which seems to be a good reason for Basta establishing more formal after care. The manager explains that once he had decided to change he had to change every aspect of his life, "It was no good me being here and then leaving for the weekend to see old friends, because I don't have any friends who are not into heroin, I had to leave that behind and make new friends".

The manger expresses how he feels about living and working at Basta "Just like in any work place or residential setting you can't love everybody all of the time, you get to know in the first few weeks who will become close friends and who are the people you will just say 'Hi' to when you see them, everybody has to try and get along though, because its not like a normal work place where you can just go home at the end of the day and vent your frustration about work colleagues. Here you live with them as well, so you are forced to resolve any problems that have occurred during the day and that is not necessarily a bad thing". At Basta problems are brought out into the open very quickly meaning that they cannot escalate as they do in so many work places. The manger says "It is not easy being with the same people 24 hours a day, you must work at it and it helps knowing that everyone is in the same boat as you".

The manager says he enjoys seeing the dogs arrive here in the morning "they are so excited to see all the other dogs and its good for the owners to see that the dogs are happy here". He also believes that meeting the dog owners has helped with his rehabilitation process. "When I meet the owners and talk to them about their dog's welfare I know that I have to be professional and I am professional because I have

learnt a great deal about working with the dogs”. It seems that the notion of rehabilitation through normal communication can work in a practical setting.

### **3.3 Basta Basjkir**

Sixteen horses are kept at the stables in Basta, cared for by four members of staff. The majority of the horses are a special Russian breed – the Basjkir. These horses are only found in any quantity in Russia with a few also in Norway and just one in Denmark. When the Basta stables were started four of the horses were brought over from Russia. They differ from regular horses in both appearance and temperament. They have slightly bigger heads than regular horses and are more stocky – when chewing and yawning (which they do a lot) they almost resemble a camel. They are also more docile than normal horses, making them good for children and beginners to practice riding on. Also this particular breed of horse does not inflame allergies in people who usually get them around animals. The Basjkir is bred at basta; Borris the stallion is now in great demand throughout Sweden!

Basta runs classes for children wishing to learn to ride, usually during school holidays. Kids come and stay in guest huts and ride the horses during the days. “Its great fun” one of the stable staff says “but it does get tiring, going out riding everyday for seven weeks!”. The horse riding business is small and flexible, so they can meet personal demands in terms of when and where people want to go out riding. In the winter the snow covered forests of Basta provide the perfect setting for brisk horse rides. In the summer time visitors can enjoy longer outings exploring the fields and lakes. Basta Basjkir also generates income by renting out stable space to private horse owners who are also able ride throughout the grounds.

Again in the stables it is clear to see a commitment to quality. The horses are groomed immaculately and are in very good condition. The stables are also kept clean and after taking the horses out riding all the equipment must be properly put back in place. This is all a manifestation of Basta’s emphasis on being an efficient competitive company not just a good business for a bunch of ex-drug addicts – as they may be seen if standards were to drop.

### **3.4 Basta Klottersanering**

Basta Klottersanering, is a graffiti removal service operated by two work teams with a total of 8 employees. They are employed by the environmental office of the local Kommun (city council), who provide them with a list of sites where cleaning is needed. The majority of their work takes place in the less wealthy suburbs of Stockholm.

I joined the graffiti workers on a morning trip to the suburb of Alby. The day began with the customary trip to the environmental office to pick up the list of work spots. The manager laughs as we approach the office; “The boss of Alby Kommun was my worst enemy once, I used to commit crime all over this area, now he is a good friend, we are allies because of the work I do”.

The site for this morning is a primary school, which has been heavily graffitied during the night. All of the windows and doors have been sprayed. Basta Klottersanering

uses a non-toxic based cleaning fluid to wipe down the windows. They also use an anti-graffiti wax on the walls to try and prevent spraying in the future. On this particular morning, at -10 it was too cold to use the water jet spray and so all the work had to be done by hand. It can be hard work and they are meticulous in what they do. During the day I talked to the manager of the graffiti removal enterprise about his life and his feelings towards Basta. He couldn't be more positive in his own assessment of what it has meant to him; "I was addicted to amphetamines for 26 years and I was a heavy user, I came here three years ago and have not once felt the need for drugs. I made a decision to change my life and I have". I ask him how he thinks this transformation has been possible, after all it is no easy feat to come out of so many years of addiction. He explains "You get responsibility from day one at Basta and I think that's good, it helps". This is of course one of the mechanisms by which Basta seeks to aid rehabilitation – encouraging pride in independence. For the manager of Klottersanering it seems to have worked, for others it will not. Through responsibility and independence in a working environment ex-drug addicts are given something to focus on and a purpose in their life. Hence Basta's dual emphasis on business and rehabilitation. I ask him how he heard about Basta and how he came to be here; "I was watching TV about five years ago and I saw one of the staff here, in a documentary about Basta, she used to be a good friend of mine, even in the drug world it was possible to have good friends...I didn't think much of it then but over time I started to think more and more about giving up the drugs, I decided I wanted to come to Basta and I asked social services, they interviewed me and investigated me one month later I was here". He started out working in the stables for a year and half but says he decided to do the graffiti job because you get 50 kronor extra a day if you work off Basta's site. It is a competitive sector, there are plenty of other firms in the area offering similar services. "We charge the Kommun about 250 Kronor (approx £20) an hour we are cheaper than some of the others but also we make ourselves more available".

It is clear he takes pride in his work, he has a digital photo store of every piece of graffiti he has removed. The work is not easy and sometimes the hours can be long but this helps in the rehabilitation process according to Basta's philosophy. After all many people in society work long and hard hours and appreciating and experiencing this helps ex-drug users to adjust to the norms of society.

## **Social Welfare**

### **4.1 The practicalities and cost of rehabilitation**

Åsa Wihlborg is responsible for overseeing the budget for rehabilitation and for monitoring the social welfare of Basta's work force. She explains the procedures that must be followed if people want to come to Basta. Firstly, it must be a free choice, they have to want to get off drugs and to do so in a working environment. Often people hear about Basta through friends who have been here and have recommended it as a way to try and break the cycle of drug addiction.

Once an application has been made the individual must undergo a relatively formal interview conducted by two members of Basta's company. The interview is a two way process. Basta explains what they can offer and in return the person should say what

they can bring to the organisation. The minimum qualification is to be a drug addict in addition the individual must express genuine motivation to come off drugs and the ability to work.

Provided the conditions are met the person will be offered a place. Basta aims to accommodate all the people they can, in the past this has entailed renting mobile homes. On the day of arrival the new comers must take a drug test to check they are negative. They will then begin an eight-hour working shift, ensuring they are part of the company from day one.

The local municipality pays for a Bastian's accommodation and expenses during the first year of residence. Expenses include: food, drink, tobacco and toiletries. The local authority pays approximately £60 per person per day. After the first year funding stops and the individual must earn their income through employment in one of Basta's enterprises. The system works well for Basta and the municipality. If an individual succeeds and gives up a life of drugs and crime it saves the state money in the long run either through welfare benefits or the cost of crime.

Each person is taken on for a probationary period of three months to see if it works for both parties. It is Åsa's job to meet with each resident/worker after their first three months and to evaluate how the experience is going and whether they wish to stay. Then again she has a one-on-one meeting with them as they approach the end of their first year. Additionally anyone can come and talk to her at any time if they feel they have problems. If people stay past the first three months they tend to stay longer, they become involved in the system and find it works for them. Basta does not actively seek to maintain contacts with people who leave. They do not have procedures for follow up care. However individuals are always welcome to maintain links and to come back for visits should they want to. Whilst I was visiting Basta's offices they received a call from a former resident. He had left in the summer of 2002 and fallen back into heavy drug use, he was calling to let them know he had decided to go to a detox clinic, but that there wasn't a bed free for five days he was worried the wait would tip him over the edge. He just wanted to speak to someone to help and advise him. So although no formal after care is offered there are channels of communication and support should people want it?

Åsa, came to Basta five years ago and went through all the channels to become the rehabilitation budget co-ordinator. She worries that the current residents see her as personnel and not as 'one of them'. She does all she can to emphasis that she has been through similar problems to themselves and is aware of the difficulties and fear involved in starting at Basta. Her experience means she is able to understand what the residents are going through.

## **4.2 Social Relations and Basta Regulations**

There are few regulations at Basta but those few, are adhered to rigidly. Firstly, if people bring drugs into Basta they will be expelled, no questions will be asked. People have had to leave Basta for this reason in the past and it is almost certain that it will happen again in the future. It is harder to know how to treat those who have taken the drugs but didn't bring them onto the premises. Basta is supposed to provide a drug free environment and it is difficult to judge too harshly those who have given in to

temptation when offered drugs they are trying desperately hard to give up. There is no formal procedure to follow in such circumstances each case will be judged separately so long as consistency is ensured.

The other main rule at Basta is that relationships should not be formed between people in their first six months. Of course close friendships develop and are encouraged, but sexual relationships are not allowed. One long-term resident explained the reason for this; “people are vulnerable when they first get here, they may feel that falling in love would be a perfect way out of their problems but they need to address their own problems first”. Also an individual would decide to stay because of the relationship rather than it really being the best place for them. Or if the relationship were to break down one or both partners might decide to leave Basta for the wrong reasons. After the initial six months people are free to form relationships and many have. A number of couples live on site in homes apart from the dorm, a few live with their children. Although few children live on site on a day-to-day basis many more visit at the weekends and during school holidays. One resident believes the presence of children has changed the atmosphere; “people behave differently when children are around they are less likely to make crude jokes or complain too much, the children and a more family orientated atmosphere has had a positive effect on the overall environment at Basta”.

It is also not allowed for a person who has been at Basta for over a year to form a relationship within someone who is in their first six months. Because the relationship is seen to be on an unequal footing. Essentially the rules are in place to ensure everybody goes through the same rehabilitation process during their first months. The rules also exist to protect the vulnerable. Many women at Basta have been involved in prostitution or have been raped. The rules help to ensure a threatening environment is avoided at all costs.

Power relations in Basta are carefully structured. The office personnel are not seen as being in charge. Everyone is responsible for the way the company is run and all have input. Meetings are held every morning for people to raise any issues they have. Any decision relating to Basta, be it financial or governmental is recorded in a log book which everybody has easy access to. One Bastian believes the power relations help to ensure everybody takes responsibility for themselves; “The atmosphere in Basta is mature, people act appropriately”. She believes people internalise the atmosphere of Basta. They act responsibly because the environment encourages them to do so, “Sometimes guests from other organisations come here, maybe ex-criminals, they behave so differently from Basta residents they are not used to an environment like ours they don’t act with so much respect towards other people...once this guy came here and you could see he was used to being the big guy around prison, acting all tough, but here people just thought he was an idiot and he began to realise that and adjusted his behaviour”.

The same resident describes how she first realised the way Basta works; “I was new here and I was standing in the dorm and the light bulb was broken so I told this guy, hey the light bulb needs fixing and he said well fix it then”. The experience has stayed with her and characterises a great deal about the philosophy of Basta, you do not pass the buck, you do something practical to overcome the problem.

### **4.3 Women's Welfare Meeting**

Thirteen women now live and work at Basta, out of a total of 70 people. As one of them put it "we are a minority but a significant minority". There are in fact more women now at Basta than there has ever been. In February 2003 all the women met with chairman Alec Carlberg to discuss women's welfare. He called the meeting to assess whether the women had any needs which were not being met or had any issues they felt particularly needed to be discussed. Perhaps it is a testament to how well Basta runs that few women felt that they had any problems to report. With further discussion some ideas did come about. One individual mentioned that it is assumed women coming to Basta will work with the horses or the dogs rather than it being considered that they could work in carpentry or construction. Further discussion revealed that few women actually did want to work in these areas but they did feel that more 'women orientated' enterprises could be established, such as revitalising an organic green house that used to exist. Some women also felt uneasy going to the gym and sauna as there was only one set of showers, this made them feel uncomfortable and plans were discussed for constructing a separate shower unit. It was also decided that the women of Basta should meet more often on an informal/non-work basis. This needn't be a grand affair but just meeting to share a meal and chat every now and again. In this way any issues that occurred relating to women's issues could be discussed before they became problems. It would also be a chance for the women to catch up in an environment that is very male dominated.

## **Education and European Union Funding**

### **5.1 Education at Basta**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2003 a new education centre was opened at Basta. Its work is co-ordinated by teacher and educational theorist Lena Lago. The centre runs a one-year course in vocational and entrepreneurship training.

Originally it was planned that eight students would participate in the first year of the programme, with some of the students coming from outside of Basta. Due to timing constraints the course has had to commence with four students – all currently Basta residents.

The initiative is referred to as an education centre rather than a school. Firstly, because it was felt it would be patronising to suggest that adults were attending school and secondly because many of the residents of Basta had negative experiences of school earlier in life and the very word may discourage involvement and have all the wrong connotations.

The training involves both practical and theoretical education. It is the first educational institute for marginalized adults in Sweden. The pioneering work is leading to new 'Basta Pedagogy'. Participants choose to develop vocational skills in one area of the work conducted at Basta – be it carpentry, horse care, construction etc. A total of 40 weeks are spent in practical education in the chosen field. With

instructors brought in from outside or the participants leaving the site for instruction. The four current students have a diverse range of interests and are of different ages and gender. One is training to be a builder, one a carpenter, one an electrician and one to work with horses. Normally in the Swedish education system training for one of these occupations would involve three years of study, Basta aims to do it in one. The difference is that at Basta, the participants focus solely on the essentials of one vocation.

In addition to training for a practical vocation the participants take classes in seven other areas:

- IT skills: Four weeks are spent learning basic IT skills at the on-site computer centre.
- Power/leadership class: This class aims to foster a sense of self-control in former drug abusers who have all experienced to various degrees a sense of not being in control of their own lives. Additionally it helps to change their perspective on power relationships within society. Many Basta residents are used to seeing those in power in society as a threat – say social services or the tax-man, this course helps them to see such institutions as something which they can work with for their own benefit. It seeks to change their attitudes and responses to these people.
- Society Science: Builds on the themes of the previous class. Teaching participants about the structure of society, how democracy works, how government and community come together.
- Project Planning: Participants learn the fundamentals of planning projects, including; dealing with budgets, goals, visions and strategies.
- Social Enterprise: Involves learning about the organisational structure of Basta, which they may not have experienced simply by living at the co-operative. They learn the difference between social enterprises and normal businesses.
- Social Attitudes: Learning about themes such as equal opportunities and their implementation in a social enterprise setting.
- Way Out: This course involves learning about the employment market, about the practicalities of finding a job in a competitive market.

Every Monday Lena meets the four students to discuss their plans for the week ahead and any concerns they may have. Each Friday they all meet again and evaluate the week's work. Participants are encouraged to use self-evaluation/reflection to assess how the training is affecting them not just in terms of professional development but on a more personal level, how the learning process makes them *feel*. It is hoped that the course will enhance the participant's self-confidence and enable them to feel self-worth. Many of the residents of Basta have had a poor experience of mainstream education and are not used to being told that they can succeed. Lena, says that very early on in the vocational training she is able to see a change in the participant's

attitudes towards themselves and others, they begin to understand they *can* learn and they *can* work.

Lena, says that during the first week of the programme the participants were putting a lot of pressure on themselves, because they were so eager to make a success of the programme. They were also aware that they were trying to learn in year what usually takes three and so felt a sense of urgency. Lena used the Monday and Friday evaluation meetings to discuss the pressures the participants were feeling and helped them to devise manageable work plans.

At the end of the 40 week course the participants are examined by the near by college Västergårdsgymnasiet. They are assessed by the same methods and grading system as students of the college would be. Passing the course will earn the participants a certificate which can be used to gain further employment should they so wish.

More students will start the training programme in the following academic year, it is hoped it will become a permanent feature of Basta activity.

The course is proving popular with the local community and there are ideas for its expansion. Soon Lena will meet with tutors from the Västergårdsgymnasiet who are eager to increase their level of involvement. The gymnasium believes students from their college who have difficulties with mainstream education may benefit from the course run at Basta. Whilst pleased with the success of the programme and interested in new ideas, Lena believes she must proceed with caution. Basta is first and foremost about the rehabilitation of drug users and that must remain the paramount focus. Were Basta to begin programmes involving young people who are not drug abusers then the philosophy of Basta may be compromised. Nevertheless, ideas for expansion are by no means dismissed out of hand and the work of YES will continue well into the future so long as the central tenets of the Basta ideology are ensured. The chairman of Basta is certainly positive about the education programme he believes “It may well end up being the most successful enterprise at Basta”.

## **5.2 Empowerment for the Future Development Partnership (EFF DP)**

Basta is the leading partner in the Empowerment for the Future Development Partnership (EFF DP), established under the European Social Fund project EQUAL. The partnership is co-ordinated by young business graduate Kristina Blixt.

The partnership incorporates four organisations:

- **Basta Arbetskooperativ:** A work co-operative staffed by ex-drug users. Basta aims to rehabilitate individuals through the process of work.
  
- **Folksam:** One of Sweden’s leading insurance companies it works with the EFF DP in order to fulfil the requirements of its community initiative programme. The company has a vision of a safer and more inclusive society. There are also more pragmatic reasons behind their involvement. Drug abusers through theft and other crimes cost insurance companies a great deal of money. By working with a

rehabilitation organisation they are not only helping the beneficiaries but also in the long run themselves. Folksam cooperates with the project by providing resources such as speakers and books for the Basta education programme YES.

● **Funk:** The brainchild of Thomas Fröberg. He heard about the Basta project and was keen to establish a similar organisation in Gothenburg, West Sweden. This became known as Funk, short for Funktionell Narkoman (with the approximate meaning of 'Functioning Narcotic'). Funk with the cooperation of the other development partners has now been established and is now known as Basta-West.

● **The University of Lund:** One of the biggest university's in Sweden with some 35,000 students. It works with the EFF DP helping to fulfil the pillar of Research and documentation. Flemming Kristensen, a post-graduate student at Lund, will follow the work of the EFF DP for the whole three years of the project. He monitors the progress of the organisation, assessing what aims have been achieved and what is yet to be done. Every six months he provides a report to the Swedish government about Basta's work. Another researcher, Cecilia Heule, monitors the progress of just the Funk section of the EFF DP.

The EFF DP project consists of eight areas of action:

● **The creation of a vocational training and entrepreneurial school within the framework of Basta**

◆ A one-year training programme will be created for residents of Basta and others.

◆ It will consist of both practical and theoretical training. The practical training can be directed towards one of the business enterprises at Basta including: computing, carpentry, construction, administration or the breeding of dogs or horses.

● **Computing classes will be offered on an ongoing basis**

◆ The goal is for everybody at Basta (who wants to) to develop at least basic IT skills and others developing advanced skills. With a view to marketing IT know-how to outside organisations.

● **Drug-rehabilitation**

◆ This is the main and overarching activity of Basta and is an ongoing area for action. Through EFF the activities of Basta will be expanded, for example education and training will be offered to individuals who are not residents of Basta but who are also somehow marginalized or excluded from society.

● **FUNK**

- ◆ The creation of Basta-West a social enterprise initiative in the west of Sweden. The enterprise is directed towards homeless and unemployed people who abuse or have abused drugs. It welcomed its first residents in February 2003.

- **Research and documentation**

- ◆ This will be carried out with the cooperation of The University of Lund and a number of post-graduate students.

- **Marketing**

- ◆ Social co-operatives under perform in marketing themselves and their products. Basta has devised a number of initiatives in order to spread knowledge about their work and products.

- ◆ Basta has employed the services of Swedish architect Gunnar Åhsell. He is in the process of designing a furniture range unique to Basta, which the Basta carpenters will then make. Following production the furniture collection will be exhibited in a national furniture display

- ◆ Increased publicity and dissemination. This will be done through conferencing, pamphlets and books. Five conferences are scheduled to take place in the following three years. The first of these is to be held on May 21<sup>st</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003. This will be entitled '**When the Problem Bares the Solution**' and will be concerned with the theme of empowerment. This conference is being organised in cooperation with two other organisations: Fryshuset and Iris. The former is a high school offering an 'alternative' curriculum with classes in circus studies amongst other things. It offers education for students who have for one reason or another been excluded from mainstream education or who have not been suited to formal, academic education. Iris is an organisation set up to work with people with eyesight difficulties. The common theme linking Basta, Fryshuset and Iris is their work with marginalized people. An important aspect of this co-operation is about breaking boundaries. Usually the problems facing drug users, young offenders and disabled people are viewed separately this partnership wishes to break this trend to look at the problems marginalized people in society face from a co-ordinated perspective. The rationale is that by organising a joint conference the three partners will be able to create a bigger impact than they would be able to alone. The two - day conference will raise the profile of the organisations work, with prominent politicians and international guests being invited.

- ◆ Additionally Basta hopes to raise awareness of its activities through the publication of articles and pamphlets. These will be written by people involved in Basta's work e.g. researcher Cecilia Heule and education co-ordinator Lena Lago. Lena is also hoping to write a book concerning the educational philosophy of Basta – exploring how teaching techniques which have worked at Basta could be implemented in different settings which other individuals who have had difficulties with mainstream education.

- **Transnational Co-operation**

- ◆ The EFF DP is part of a transnational partnership which includes organisations in Spain, Italy, France and the UK. Together these international organisations work through the European Community Cooperative Observatory (ECCO).

## Conclusion

### **6.0 Conclusion: An assessment of achievements to date and looking to the future.**

In under ten years Basta has evolved from an organisation of just a few to a dynamic, expanding and financially secure social enterprise. With over 70 employees generating an income of £1million it plays a significant role in the economy of the regions south of Stockholm. However the financial rewards of the business have always been of secondary concern. The vision of those who created Basta was to help transform people's lives and enable them to escape the dangers and desperation of drug addiction. In this respect Basta has helped hundreds. As this report has explained Basta is not a utopia and many people do slip through the net. It cannot help everybody nor is it the right environment for all abusers seeking to end the cycle of addiction.

As an outsider it is easy to see Basta on a very superficial level. Whilst I was continuously impressed by the skilled craftsmanship, the dedication to the welfare of the dogs and the horses and the sheer determination to see a job done well, this can only be one side of the story. Without living and working at Basta you cannot see the months, if not years, of desperation and fear people have gone through in trying to change their lives. You can only guess at the courage it must have taken for them to decide to come to Basta in the first place. The realities of rehabilitation are not swept under the carpet it is just that as an outsider you don't see them. People at Basta are however painfully honest about the life they have led, including the years of crime, prison sentences, prostitution and the death of loved ones. It is easy to forget the real purpose of Basta as you tour the grounds seeing the excellent business initiatives, but all of this is the means by which people are able to find meaning in their life and a reason for getting up in the morning. Basta provides opportunity, responsibility and time to reflect.

There are many opportunities for Basta and a host of ideas for the future. The education and training programme looks set to expand and may even lead to revolutionary changes in the Swedish school system. A second Basta in the West of Sweden recently opened its doors to its first residents. Furniture production looks set to expand and modernise through the combination of Basta's commitment to quality and the cooperation of new designers. It is clear Basta will continue to be a leading player in the Swedish social economy and help to transform lives in the process.

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