

English summary

KRIS. A survey of the organisation Criminals' Return Into Society

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The organisation known as KRIS (Criminals' Return Into Society), was formed in Stockholm in 1997 on the initiative of four individuals with a long history of involvement in crime and drug abuse. The basic idea was to form an association of people with similar experiences, which could provide a supportive network for individuals wishing to leave a life of crime and drug abuse behind them.

By the spring of 2002, the national federation formed in 2000 had come to include 23 local KRIS-associations, divided into five different regions. Almost 1,500 so-called 'full members' (individuals who themselves have experience of crime and drug abuse) paid the yearly membership fee for the year 2002.

The National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) has surveyed the work of the four largest associations within the KRIS organisation.

Week-long visits have been made to each of the four associations included in the study. Information has also been collected on the extent of the visiting work conducted by the associations at remand centres and prisons during the first quarter of 2002, and of the lecturing activities carried out in this same period.

As a means of collecting data on how the activities of KRIS are perceived by others who collaborate with the organisation, interviews have been conducted with 50 representatives from the prison and probation service. Additional interviews have also been conducted with nineteen representatives from schools where individuals from the four KRIS associations have held lectures.

Several forms of assistance to members

The four associations are able to provide their members with a number of different forms of assistance. The first of these involves offering their members a meaningful occupation, either by participating in the association's visiting activities, as lecturers or as 'sponsors', providing support at the individual level to other members. Usually, those who are employed by the associations have previously worked on a voluntary basis within the organisation. Three of the associations are able to provide assistance with housing, since they have a number of residences to which homeless members can be given access. The associations also appear to some extent to carry out tasks, both for individuals released from incarceration and for those still in prison or on remand, that are tied to the work traditionally carried out by the social services and the probation service. This may involve facilitating various types of contact with authorities, dealing with bureaucracy, applications and the like. Finally, there is the "friendly support" that may be provided in connection with the more social aspects of involvement in the association.

Visits to prisons and school lectures

In addition to the organisation of social activities for the members, the work of the associations is dominated by visits to prisons and remand centres and by lecturing in schools.

In connection with visits to prisons and remand centres, KRIS meets with inmates both in groups and on an individual basis. The objective of these activities is partly to create an interest in KRIS as an organisation, and partly to provide support to the inmates who are visited. All four associations have contracts with the prison and probation service relating to this work. During the first quarter of 2002, the associations made over 100 visits to prisons and remand centres. The interviews conducted with representatives from the prison and probation service show that on the whole those working within the system are satisfied with the work being conducted by KRIS. At the same time, several of the prison and probation service representatives point to an inbuilt fragility within the organisation, which is a result of the fact that the length of time that association members have been crime and drug free varies, which makes it difficult to know to what extent the representatives of the organisation are to be considered stable. Some of those interviewed therefore view their positive assessment as being linked to the specific individuals of whom they have experience, and they feel that the quality of the work done and of the collaboration with KRIS is largely dependent on the working relationship established with these specific individuals.

The other most prominent aspect of the associations' work involves presenting lectures, primarily in schools, but also elsewhere. These lectures involve the KRIS representative describing the organisation's activities on the basis of his or her own experiences of the path into and out of drug

abuse and crime. Representatives for the four associations held a total of approximately thirty lectures during the first quarter of 2002.

The majority of the school representatives interviewed were very positive about the work of KRIS and felt that the speakers had done a good job. One or two raised questions about the jargon that they felt the KRIS representative employed. These persons felt that the use of jargon in this way gave the impression that the speakers had not been clear enough about having put their old way of life behind them.

Few of the association directors, for whom information could be obtained, had reoffended

The National Council's original intention was to study whether KRIS succeeded in its goal of seeing its membership desist from crime. As a result of problems with the documentation of the associations, however, this was not possible. A more limited study was therefore carried out into the criminality of those who might be regarded as comprising the leadership within this organisation, namely the directors of the local associations. It is crucial that these individuals manage to avoid reoffending, both for the credibility of the associations and for the work of the organisation to function well.

The vast majority had not been convicted of offences following their taking up a position on the board of directors; of the 218 individuals examined, only three per cent had been convicted subsequent to this point. The National Council was given the names of a further 50 directors, but these could not be included in the study for a variety of reasons, amongst other things because some of them did not want to participate. If all of those in this attrition group had reoffended since taking up a position as director, the total proportion who had done so would increase to 21 per cent. Thus the proportion of individuals who have been convicted of an offence following their acceptance of a directorship may be said to lie somewhere between three and 21 per cent.

A control group analysis showed that the members of the control group reoffended to a much greater extent than the individuals who had started working as directors at the KRIS associations.

Difficult to maintain a balance between "professional" work and social support of a more everyday character

At the general level, the survey shows that the work conducted by the four KRIS associations is extensive and varied. There appears to be a substantial level of creativity as regards extending the work of the organisation into an increasing number of areas.

One of the associations' strengths is their accessibility. The local associations have generous opening hours and to begin with new members are able as a rule to contact their sponsors around the clock.

The prison and probation service authorities and the schools that have made use of the KRIS associations are for the most part satisfied. One thing that emerged from the study, however, was that the very strength of the organisation – namely the members’ experiences of drug abuse and crime – also quite naturally involve a risk. This places exacting demands on the organisation in its assessment of which members have come far enough in their personal development to be suitable for “external” work.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to study the most interesting question in a satisfactory way – that of whether KRIS contributes to a lower level of reoffending and of relapse into drug use amongst its members. One question raised by the study is that of how the associations may maintain a balance over the longer term between their more “professional” undertakings, such as visiting work regulated by contract with the prison service and lecturing activities, and the provision of social support between members. The greater the level of ambition in relation to the professional side, the higher the level of demands this will place on the active members. In part this will involve a risk that these members will become “burnt out”, something which already seems to be happening to some extent, in part also a risk that the social aspects of the organisation’s work will suffer as a result. With its insistence on being drug free and not breaking the law, it is not the objective of the KRIS organisation to function as a low-threshold alternative for persons released from prison. An organisation of this kind would nonetheless be well served by an open and continuous discussion of whether the focus of its activities corresponds with the goals of the organisation, and whether the tolerance threshold has been set at the right level.