

Working in the empty headquarters of the Probation and Mediation Service

An article written by Miroslava Jakesova, international and communications officer at the Czech Probation and Mediation Service.

First Time for Everything

Each year is connected to some memories that shape the way you recall that year, and what brought me to this stage as working in the probation and mediation field. If you make a list, it would look like this:

1994 – first year of school

2007 – first year of university studies

2010 – first year of working full time

2018 – first year in the Probation and Mediation Service

2020 – first experience in living during a state of emergency

My work in 2020

Jumping into 2020 felt quite different this year. Besides the fact that 2020 launched a new decade, other changes and novelties lied ahead of me – a new senior colleague, reorganisation of our tasks, a few important milestones ahead of us – 20th anniversary of the Service, international conference in Prague, 5th Yellow Ribbon Run – all of them postponed until later, until the autumn or even spring 2021.

Who am I? My name is Miroslava and I have been working with the Probation and Mediation Service as an international relations and communication officer. I am responsible for coordinating all international matters regarding memberships, international visits, business trips, translations, communication with partners and colleagues, handling all international administration etc. The rest of my daily agenda is connected to the press department: co-organizing and coordinating various events for press and the public, editing and writing texts, updating website and social sites and many others.

Life slowed down in March

In February we managed to organise a successful press conference and public meeting. At the beginning of March, we joined the Law Night and if everything had gone as usual I would then focus on coordinating the international conference held in Prague scheduled for autumn 2020, our attendance on Yellow Ribbon Run 5th edition and all international matters. This spring we planned to attend a conference and general project assembly meeting, host some specialists from abroad, provide training to criminology students and give some presentations to foreign specialists visiting the Czech Republic. However at the end of February, it started to become clear that it would not be possible to travel abroad in the near future. The first three cases of the COVID-19 infection were confirmed on 1.3.2020 and after that a state of emergency was declared. Borders closed and we

knew that not only would we go nowhere, but also no one would be able to arrive in the Czech Republic. So the first weeks of the emergency state for me were a new era of postponement and reorganisation of tasks and calendar. Every meeting and event needed to be rescheduled for a later date, everything planned as a face-to-face meeting needed to be redesigned. On a positive note, along with my daily tasks working from home I found time to complete all the paperwork, finish some translations which I originally planned to do in the summer and most importantly refresh my written English because we were asked to share measures that the Service adopted with our international partners.

Facemasks all around us and an empty office

Our Service Centres were not closed but the face-to-face meetings as well as the number of people in the office were reduced and the same was applied at the headquarters in Prague. Fortunately, we have been living in a technological era and therefore we were able to replace face-to-face meetings with the virtual ones like everyone else did. We partly worked from home and partly from the office. Travelling to work was not a problem because metro, buses and trams were almost empty and blue parking zones allowing only residents to park their cars at the city centres were temporarily cancelled. The office was empty as well. Now that we are back in here I realize how strange it felt going through deserted floors or having a Skype meeting with facemasks on. Another thing that always crosses my mind when thinking of the emergency state is the ubiquitous smell of disinfectant. We are obliged to use it up till now when entering the building or different floors but I have already got used to it.

Furthermore, it was mandatory to wear facemasks both outdoors and inside public buildings. As in the first couple of weeks it was impossible to buy single-use facemasks :the largest production of fabric facemasks hit our country and our probation officers were not behind. Looking back on that time, I keep being amazed when recalling all beautiful and original creations produced by my colleagues. We asked them to send us photos of their facemasks and published it successfully on our Facebook page. As the face-to-face meetings with clients were limited, my colleagues communicated with them by phone, email or Skype. We wanted to support the clients amongst whom there were both offenders and victims, and therefore we started publishing messages in order to support the offender's efforts to live the life in accordance with the law and rules, and remind the victims of the fact that the Service kept providing counselling services.

Back to normality

Recently, our lives have been going back to „normality“. The Service Centres reopened, most people returned back to their offices, even though we keep wearing facemasks in the office and try to be cautious. My only hope now is that we will manage to launch the first celebrations connected to our 20th anniversary this autumn, as well as to organise the conference next spring.