

Töömaja - Estonia

Introduction

Töömaja is a facility in Ahekõnnu, a village in northwestern Estonia. The facility offers a year-long work-based rehabilitation program to help individuals overcome addiction. Through various work opportunities, it aims to rebuild self-esteem, enhance communication skills, and foster a sense of belonging. The facility was founded in 2019 and is managed by MTÜ Töömaja (NGO Workhouse), which also oversees other facilities, including Jätikumaja, a hostel that rents out rooms. Those who successfully complete the program at Töömaja have the option to live at Jätikumaja as they continue their reintegration into society.



Originally a social welfare facility, the facility was later donated by NGO Village of Hope, another Estonian NGO managing a facility for people with addiction problems. Village of Hope entrusted the managers of Töömaja to run an introductory program, but due to its remote location from their NGO, they decided to donate the land so they could establish their own NGO. The facility is managed by two people, one of whom has lived experience with addiction.

Incarcerated individuals can also be placed in Töömaja, offering an alternative to imprisonment. Some serve part of their sentence here, while others transition after early release. In 2024, a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Justice provided counseling, housing, and psychological support, with continued collaboration expected with local authorities and probation services.

Scale

Töömaja is a small-scale facility with a maximum capacity of ten people.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Töömaja is a facility for men aged 18 and older who are struggling with addiction and seeking to break free from the cycle of substance abuse. This program is designed for individuals who are committed to changing their lives and ready to put in the effort required for recovery. However, there are certain contraindications

for admission. Applicants who have previously attended Töömaja and left the program without completing it are generally not eligible. Additionally, individuals convicted of offenses related to pedophilia are excluded from the program.



The target group includes incarcerated individuals who are eligible to serve all or part of their sentence in this facility. It also accommodates those who have been released early from prison and need a fixed address for their reintegration into society. Occasionally, people are referred to Töömaja through court-ordered therapy as an alternative to incarceration. Successfully completing the program may allow them to avoid further prison time.

To be admitted to Töömaja, applicants must meet certain criteria and undergo a thorough screening process. The process begins with a phone interview, followed by a document review and a mandatory TB test. If the detainee is seeking early release or substitute imprisonment, they must submit a form from their prison. The facility must then receive approval from both the prison and the court for their admission.

The program at Töömaja spans 12 months, during which residents engage in intensive counseling, therapy, and skill-building activities. While some may choose to leave the program earlier, those who successfully complete the full 12-month duration have the opportunity to transition to Jätikumaja, also known as the Adapting House, where they can continue their reintegration process.

Forms of security:

Töömaja does not employ strict physical security measures, but operates with a strong foundation of relational, procedural and static security to maintain a safe and trusted environment. According to the managers, there are no special security protocols, and technically it would be possible for a resident to sneak out of the facility.

A key element of Töömaja's security approach is relational security, which focuses on building trust and accountability between staff and residents. Many activities are conducted together outside the facility to help residents integrate into society. Managers actively participate with residents in daily tasks, creating a sense of shared goals and community. According to staff, this approach improves group dynamics and reduces negative behavior by creating a sense of team unity.

The static security measures at Töömaja are minimal. The facility has no cameras or security locks, but its remote location deep in the woods makes it difficult for outsiders to enter undetected. Residents are not

routinely searched, even those attending the program for a second time. During admission, residents' personal belongings are checked. Additionally, residents are encouraged to hold each other accountable for their actions.

Procedural security plays a significant role at Töömaja, as there are clear rules in place to maintain order and prevent potential issues. From Monday to Friday, working hours are from 8:00 to 17:00, and residents must adhere to these times. During weekends, residents have free time, but it must be spent within the facility's grounds to avoid relapse. For the first four months, residents are not allowed to use phones or carry cash. Mail is opened in the presence of a Workhouse team member, and residents are required to remain on the facility grounds at all times, with no unsupervised exits allowed. While residents are given keys to their rooms and the facility, their movements are monitored and restricted for their safety and well-being.

Activities:

At Töömaja, all residents are required to participate in joint activities. They are mostly not allowed to leave the facility on their own or make decisions without consulting staff, but they are encouraged to make their own plans and take an interest in their development. Individual plans and wishes are considered as long as they align with the values of Töömaja. After work hours, residents have free time, which they can use as they wish, but must remain on the premises. Work tasks are assigned by the staff, but residents are free to divide the tasks among themselves.



In the first four months, residents face more restrictions: phones and electronic devices are prohibited, and all appointments with third parties must go through staff. After four months, some of these restrictions are lifted. By the ninth month, depending on behavior, residents are allowed to go into town alone for activities like driving lessons or counseling. After completing the 12-month program, residents who wish to continue their progress can move to Järvakandi, where they live more independently but continue working at Töömaja.

Residents gain skills through daily activities such as chores, cooking together, and developing basic social skills. They also acquire work skills and a good work ethic at Töömaja. Additionally, they learn how to manage their finances and plan their money wisely. Outside the facility, residents can engage in volunteer

work, education, and sports. The facility has a gym, which is available every evening, and they can go for walks or runs on the premises. Every Saturday, residents enjoy a sauna session, and social gatherings with graduates of the program provide support. Residents can also play table tennis, arrow-throwing games, corona, and basketball.

Staff and residents regularly go to the pool together, and at least once a month, they attend sports events, theater, movies, or museums. In summer, trips to the Pärnu beach are common. These outings help residents practice attending events while sober and taking responsibility for purchasing tickets. In the final months of the program, residents work on preparing their CVs, and staff assist in finding a job.

Visits occur only on weekends, and visitors are allowed after the resident has been in the program for two months.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Töömaja is located in Ahekõnnu, a small village in northwestern Estonia with approximately 47 inhabitants (2021).¹ The facility covers a large area and consists of several small houses. Ahekõnnu is a rural area with few people around, and the nearest neighbors live about two kilometers away. The nearest bus stop is four kilometers from the facility and is served by a provincial bus line. When a new person joins the program, he is picked up by a staff member at the bus stop.

The entire Töömaja site is surrounded by a thick forest with many trees and bushes, providing a peaceful



and natural setting. Right near the entrance, there is a pond for swimming. The buildings are small and wooden, giving the entire space a cozy, rustic charm. Inside, the facility is decorated with wooden sofas, thick carpets, wooden staircases, and even a fireplace, creating a warm and inviting environment.

The residents have private bedrooms, but share common areas such as the bathroom, kitchen, living room, and toilet. The kitchen features a large table, where everyone can gather to eat together. The property also includes several additional buildings, such as a camp house for summer camps, a cellar, an office

¹City Population. (n.d.). *Ahekõnnu (village in Kehtna, Rapla, Estonia)*. City Population. Retrieved February 24, 2025, from https://citypopulation.de/en/estonia/rapla/kehtna/1110__ahek%C3%B5nnu/

building, a tool shed, a sauna, a gym, and the owners' house. The men's house serves as the main accommodation for the residents.

Interaction with the community:

A lot of interaction takes place between the residents and the community, as Töömaja is linked to several social enterprises that offer services to the local area. Residents contribute to these businesses, participating in job services within the community. Notably, local enterprises such as the O-I Glass factory and Artlink, a picture frame factory, provide job opportunities for the residents.

Töömaja also works closely with local municipalities, which are partners of the NGO Töömaja. These municipalities support the rehabilitation services offered to individuals struggling with addiction, with written cooperation agreements signed with each municipality.

Integration into the community is further supported through participation in local events. Residents join in activities like marathons, open days, open farm days, and fairs. Additionally, local residents are invited to the Workhouse for workshops, open days, and other events.

The local community plays an active role in supporting Töömaja, making voluntary donations and gifts. Toidupank (Food Bank) regularly donates food, and local churches also provide support. While members of the community can visit the facility, these visits must be arranged in advance with staff members.

Töömaja

Founded: 2019

Capacity: 10

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town:

Ahekõnnu (Estonia)

Nature of interaction:

Mapped by Village of Hope
(03-12-2024)

Publicity/ read more

- More information about Töömaja at the official website of Töömaja:

Toomaja. (n.d.). *Toomaja*. Retrieved February 24, 2025, from <https://toomaja.ee/>