

Village of Hope - Estonia

Introduction



Village of Hope (MTÜ Lootuse Küla) is a non-governmental organization founded in 2000 with the mission of supporting individuals struggling with addiction and helping them reintegrate into society. The facility is located in Kibuna, a small village in northern Estonia, not far from Tallinn. The initiative was started by Bishop Märt Vähi, who, inspired by his personal experience with his son's battle with substance abuse, shifted his focus from church work to rehabilitation efforts. The facility was established on his grandfather's property and has since provided a structured, supportive environment for individuals recovering from addiction, with Christian faith as a central element throughout the program.

Village of Hope works closely with the Ministry of Justice, offering an alternative to incarceration for eligible offenders. Since 2015, the facility has had an agreement with the ministry to provide accommodation, counseling, and psychological support for young offenders and those on early release. Some individuals are also placed in the program as a court-ordered substitute sentence or while wearing an electronic monitoring bracelet. The facility focuses on creating a stable environment that helps individuals rebuild their lives and reduces the risk of reoffending.

Scale

Village of Hope accommodates 44 residents, who are divided into smaller groups of four to eight people.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Village of Hope is open to both men and women ages eighteen and older who are struggling with addiction and unable to change their lives on their own. The program is designed for people with a genuine desire to recover and who are willing to commit to Village of Hope's structured environment and rules. Residents must be willing to stay for a period of at least ten months to a year, during which they are expected to work on changing their attitudes, principles and values.

For admission, applicants must call Village of Hope for an initial interview and demonstrate their willingness to change. They must undergo a tuberculosis test and provide proof of the result upon arrival. Participants must also arrive sober, with a few days of sobriety recommended before participating in the program. The monthly fee for participation is €200. Certain conditions disqualify individuals from participating in the program. People who will not quit smoking or psychiatric medications and those who have previously left Village of Hope before completing the program may not return. Incarcerated people convicted of pedophilia or rape are also ineligible.

The facility also houses staff members, volunteers and their families, including children. To ensure privacy, program participants are not allowed to enter the areas designated for staff. The average length of stay ranges from ten months to three years.



Incarcerated people seeking an alternative to incarceration can apply by filling out a form at the prison, which is then reviewed by Village of Hope staff. If the application is accepted, a confirmation letter is sent to the court. If the application is approved, the person can enter the program as a substitute sentence, through early release or under electronic monitoring.

Forms of security:

Village of Hope ensures a high level of security through a combination of relational, static, and procedural measures, with a particular emphasis on procedural security due to the facility's strict adherence to rules and regulations. This approach creates an environment where participants can feel safe and supported throughout their rehabilitation process.

Relational security is the foundation of the environment at Village of Hope. Participants are trusted, and as they progress in the program, more responsibility and authority are given to them. This trust fosters a sense of accountability, where individuals are expected to uphold the values of the facility. Residents support one another, and those who align with the program's principles tend to thrive in this environment. If someone does not agree with the rules and values, they generally leave voluntarily. Staff members, who have lived experience with addiction, serve as support workers and counselors, drawing on their own experiences to guide participants in their rehabilitation journey.

Static security measures ensure the physical safety of the facility. Access to the Village of Hope is tightly controlled, entrances are monitored by cameras, and the gate is secured with a barrier. All buildings on the property, including offices and industrial areas, are locked and under surveillance. Regular room checks and alcohol tests are conducted, and urine tests may be administered if necessary. No one can enter the facility without the knowledge of the staff.

Lastly, procedural security plays a central role in Village of Hope. Village of Hope operates on a strict set of internal rules that help ensure the security and well-being of everyone involved. Communication by phone is prohibited for participants, and searches are conducted if there are any suspicions. The facility also forbids participants from carrying cash, open medication containers, or substances such as alcohol or nicotine. Residents are not allowed to leave the village grounds during their program unless they have graduated and are continuing their stay. Even then, they are permitted to leave only on weekends or after 5:15 PM, with a curfew of 10:00 PM. Additionally, there is a daily quiet prayer time from 07:25 to 08:00, during which all residents are required to remain in the classroom.

Activities:

At Village of Hope, residents follow a highly structured daily schedule, giving them little opportunity to make independent decisions because they must adhere to a set schedule. The day is filled with activities from early morning to late evening, designed to help residents focus on their recovery away from external temptations. Despite the structure, Village of Hope offers a variety of activities for residents to choose from.



Residents engage in physical work every day, which builds their work ethic, discipline, and practical skills. One lesson, called the "Sociogram," helps participants learn how to give and receive feedback in a respectful and caring way. Additionally, the program encourages the development of essential life skills, such as cleaning, cooking, and personal responsibility.

Inside the facility, residents have access to a range of activities. They can use the gym, play sports like basketball, volleyball, and ping-pong, and swim in the summer. There are also opportunities for walking, jogging, and enjoying the sauna on Saturdays. On weekends, residents can watch movies, and during major Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter, special activities and events are organized to celebrate. There is also a library with Christian books available for residents to read during their free time.

Although there are no activities outside the facility, residents occasionally participate in trips, such as attending church events or hearing guest speakers. In partnership with the Estonian Unemployment Office, the facility provides monthly counseling sessions to help residents stay up-to-date on job opportunities and prepare for the job market after completing the program. In the final month, residents are given access to a computer to send out job applications.

Family members can visit on Sundays, but visits must be scheduled in advance, and only close relatives are allowed. The facility also offers a Family Recovery program, which supports the loved ones of the residents in their own healing journey.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Village of Hope is located in Kibuna, a small village in northern Estonia, not far from the capital Tallinn. Kibuna has about 187 inhabitants (2021).¹ Located in a remote area, the facility provides a peaceful and quiet environment for the recovery of its residents.

The plot of land on which Village of Hope is built is personally owned by Bishop Märt Vähi, who donated it to the NGO Village of Hope. Over the years, the NGO has expanded its territory by purchasing additional surrounding plots of land from the local municipality. Although the village itself is small, it is part of a larger community of residents in the area. The nearest train station is about a kilometer from the facility and provides access to transportation links for those wishing to travel outside the area.

Village of Hope's grounds resemble a small village, with several buildings scattered throughout the grounds, including residential buildings, an industrial complex, a focal point with a cafeteria and community cafeteria, and a parish hall. The facility is located in the woods and nature, providing a quiet, rural setting. Residents can enjoy the natural surroundings, with access to a river and an artificial pond near the women's house for swimming.

The living spaces are simple, with shared bedrooms, bathrooms, toilets and living areas, promoting a focused and disciplined environment for recovery. In addition to the living spaces, Village of Hope offers a range of amenities that complement the structure of the program. These include a gym, sauna, basketball court and greenhouse. The campus also houses a church/classroom for spiritual activities and classes, as well as a café and store for daily necessities. Staff members have their own separate living quarters separate from those of the residents.

¹City Population. (n.d.). *Kibuna (Saue, Harju, Estonia) population statistics and charts*. City Population. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/estonia/harju/saue/3001__kibuna/

Interaction with the community:

Interaction between Village of Hope and the local community is relatively limited. Residents are not allowed to leave the facility during the first year of their program, and neighbors may enter the grounds only by appointment and with a valid reason. The idea behind this is to protect the residents and help them remain focused on their recovery journey.

Although direct interaction is limited, Village of Hope is actively involved in the local community through volunteer work. A volunteer rescue association is based at the facility, and residents serve as firefighters to assist with emergencies in the community of Saue and surrounding areas.

The facility also donates food to neighboring families in need, promoting goodwill. Twice a month, the men in the program help the local Food Bank in Tallinn, where food is distributed to families in need throughout the region.

At first, Village of Hope encountered resistance from some local residents, who were suspicious and voiced their concerns through petitions and complaints about noise, pollution and nuisance. Over time, however, these problems have subsided and the facility no longer faces opposition as often.

Village of Hope

Founded: 2000

Capacity: 44

Security level: Medium

Nearest city/town:

Kibuna (Estonia)

Nature of interaction:

Mapped by Village of Hope
(18-12-2024)

Publicity/ read more

- More information about Village of Hope at the official website of Village of Hope:

Lootuse Küla. (n.d.). *Home*. Lootuse Küla. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from <https://www.lootusekula.ee/>