

STREETWORK AKO PRÍKLAD PRAKTICKÉHO UČENIA SA V SOCIÁLNEJ PRÁCI

STREETWORKING AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICAL LEARNING

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Abstrakt

Predmetom záujmu tohto príspevku je streetwork – špecifická forma práce s ľuďmi, ktorí odmietajú inštitucionálnu formu pomoci. Chceme prezentovať úvahy o definíciách streetworku. Budeme diskutovať koncept a typy streetworku a budeme diskutovať ambície programu STACJA, ktorý bol implementovaný na Varšavskej centrálnej vlakovej stanici.

História streetworku siaha až do dvadsiatych rokov dvadsiateho storočia v USA, kde bol zaregistrovaný nárast trestných činov páchaných mladými ľuďmi prisťahovaleckého pôvodu. V Poľsku začala história pedagogiky ulice v medzivojnovom období, aj keď to bolo oficiálne spomenuté až v deväťdesiatych rokoch dvadsiateho storočia.

Práca streetworkera, t.j. práca mimo inštitúcie a v prostredí, kde sa nachádzajú osoby, ktoré potrebujú pomoc, podporuje značnú flexibilitu a umožňuje dosiahnutie širokého okruhu ľudí, ktorí potrebujú podporu a pomoc. Streetworkeri najčastejšie pomáhajú osobám vykonávajúcim prostitúciu, homosexuálom, bisexuálom a transsexuálom, drogovo závislým osobám a tiež deťom a mládeži ohrozeným patológiami.

Kľúčové slová

Patológia. Deti. Mládež. Osoby vykonávajúce prostitúciu. Dobrovoľník. Pedagogika ulice.

Abstract

The subject matter of this paper is the streetworking – a specific form of work with the people, who reject institutional forms of aid. We want to present a pondering on definition of what the streetworking is. We will discuss concepts and types of the streetworking, and will discuss assumptions of the STACJA program, that is being implemented at the Warsaw Central Railway Station.

History of the streetworking dates back to the twenties of the XX. century in USA, where growth of offences was observed, committed by young people of the immigrant circles origin. In Poland the history of the backyard pedagogy was started in the interwar period, even though it was officially mentioned only in the nineties of the XX. century.

The work of the streetworker, i.e. the work off the institution and in the environment, where the persons, who need help function, facilitates a substantial flexibility of operation and enables reaching of a wide circle of people, who need support and help. Most often the streetworkers help prostitutes, homosexual, bisexuals and transsexuals, drug addicts, and also youth and children endangered by pathologies.

Key words

Pathology. Children. Young prostitutes. Volunteer. Pedagogy of the street.

1. Definition and History of Streetworker Profession

The term streetworking is applied to such a form of the social work that is concentrated on offering help to people and satisfying their needs in their own environment. The term comes from two English words – *street* and *work*. Streetworking is thus a work of a mobile character, consisting in reaching people at a place where they need help (Biernat 2009; 19).

Streetworker is a man of the street taking care of bringing up of the children right at their backyard and street. Collaborating with children in their own environment a person like that becomes able to come to know said children, win their trust, and then introduce them to the

world of standards and rules which are generally acceptable worldwide. The function of the streetworker covers also presentation to the children of the new chances which can replace the current habits (Cueff 2006; 154).

History of the streetworking dates back to the twenties of the XX century in USA where growth of offences was observed, committed by young people of the immigrant circles origin. To prevent that the attempts were started, meant to reach such groups in their own environments – usually the streets. With the end of the WWII the streetworking was started in Europe. First relevant activities were addressed mainly to the youth, and gradually the interest was focused also on the homeless, prostitutes and drug addicts (Olszewska-Baka; 34).

In Poland the history of the backyard pedagogy was started in the interwar period even though it was officially mentioned only in the nineties of the XX century. Till these days the concept of this field of pedagogy is implemented by a counselor in the three planes. The first one of them concerns direct educational effects, the second one – the intra-group social engineering while the third one deals with the environmental lobbying (Pytka 2000; 298).

The work of the preventive-educational character, as performed by the counselors in the streets, consists in embarking on the planned activities concentrated on the selected group recognized as the neglected one and most endangered by pathologies. Activities like those are usually conducted in the line of an institution like an environmental entertainment room where the target group is nursed while its members are free to participate in the sports and cultural activities organized for them.

The work of the streetworker, i.e. the work off the institution and in the environment where the persons who need help function, facilitates a substantial flexibility of operation and enables reaching of a wide circle of people who need support and help. Most often the streetworkers help prostitutes, homosexual, bisexuals and transsexuals, drug addicts, and also youth and children endangered by pathologies. As distinct from other countries Poland proceeds in principle with no activities addressed to the homeless, and even when such activities become the case they are of a character of the transitory, time-limited aid.

Streetworking is often conducted jointly with other activities which are the case with various experts and services, particularly those proceeding with implementation of the social programs (Biernat 2009; 19).

The objective of the streetworker profession is thus a change of the life of people in the streets to the one that has both the future and the purpose. This profession is also used as a form of gaining access to the social groups which:

- Function off such social structures like: family, local community, etc.
- Do not seek aid anywhere while their behavior in this context is passive
- Hide themselves (Biernat 2009; 19).

The most important terms related to realization of the streetworking tasks include:

- *Drop in* – this is such a place where the streetworker can meet the person he or she plans to offer help, meant to proceed with therapy, organize the support group, etc.,
- *Harm reduction* – or the rule of reduction of damages consisting in a situation where the streetworker embarks on activities which minimize damage and risks resulting from a risky behavior, e.g. offering clean needles to the drug addicts while in the line of the help offered to the prostitutes – offering them condoms and attempting to educate them sexually

(http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redukcja_szk%C3%B3d).

2. World of Streetworker

Recognized as one of the fundamental skills the *Streetworker* should have is the ability to plan his or her activities. This planning is started from determination and description of the target group. Study of the environment can be of both the theoretical character and the practical one. Theoretical character consists in analysis of knowledge amassed by others, concerning social and historic characterization of the phenomenon, and its specificity, while the practical character is based on personal meetings with people combined with determination of locations where the continued work will be performed. Direct watching does not assume yet embarking on any intervention. Its purpose is defined rather as learning of the culture of given environment and determination of locations where the continued work will be done. To make the watching produce the planned results it must be performed in a regular manner. Periodicity facilitate not just an ability to learn precisely those in control of given environment but first of all it makes presence of the *streetworker* become natural (<http://www.gpas-lodz.pl/download/przewodnik.pdf>).

Reaching the next stage the streetworker introduces himself or herself and tells the purpose of his or her watching. From now on he or she starts building his or her actual role. Correctly formed role enables later establishment of the proper ties with the persons the collaboration is to take place with. Such ties are thus established with the local community, with courts and police, and with schools and with social organizations. It often happens that places are established where group or individual contacts with youth can become the case.

The following goals can be seen among others as the main ones of the streetworker work:

1. Activities meant to improve quality of life and arrival at the state when a voluntary change of the attitude and a change of the way of thinking takes place.
2. Improved effectiveness and increased efficiency in support of people endangered by the social exclusion (Szczyplik, Meller 2008; 1).

Streetworker works based on individuals, organizing assistance/help in a group and working the community way. Type of assistance/help depends on the group and its needs, and on environment.

Let us discuss the practical operation of the streetworkers using as an example the STACJA Program that is being implemented in Warsaw. The fundamental rule guiding the work of streetworkers involved in the Stacja Program is the following maxim:

None of us will make fun of you nor reprimand you behavior.

The presented program was established in May 2004 with the support of Ośrodek Badań i Usług Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego (*Center of Psychological Research and Services of the Polish Psychological Society*). In July 2005 the coordinators, counselors and supporters of the STACJA Program established Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Dzieci i Młodzieży "Program STACJA" (*Association for Children and Youth "STACJA Program"*) that was assigned the status of a legal person in November 2005.

The STACJA Program was and still is the pioneering project that gained support of the Warsaw authorities as the one of a potential in solving of the problems related among others to prostitution of children and youth. Till that moment Warsaw had no project targeted at children and youth threatened with prostitution or prostituting which would include the elements like the streetworker work, recreation room, hostel. It results from watching of the juvenile prostitution that repressive actions against children and youth involved in this shady business fail to solve the actual problem. Just the appearances are produced while the prostitution of children and youth becomes hidden even better. As shown in practice the recipients of the STACJA Program are also the prostituting young people who are in a crisis situation.

The main objectives of the STACJA Program are as follows:

- offering to young people in a crisis situation (such as homelessness, violence in the family, addictions, threat of prostitution, prostitution) of the specialist pedagogical, psychological, social, medical and legal assistance meant to improve their living situation, psychical and physical health, and facilitate a proper social functioning;
- establishment in "children and youth of the street" of a feeling of acceptance and safety, and establishment of conditions which are conducive to restoration of the trust in adults and in assistance and education-teaching institutions.

The main purpose of the STACJA Program was launching of a link that directly connects young people with the assistance institutions in operation in Warsaw, and introduction of the elements of prevention and education in the circles threatened with demoralization, prostitution in particular.

Tasks subject to realization in the line of the STACJA Program are as follows:

- direct application of the streetworking method in the work in the circle of “children and youth of the street” at the Central Railway Station and in its vicinity. Activities like those are performed in the evening hours three times a week: every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday;
- interventions and support – operation of the Intervention Hostel (in operation till 2008) and recreation room;
- work with individual cases;
- advising in psychology, medicine (doctor specializing in contagious diseases), law (attorney, social warden), social matters (social worker);
- intervention telephone with the calls being received twice a week, 18.00 to 21.00 hrs., by streetworkers and counselors;
- running of the prevention-education classes for young people as an alternative for embarking on the risky behaviors;
- training of educators, volunteers, pre-educators.

Implementation of the Program managed to minimize the effects of embarking on risky activities, extending of care onto children and youth suffering from pathology, and analyze real problems of the street functioning of children and youth.

Four groups of workers are involved in the STACJA Program: coordinators, educators and volunteers, and pre-educators. Coordinators of the STACJA Program are the people who completed trainings and practical education at various institutions and organizations dealing with children and youth of the high-risk groups, in the problems of HIV/AIDS, matters of reproductive health. They also familiarized themselves with the similar programs in operation in Germany, England, Sweden, Holland or Denmark.

Educators and volunteers come from graduates and students of such majors like: pedagogy, psychology, political sciences or sociology. They are prepared to deal with the widely understood problems of children and youth. Participation in the Program enables their creative use of their knowledge and skills.

The Association regularly organizes training events addressed to educators and volunteers, mean to improve effectiveness of their work with children and youth of the high-risk group. Training events, workshops and lectures are conducted by specialists, lecturers of the schools of academic rank, politicians from NGOs. Part of the training events are combined with delivery of relevant completion certificates.

Board of the Association signs contracts with educators and volunteers for the term of their participation in the Program (based on the Public Utility Activities and Volunteering Act of April 24, 2003, Journal of Law No. 96, item No. 873).

Pre-educators are the environmental allies. It is definitely often that they are young people of experience in functioning in the street, and understand the need of a change of their current life. Having received the emotional and social strengthening they work not only on themselves but also offer help and support to their male and female friends, peers, who live in the circumstances of the social exclusion. Trained pre-educators who well know this circle provide a full support of the work of streetworkers.

The discussed program makes an attempt to apply in the truly practical social work the assumptions concerning work with children of the street. At the same time of its unique character the Program is a contribution to develop of, at one side, the concept (model assumptions) and, at the other side, of the method of work with the beneficiaries. In spite of its being monitored and evaluated the Project shows a shortcoming consisting in the fact that there are no unique, clear and empirically verifiable indicators that would facilitate evaluation of relevant activities. Development of such indicators, compatible with the theories of work with children of the street, is the task of theoreticians and researchers working in the field of the social and rehabilitation pedagogy who are involved in the social work at the same time (Surmaj 2011; 94-95).

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