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## **EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL WORK ON EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL PROJECTS BY STUDENTS OF SOCIAL WORK COLLEGE IN INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY AT UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA**

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### **1. In search of standards of education for professions in social work**

Professional preparation for social work has been a subject of questions and doubts. They relate to the directions and standards of education<sup>1</sup> and sometimes focus on substantial questions referring to the essence of social professions or the acknowl-

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<sup>1</sup> See: *W drodze ku profesjonalizacji zawodu pracownika socjalnego* [Towards the Professionalisation of the Profession of Social Worker], B. Matyjas, M. Porąbaniec (eds.), Kielce 2008; E. Leśniak-Berek, K. Wódz, *Dylematy kształcenia dla pracy socjalnej. Z doświadczeń Studium Pracy Socjalnej Uniwersytetu Śląskiego* [Dilemmas in Educating for Social Work. Experience of School of Social Work of the University of Silesia] [in:] *Współczesne wyzwania i metody pracy socjalnej* [Contemporary Challenges and Methods of Social Work], W. Szymczak (ed.), Lublin 2009, pp. 67–86; K. Wódz, *Kilka refleksji na temat aktualnych i przyszłych wyzwań dla edukacji i doskonalenia zawodowego pracowników socjalnych w Polsce* [Several Reflections on the Present and Future Challenges for Education and Professional Training of Social Workers in Poland], A. Kotlarska-Michalska, *Refleksje na temat modelu kształcenia pracowników socjalnych* [Reflections on the Model of Social Workers Training], B. Szatur-Jaworska, *Perspektywy rozwoju kształcenia w obszarze pracy socjalnej w Polsce – głos w dyskusji* [Prospects of Education Development within Social Work in Poland – A Voice in Discussion], K. Piątek, *Kilka uwag na temat doświadczeń i perspektyw kształcenia w obszarze pracy socjalnej w Polsce* [Several Remarks on Experience and Prospects of Education within Social Work in Poland], J. Grotowska-Leder, *Praktyki zawodowe – niezbędny a niedopracowany element kształcenia w zakresie pracy socjalnej w szkołach wyższych* [Vocational Training – Vital yet Incompletely Developed Element

edgement of the professional status of a social worker. Undeniably, among these questions, the issue of the continuously increasing level of social requirements concerning social professions including social workers appears<sup>2</sup>. Professional competences are necessary to achieve the primary objective of social work, namely providing help to individuals, families and communities in overcoming life difficulties and regaining the abilities to manage them themselves. These competences are acquired in the process of multi-conditioned and systematic education connected with practical actions.

In the modern model of social work, a social worker is faced with much more comprehensive and differentiated professional requirements. A necessary condition for meeting these requirements is increasing their independence and flexibility in action. The ability to appropriately and fully diagnose the situation of the client (or group), in their relationships with their community and planning adequate support actions is conditioned by being knowledgeable in different fields of science. There will be the more possibilities of effective intervention, the more problems of the client a social worker will be able to understand and explain. It also requires providing social workers with more and more extensive and precise knowledge, thanks to which they will perceive and define client's problems in a wide context of their conditions and aspects, equipping them with the skills of flexible reaction and choice of adequate methods of actions in a specific case, conducting on-the-spot analysis of the relationships between numbers of variables that determine a situation, as well as skills to appropriately define their clients' social roles.

Yet another challenge to the process of professionalizing social work is the development of the methodologies of actions. The success in that development depends on educating for social work in such a way that would be of a more inter-

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of Educating in Social Practice in Higher Education Institutions] [in:] *Przeobrażenia w pomocy społecznej a edukacja i doskonalenie zawodowe pracowników socjalnych w Polsce i Republice Słowackiej* [Transformations in Social assistance and Education and Professional Training of Social Workers in Poland and Slovakia], K. Wódcz, K. Faliszek (eds.), Toruń 2010, pp. 13–70; E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *O wielości przestrzeni refleksji nad praktyką pracy socjalnej / społecznej i wzajemności przepływu kontekstów praktyki i teorii – kilka uwag wprowadzenia* [On the Multiple Areas of Reflection on Social Work / Social Welfare Practice and the Mutual Transfer of Practice and Theory Contexts – Introductory Remarks] [in:] *Praca socjalna. Kształcenie – działanie – konteksty* [Social Work. Education – Action – Contexts], A. Kanios, M. Czchowska-Bieluga (eds.), Kraków 2010, pp. 9–14; J.M. Watkins, D. Pierce, *Edukacja pracy socjalnej: przyszłość pewna czy zagrożona* [Social Work Education: Certain or Endangered Future] [in:] *Współczesna polityka społeczna. Postępy w pracy socjalnej* [Contemporary Social Policy. Advances in Social Work], J.G. Daley (ed.), Warszawa 2010, pp. 29–38.

<sup>2</sup> E. Kantowicz, *Praca socjalna w Europie. Inspiracje teoretyczne i standardy kształcenia* [Social Work in Europe. Theoretical Inspirations and Education Standards], Olsztyn 2008, p. 187.

disciplinary nature than it is today, with a great emphasis put on developing skills of methodological conduct within three primary methods of social work and the skill of their application in practice. If we take into consideration professional qualifications which are needed in work with individual case, group or local community, we could say that these methods are subject to modification and division into separate professional specializations. The knowledge, skills and ways of actions needed in each of them are so extensive and different that could become a subject of specialist education.

At present, competences and skills acquired during Bachelor's studies at the faculty of Social Work<sup>3</sup>, which has been a separate faculty since 2007<sup>4</sup> with enacting new standards of education, are the basics of social work<sup>5</sup>. It is the first stage of education which, despite being the condition sufficient for performing the profession, is most often supplement with master studies<sup>6</sup> at similar faculties, post-graduate studies or finally with courses of specialization in the second degree in the profession of social worker. However, **the process of education within tertiary education is not limited to acquiring the next level of knowledge developing professional skills**. By means of programmes of workshops and practical classes, students are able to build the basics of their competences, including professional identity and awareness indispensable to develop the culture of social actions of social professions representatives<sup>7</sup>. Such course of education could result in preparation to both realize the current tasks and to anticipate actions, based on the analysis of one's own skills and available resources. It could encourage to creatively and courageously undertake innovative solutions and strengthen the inclination to reflect on actions. The professional social projects constructed during the course of education, which are a condition for completing studies at the faculty of

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<sup>3</sup> Qualifications required to perform the profession may also be achieved by obtaining the diploma of a college of social services workers (until the end of 2015) and within the specialty preparing for the profession of social worker at one of the faculties: pedagogy, special pedagogy, political science, social politics, psychology, sociology, family sciences (until the end of 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Social Work College at the Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia – the faculty of Social Work was introduced in the academic year 2009/2010.

<sup>5</sup> Education standards for the faculty: [http://www.rgsu.edu.pl/files/active/0/praca\\_socjalna20070210.pdf](http://www.rgsu.edu.pl/files/active/0/praca_socjalna20070210.pdf) [access: 06.04.2011].

<sup>6</sup> For students with minimum 5 years of practice in the profession of the social worker.

<sup>7</sup> E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Zamiast zakończenia. W sprawie kształcenia do profesji społecznych* [Instead of Conclusion. On Educating for Social Professions] [in:] E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Badanie – Działanie – Kształcenie. Czyli o przydatności dyscyplin społecznych dla doskonalenia praktyki profesji społecznych w dziedzinie oświaty, kultury i pracy socjalnej* [Research – Action – Education. On the Usefulness of Social Disciplines for Improving the Practice of Social Professions in the field of Education, Culture and Social Work], Łódź 2002, p. 145.

social work at the Social Work College in the Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia, is an example of employing the skills enumerated above.

## **2. Social projects in response to real social needs**

Connecting theoretical academic curriculum with a broad programme of training periods for students has been an essential function of the Social Work Department at the Sociology Institute of the University of Silesia since the very beginning of its foundation. The training periods have the forms of inspection, or help, in various social care institutions; student practices and other contacts which, although numerous, have not been formalised. This is one of the main reasons why, since the very beginning, it has been assumed that dissertations by the third-year students to be granted Bachelor's degree will be in the form of a social project, based on a diagnosis of a specific social problem in a particular community. Such a project is therefore supposed to be located in a specific, selected environment (i.e. district, city, or sub-district). The project requires not only a diagnosis which would illustrate the needs of such a local community, but also the recognition of local resources, which may either be taken advantage of in the project or be supplemented with outcome of the planned project (if they are insufficient). Preparation of such a social project provides non-employed students with another golden opportunity to establish informal contacts and to start an individual, ongoing cooperation with social care institutions. These contacts frequently result in employment proposals coming right after graduation, which under the current conditions of the employment market and serious difficulties in procuring employment is a matter of vital importance. As far as employed students are concerned, with the social project they will be able to acquire more practical experience and benefit from other people's skills and experience in their own work. The emerging projects are very diverse as regards the methodology applied, type of clients to which they are addressed, problems and local communities they concern. Thus, such projects may contribute decent resources to numerous social help institutions to exploit and to other associations and organisations, as a means of solving local social problems. Several examples of social projects concerning various social problems and addressed to numerous groups of clients are presented below.

Among the programmes of institutional nature, there has emerged an interesting project by Anna Rolka addressed to children and assuming the creation of community halls. The project considers the situation of the youngest representatives of ethnic groups who live in grinding poverty. The project was designed spe-

cially to deal with the problem of Romani children (project entitled *The Arrangement of Community Halls for Romani Children from Poor Families in the Centre of Katowice – Organizacja świetlicy środowiskowej dla dzieci Romów z ubogich rodzin w centrum Katowic*).

**The relevance of initiating such actions** is confirmed by figures, quoted in the text, which not only outline the social and living conditions of Romani families but also indicate a high degree of social isolation of these groups of children – a result of their membership in the ethnic group. Permanent position on the margin of social life makes it impossible for Romani children to take advantage of the already existing institutions in Katowice, such as community halls designed for helping children, and this results in the constant deterioration of the children's social and psychological condition. A significant portion of the families faces issues such as violence, alcoholism and parental carelessness. A factor that additionally makes it difficult for Romani children to fully integrate with the society is premature and unlawful (according to the Polish legislation) cessation of education (usually around the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school). The designed hall would ensure systematic (rather than short-term only) and multi-directional support performed with caring, educational and therapeutic help. Bearing this goal in mind, organization of educational classes and interest clubs has been suggested.

Moreover, the psychological counselling service and creation of support groups have been allowed for in the project, which would also be aimed at parents of the fore-mentioned children. The author suggests that engaging activities would help teaching and improve essential sets of social skills and learning habits, whilst maintaining positive thinking and creativity. Meetings between groups from other halls, focusing on interaction and group activities, would create favourable conditions for integration with children from other communities. Creating a hall council (the equivalent of a student council) could result in an excellent opportunity to improve resourcefulness, independence and a sense of responsibility, as well as skills such as reaching crucial life decisions; all of them being essential in later life.

**Two methods of social work** are expected to be applied in order to realize all these aims. The extent to which each method is used depends on the stage of development of the hall group. In the initial phase of organising the hall, the author anticipates the *case work* method, which is apparently indispensable for a precise diagnosis of the child's social position, its psychological profile – individual needs, personality features, fixed behaviour patterns. At the moment, when the quantity of participants is fixed, the *case work* method would be no more than a supplement to group work, which from this moment will be treated as the basic method in supporting the process of change.



The author anticipates organising an interdisciplinary team in order to improve the effectiveness of the designed actions. Its aim would be to establish and maintain contact with important institutions in the city such as the Society of Romans in Poland, the help of which could turn out to be critical as regards convincing Roman children's parents of the purposefulness of the services offered. The manager position of the intended community hall would be held by a social worker, whose tasks would be to gather personal details of the participants, to mediate between children's parents and teachers and to explore various ways of helping the children's families.

Not only a child, but also an adult is often addressed by a social project concentrating the system of helping people living in poverty. This trend of assistance is broadly illustrated in the project by Anna Herman entitled *Self-Help Support Group for the Underprivileged* [*Samopomocowa grupa wsparcia dla ludzi ubogich*]. Having carried out careful observations and having estimated the scale of poverty in the area of Zabrze, the author suggested arranging community forms of helping poor residents of the sub-district Janki. Within the limits of the self-help support group, long-term unemployed inhabitants of the sub-district, who are provided with help by MOPS (municipal centres of social assistance), would meet each other. The purpose of the support group would be to prevent functional deprivation and social marginalisation of its members. Utter solitude, atrophy of social life and exclusion from a broader community weaken psychological condition and frequently strengthen disruptive strategies of dealing with such difficult situations of individuals (i.e. alcohol addiction, aggression) among people devoid of fundamental emotional and material needs. According to the author, a breakthrough in the helplessness and unwillingness to initiate any kind of activity would create opportunities for these people both to meet within the group of those who have already experienced similar obstacles in their lives, and to organize a wide range of courses and activities i.e. culinary, dressmaking and tailoring courses, DIY (do-it-yourself) clubs and cultural activities. A series of discussions and therapeutic meetings chaired by a qualified psychotherapist would be an essential element of the planned set of the group meetings. A social worker who diagnoses the phenomenon of poverty on a local scale should be responsible for initiating the project. His role would also include other tasks such as inviting a group animator, mediating in case of any conflicts within the group, delivering information necessary to solve issues related to poverty and helping the group members in developing crucial skills. Group processes characteristic of the used method of group work would facilitate the development of desirable patterns of individual and social behaviour in the group members.

Among projects aimed at the underprivileged, there is one by Beata Ogórek. The project entitled *The Help Plan for the Dysfunctional Family X – in Care of Social Assistance Centre in Bytom* [Plan pomocy dysfunkcjonalnej rodzinie X – podopiecznej OPS w Bytomiu] assumes the creation of a multidimensional assistance plan for the whole family. Careful analysis of the family's history and use of observation instruments and diagrams: family tree, eco-map and the family structure were the basis for developing a reliable social diagnosis, which is indispensable for formulating aims of assistance and designing forms and methods of their realization. For improving social integration of the family and its individual members, the project initiator recommends, among a number of actions based on **the method of case work, employing the following:**

- strengthening,
- ecological approach towards working with the family,
- task concentrated intervention,
- and various other types of methodical actions such as support, informing, supervision, establishing new social contacts.

Their aim is to create possibilities for the family so that it can entirely benefit from the help of institutions and individuals. To achieve the highest possible level of independence and self-sufficiency is also an objective of great importance. The principle of strengthening competences and developmental possibilities of the family is assumed to be the most important here. In order to realize it, a social worker would have to take educational actions (provide necessary information and develop skills essential for the family members to help each other) and manage resources (mediate between institutional resources and the family itself in order to activate the resources of the family).

A project that presents work in a local environment is the one by Maria Dudzik entitled *Local Community Activation Through Participation in Eco-Workshops to Improve the Functioning of Dysfunctional Families* [Aktywizacja środowiska lokalnego przez udział w warsztatach ekologicznych w celu poprawy funkcjonowania rodzin dysfunkcyjnych]. The concept assumes carrying out international ecological workshops as a way to improve physical and psychological condition of the youth living in an environmentally and socially degenerate area of Siemianowice Śląskie. The applied methodology will also support shaping proper social, family, neighbourhood and local bonds. The main assumption of the designed workshops is mutual voluntary work of the multi-generational community of Siemianowice Śląskie which would aim at building street gardens, playgrounds and labyrinths for children. Such a system of nature protection and shaping the environment would be realized in cooperation with young people from Germany and Austria, from the



Waldorf schools in which care about the Earth and cooperation represent the main value of education. The participation of the youth from abroad would become another factor motivating to cooperate, study foreign languages and learn openness for and tolerance of cultural diversity. The trainings would include 2 programmes: ecological and psycho-preventive, with the latter taking place during breaks between ecological classes. The implementation of the project ought to be preceded by a careful diagnosis of social problems of the area of Siemianowice Śląskie. To sum up, the main aims of the project are: to preserve and work in aid of the Earth, activate the local community, change unhealthy social attitudes, and strengthen social, neighbourhood and local bonds.

Completely different aspects of social work are presented in the project by Katarzyna Thiel entitled *Voluntary Service in Work with Family with the Problem of Helplessness in Child Care – and Upbringing-related Issues. A Social Project on Example of a Family Assisted by MOPS (Municipal Centre of Social Assistance) in Ruda Śląska [Wolontariat w pracy z rodziną z problemem bezradności w sprawach opiekuńczo-wychowawczych. Projekt socjalny na przykładzie rodziny objętej pomocą MOPS w Rudzie Śląskiej]*. The main aim of the project based on the cooperation of a family with a volunteer is to strengthen child care-related and educational actions of the family affected with such a problem. The role of the social worker would be assigned a function of an advisor, teacher and consultant to the volunteer who would be directly engaged in providing support for the family.

The family that was chosen for the project, apart from the dominating problem of helplessness in upbringing and educating children, was also affected by the issue of the unemployed mother and alcohol addiction of the father. There were three children in the family. The work of the volunteer was expected to last up to one year and would have the form of systematic meetings. The main aim of his/her activity is to assist by improving communication between members of the family by establishing a positive image, improving self-esteem of every individual family member and through building a sense of safety in the family. The volunteer would also have the task of improving pedagogical culture of the parents and providing them with any essential knowledge or information. An important element of his/her actions is also to organise the family's free time so that they can spend it together as much as possible, and to strengthen their habits and skills of organising constructive leisure activities, doing homework and simply being together. Finally, another task of the volunteer is to shape important skills such as time management skills, prioritising daily duties of both parents and children. By bringing positive exemplars of social behaviour, and encouraging the family members to various forms of mutual outdoor activity, the volunteer should con-

siderably contribute to the improvement of the family's integration with its closest environment.

One of a few projects employing the case work method is the one by Urszula Tadej entitled *A Drug Addict in a Penal Institution as a Case in Social Work* [*Narkoman w zakładzie penitencjarnym jako indywidualny przypadek w pracy socjalnej*]. The author of the project has made a diagnosis of the situation of drug-addicted convicts. She has mainly concentrated on prison drug addiction treatment – it is implemented within 10 addiction treatment units, which function as special units directed only at the group of prisoners who need application of special medical and educational measures. The project is addressed to people put in custody in Bytom, who are staying at the detoxification unit of the local hospital.

The author expresses deep conviction on the need for social work in penal institutions, proves it with firm arguments, and finally outlines a project of delivering help to a convicted drug addict. The project presents a plan of activities with the drug-addicted prisoner that should be task of the social worker. It includes an initial interview, meetings twice a week during the stage of diagnosing the situation of the convict, establishing contacts with the family of the prisoner and institutions dealing with addiction treatment, and last but not least, consultation with workers of addiction treatment institutions, volunteers and anonymous drug addicts. The fundamental aim of the described actions using case work method is to motivate the drug addict to undergo addiction treatment.

Another social project that assumes the use of case work method is the one by Ewa Leśniak entitled *How to Live with Stigma? Alcoholic Polineuropathy – Case Work* [*Jak żyć z piętmem? Polineuropatia alkoholowa – praca z indywidualnym przypadkiem*]. It is worth noticing the specific situation of drawing up a project and realizing it at the same time. The author took active part in planning and delivering help to a young, abstinent alcoholic assisted by MOPS (municipal centre of social assistance) in Zabrze after discharge from the Psychiatric Hospital in Toszek. A detailed case history, diagnosis and analysis of its situation have been presented in the project. Based on these, fundamental aims of help have been defined such as establishing contact with the society, adjustment to new conditions of living in sobriety and to the situation of health complications. A detailed plan of cooperating with and delivering help to the patient, which contains procedures essential to proper course of intervention, has been presented. The author conducted numerous interviews with the patient, his doctors, social workers from the hospital in Toszek, his neighbours, closest relatives and with other patients who stayed with him at the same help centre. Her observations were always consulted with a social worker who was personally responsible for working with the patient. The basic

tasks of the social worker, in which the author took active part, included: case management (development and coordination of the project), delivering necessary information and knowledge (defining possibilities and securing necessary means for the patient), searching for resources (creating new resources; broadening, improving and allocating them) and therapeutic interventions (encouragement and support for the patient to solve developmental problems with behaviour and interpersonal relations).

In the project by Katarzyna Błaszczuk entitled *An Individual Programme of Getting out of Homelessness in the District of Ustroń* [*Indywidualny program wychodzenia z bezdomności na terenie gminy Ustroń*], a suggestion of assistance actions was based on an the analysis of a situation of people staying at the House of Homeless People in Ustroń. The project is aimed to help homeless people in becoming self-dependent by means of institutional resources and their individual psychological and social ones. The method used to accomplish this aim was developing individual programme of getting out of homelessness. The programme begins with social, demographic diagnosis of the person. It also includes such elements as: self-assessment of the reasons for being homeless, attitude towards being homeless, and self-assessment of possibilities to get out of the situation. An important element at this stage is to get to know the history of the family, the present situation of the family of procreation and relations with the family of origin. Finally, the diagnosis also includes any resources of the patient that may appear to be helpful during the process of getting out of the homelessness. The plan of proceedings during work with a homeless person would consist of actions such as: assistance in obtaining necessary documents, getting health insurance, registration in PUP (Powiat Employment Office); help in addiction treatment, finding employment, legal advice; help in establishing contact with the family; help in receiving pension, unemployment benefit or alimony; help in finding permanent place of residence. Last but not least, the programme of individual help assumes making therapeutic help available to the patient and then introducing it into social skills training groups, support groups and training groups who focus on methods of active employment search.

The aim of the project *Creating a Social Worker Position within the Municipal Hospital in Ruda Śląska* [*Utworzenie stanowiska pracownika socjalnego w szpitalu miejskim w Rudzie Śląskiej*] developed by Lilianna Długosz-Kmieć is to provide sick people who are undergoing hospital treatment with quick, interventional (welfare) action and help them join the system of social assistance.

The creation of a position for a social worker in a hospital is supposed to address patients' needs such as: necessity to satisfy existential needs (especially after

discharge from a healthcare institution, when the person needs help of social assistance institution to secure meals at an eating-house, or to secure a place to stay for the night); satisfying the need of safety (in this case, the social worker supports the hospital staff); care about self-respect; satisfying the need of communication and contacts; or satisfying the need of information (primarily, information on resources which the client may benefit from). Apart from individual needs, a crucial justification for creating the position are the needs of the very hospital within the area of welfare, which should be delivered to people returning to hospital for social reasons. The social worker would be responsible for applying the proceedings of welfare organisations and for acting on behalf of the patient. Finally, the social worker employed in the hospital may help the hospital staff gather necessary information about the patient and advise the staff as regards the assessment of psychological and social functioning of the patient that is necessary for treatment.

Authors emphasize that complex social issues presented in their projects require taking multidirectional actions, therefore it is reasonable to appoint interdisciplinary groups within which a social worker would be one of many specialists who provide their knowledge at the stage of diagnosing a problem on a local scale. Owing to the manifoldness of the problems, students most frequently suggest simultaneous use of the group work method and the case work method, and simultaneous application of the method of working within a local community and the group work method.

### 3. Dominating role of group work in social projects

An analysis of students' suggestions has led to a conclusion that the group work method has been suggested in the majority of projects; in most cases it was also the leading method or it contributed to a carefully planned supplement of either the case work method or the method of local community organizing. The interest in this method can be noticed both among the projects designed by our students and in the practice of welfare centres.

Social work with a group became recognised as a social work method in the 1930s<sup>8</sup>. It is defined as "a method of social work which through intentional, group experience helps individuals improve their social integration and deal with their

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<sup>8</sup> B. Dubois, K.K. Miley, *Praca socjalna* [Social Work], Vol. 1, Warszawa 1996, p. 156.

individual, group and social problems better<sup>9</sup>. There are various models of the group work method that occur in the projects: the model of aggregate therapy (Gestalt), the model of developing social skills (including assertiveness trainings), the mediation model, the self-development model and numerous eclectic approaches (organisation model, socialization model) or detailed ones (the transaction analysis)<sup>10</sup>. Models that are put into practice depend on their theoretical assumptions and specification of the social problem.

Small groups are a meaningful resource for people that ought to develop their social competences, especially for those who experience 'the feeling of helplessness and alienation. They perceive themselves as victims, they meet with incomprehension in relations with others or feel they do not have any influence on systems they are part of'<sup>11</sup>. The aim of social work with a group is to raise the quality of living in the group. A social worker in this case deals with a particular and actual context of interpersonal relations<sup>12</sup>. It should be kept in mind that group work requires specialised knowledge and professional skills of the social worker. It is also important to remember that the group is only a means of development and change of the main subject who is an individual. The individual is the one to benefit from all actions taken within the group. The social worker applying this methodology is required to: be able to establish positive contacts with members of the group; consciously concentrate on needs of the members and on aims worked out by the group itself; be able to actively involve all members of the group; be engaged in solving problems of the group; support and stimulate but not interfere with solving the problems which may be easily solved by the group itself (permission for self-development); cooperate with the group in working out solutions but also independently make conclusions on the problem<sup>13</sup>. It should be emphasised that the analysed projects present not only convincing justification of choosing the group work method, but also deep understanding of the complexity of a social worker's tasks, which are considerably connected with applying the method.

The fact that so many social projects developed by our students are based on the group work method is especially valuable, since emphasis is placed here on the role of the social worker as a person doing social work rather than taking him for a man-

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<sup>9</sup> G. Konopka, quoted after K. Wódz, *Praca socjalna w środowisku zamieszkania* [Social Work in Residential Community], Katowice 1998, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> B. Dubois, op.cit. p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> G. Konopka, quoted after R.A. Skidmore, M.G. Thackeray, *Wprowadzenie do pracy socjalnej* [Introduction to Social Work], Katowice 1998, pp. 86–87.

<sup>13</sup> B. Dubois, op.cit., p. 159.

ager and a deliverer of welfare benefits and available resources. The latter description is how his/her role is most commonly perceived by the clients of social services, thus their claims mostly concern the welfare benefits and resources. Concentrating only on this aspect of helping actions is the reason for the mostly unfavourable process of addicting the clients to social services and leads to strengthening their social helplessness. A change of proportion to social work's advantage may therefore significantly increase chances of achieving the most important goal of social help, that is guiding its clients to independently and successfully deal with hard, life obstacles.

As regards the necessity to reduce effects and range of social problems, an essential feature of the discussed projects is that they are designed in the context of small, local communities. Not only does this allow to respond to a definite demand, suggest solutions that best fit a particular situation and flexibly react to its changes, but it also presents a crucial element of counteracting seclusion and marginalisation of individuals afflicted with social problems. Mobilization the local community's and neighbours' potential, and establishing new relations and bonds of a client with his/her environment will not only be an invaluable help in implementing the help process, but probably after it has ended, they will remain a long lasting element of life of the individual.

Having mentioned all these advantages, one should also point out an extremely important and topical economic aspects that mean the possibility to deliver help to greater numbers of people. Despite the fact that financial criteria for choosing a cheaper methodology is not any basis and cannot be of a higher priority than content-related premises, they undoubtedly still are an advantage that raises attractiveness and legitimacy of choosing the group work method in helping people.

#### **4. Realization of social projects in practice**

Last but not least, we would like to stress that a substantial part of projects designed by our students are either ready to be realized or have already been realized. This is a fact not only in case of part-time students, many of whom work in welfare centres and therefore have adequately bigger possibilities, but also in the case of full-time students. There have been many instances when managers of welfare centres, on the basis of which students prepared their projects, showed interest in implementing the students' ideas in their institutions. This means that the demand for this kind of social services is increasing.

We have also made an attempt to examine to what extent the projects by our students have been put into practice in whatever way. We have requested information



on the implementation of our students' projects from a few dozens welfare institutions, with which we co-operate. We have received information on a dozen or so such cases, but unfortunately many institutions have not replied. Below, we present a few projects, that either were implemented or are being implemented in a serial or continuous mode. In many letters that were sent as a reply to our request, whether the projects by our students were implemented or not, the fact of the students' employment and good preparation for work was stressed. They are mostly appreciated for their good education, professionalism and involvement. It is also worth noticing that there are projects, which, despite not direct implementation, are an inspiration and a basis for various programmes realized in a broader scope. Sometimes they are included – either partially or entirely – into local systems of helping various categories of clients; in local or community programmes of social assistance and some even get included in powiat strategies of solving social problems.

Among the realized projects, there is the concept by Ewa Górska, who is an initiator of the foundation of the Centre for Mediation in Żory, which mediates as commissioned by courts, public prosecutor's office and penal institutions (*Mediation as Remedial Justice – Mediacja jako sprawiedliwość naprawcza*). Another implemented project also in Żory, which has attracted the attention of the Polish Ombudsman for Children, is the project by Katarzyna Karczówka *School Mediations as a Way to Solve Conflicts in School Community in Żory* [*Mediacje szkolne jako sposób rozwiązywania konfliktów w środowisku szkolnym w Żorach*] is a programme which considers mediations as a way to solve conflicts at school. After consultation with the Silesian Superintendent of Schools, some efforts have been made to introduce the programme into other institutions of the region.

The project by Adam Kincel realized in the Powiat Family Support Centre in Racibórz is entitled *A Support Group for Foster Families Assistants* [*Grupa wsparcia dla opiekunów rodzin zastępczych*]. Some ideas from the project are also applied in support programme for natural families and in trainings for step families candidates.

The project by Artur Kulas entitled *Flats for Redecoration for People that Became Homeless as a Result of Mental Illness or Mental Disturbances* [*Mieszkania do remontu dla osób, które w wyniku choroby psychicznej lub zaburzenia stały się bezdomne*] was implemented in the Municipal Centre of Social Assistance in Bielsko-Biała. Thanks to the project 4 people who were at risk of becoming homeless, found their place to live in self-contained flats. Moreover, the author is involved in further projects concerning similar social issues, which also happen to be realized in the Centre in Bielsko-Biała.

An important problem of violence against children was addressed in another completed project by Cecylia Mokrus *The Debate on Preventing Child Abuse in*

*Piekary Śląskie [Debata na temat zapobiegania krzywdzeniu dzieci w Piekarach Śląskich].*

On the basis of the project by Ewa Wiwat *Support Group as a Structure that Satisfies the Need for Acceptance of Mentally Disturbed People [Grupa wsparcia jako struktura zaspokajająca potrzebę akceptacji osób zaburzonych psychicznie]*, a programme *Social Integration of People with Disturbed System of Adaptation in their Local Community* has been realized in the Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Counselling for the Mentally Disturbed in Katowice. The programme has already had its new edition.

Another project that is put into practice and addresses the issue of support groups is a project implemented in the Integration Centre Senior in Czeladź (Jolanta Waśko *Support Groups for Seniors in the Integration Centre Senior in Czeladź, 2002 – Grupa wsparcia dla osób starszych w Ośrodku Integracji Senior w Czeladzi*). In the same Centre, a project by Renata Szabelak entitled *Socio-Cultural Animation in the Day Care Centre in the Integration Centre Senior in Czeladź [Animacja społeczno-kulturalna w Dziennym Domu Pomocy Społecznej Ośrodka Integracyjnego Senior w Czeladzi]* is also realised.

The Municipal Centre of Social Assistance (MOPS) in Ruda Śląska is one of the institutions that benefits from the output by our students very intensively. It also employs 15 graduates of the Social Work Department. Among the numerous projects implemented in help programmes for various groups of clients (either partially or entirely), one can find projects treating social work as an instrument of helping: the homeless<sup>14</sup>, the people with disabilities<sup>15</sup>, seniors<sup>16</sup>, women<sup>17</sup> and many others<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Justyna Szczepaniak, *Schronisko dla bezdomnych mężczyzn [A Shelter for Homeless Men]*; Lidia Białkowska, *Mieszkanie chronione dla bezdomnych mężczyzn [A Protected Flat for Homeless Men]*; Piotr Walerysiak, *Grupa wsparcia dla bezdomnych mężczyzn [A Support Group for Homeless Men]*; Halina Ignor, *Grupa wsparcia dla bezdomnych uzależnionych od alkoholu [A Support Group from Homeless People Addicted to Alcohol]*; Joanna Piksa, *Ośrodek interwencji kryzysowej dla osób bezdomnych [A Centre of Immediate Intervention for Homeless People]*.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Smyła, *Organizowanie pomocy dla rodzin dzieci niepełnosprawnych [Organising Help for Families with Handicapped Children]*; Joanna Wyciślik *Grupa wsparcia dla rodzin dzieci z porażeniem mózgowym [A Support Group for Families with Children with Cerebral Palsy]*.

<sup>16</sup> Danuta Polczyk, *Mieszkanie wspólnotowe dla seniorów [Community Flat for Seniors]*.

<sup>17</sup> Agnieszka Curlej, *Grupa wsparcia dla nieletnich matek [A Support Group for Minor Mothers]*; Nina Grzyk, *Grupa wsparcia dla kobiet w sytuacji przemocy [A Support Group for Abused Women]*; Izabela Trutwin, *Grupa wsparcia dla bezrobotnych kobiet [A Support Group for Unemployed Women]*.

<sup>18</sup> Kornelia Kowalczyk, *Świetlica socjoterapeutyczna przy szkole podstawowej [Socio-Therapeutic Hall at Primary School]*; Sonia Borowicz, *Klub Trzeźwego Małolata [The Sober Teenager's Club]*; Joanna Konieczna, *Ośrodek pomocy współuzależnionym [The Assistance Centre for the Co-Addicted]*; Ewelina Sówka, *Zasady współpracy z organizacjami pozarządowymi [The Rules of Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations]*.

We are convinced that the interest in the group work methods, showed in the above examples, on the one hand, has been a result of a complicated situation of clients, and on the other, a sign of the constantly rising level of professionalism in social work as regards knowledge and its derivative skills. A number of the implemented suggestions were directly connected with actions undertaken by the above-mentioned centres of social assistance. These social assistance centres take innovative actions in order to help their clients become self-dependent. This may mean that empowerment as the form of help within social work is becoming more and more sought-after since it not only counteracts the phenomenon of seclusion and reduces unfavourable symptoms of institutionalisation, but also contributes to the much more humane and decent image of the system of social assistance, which is also due to the professional attitudes and values of social workers.

## 5. Conclusion

The presented social projects are only a small particle of the diploma projects which have been prepared at the Social Work College<sup>19</sup>. They have **enabled the illustration of a variety and topicality of issues undertaken**. They have also **reflected the level of knowledge, orientation and awareness of students who very often prepare very interesting and innovative suggestions for actions which have a chance to be fully or partly realized**. Finally, thanks to the designed projects, we have **the possibility to verify the competences and skills of students**, which are a significant factor in the process evaluating the course of their education.

The necessity of detailed action planning requires creative reflection and identification with a problem from the students, which in turn, influences the development of professional identity, which means “a community of objectives and principles of actions in a profession, it has got a developmental character (...). Emotional identification, rationalization (connected with intellectual evaluation of psycho-social stimuli, evaluation of one’s own professional abilities) and readiness to undertake actions, their acceptance and adaptation to conditions of functioning in the profession and internalization of values (...) are very important in particular phases of the process of professional identification”<sup>20</sup>. It seems that de-

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<sup>19</sup> In the last 5 years about 100 graduates (of both full-time and extramural courses) have been granted the Bachelor’s degree entitling them to work as a social worker. Previously, it was even over 200.

<sup>20</sup> A. Kurcz, *Poczucie tożsamości z zawodem pracowników socjalnych* [Sense of Identity with the Profession of Social Workers] [in:] *Pracownik socjalny. Wybrane problemy zawodu w okresie trans-*

signing plans of actions in the form of social projects is relevant educational practice allowing students to apply theoretical and practical knowledge acquired during the course of studies in practice. Moreover, it motivates them to think creatively and contributes to the very sense of the education process. The actual effects of students' actions are often surprising for themselves, and this aspect actuality of their work encourages their further development in the direction of providing professional support and to continue their actions.

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## SUMMARY

The aim of the following article, which addresses the issue of seeking standards on education for the profession of the social worker, is an attempt to focus on the abilities to employ the professional competences of the social worker in practice, at the Social Work College in the Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia in Katowice. The article contains an analysis of a series of social projects, designed by students, to professionally help individuals, families and communities overcome their life difficulties and regain their abilities to manage them independently in the future. The principal elements of the analysis of the supportive actions suggested in the projects were: methodological action, choice of methods of social work and suggested solutions to social problems preceded by a diagnosis of deficiencies and resources of individual local communities.

The conclusions drawn after the analysis pertain to the dominant methods of social work applied in the implemented solutions, conditions for connecting a few methods and conclusions on the roles of the social worker, realized in the planned actions. The clear dominance of functions and roles connected with modern, supportive social work proves that the range of professional roles of the social worker extends, and is not limited to the role of the resources administrator only. In addressing the discussed issues, additional data were collected. These data reflected outcomes of the sample projects implemented in practical solutions to actual social problems, providing feedback on students' competences and skills in integrating the theoretical knowledge with practical actions.

### Key words:

Social work, social project, a professional, methods of social work, social work practice